“They Just Want the Eyesore Gone”: Evictions and Belonging in Eugene’s Washington Jefferson Park Houseless Encampment

by

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In December of 2020, the City of Eugene responded to the pandemic-driven surge in unsheltered houselessness by suspending its urban camping ban and establishing a sanctioned encampment for the unhoused in Washington Jefferson Park. Unhoused encampments are a feature of the urban landscape in almost every American city, yet local governments manage these encampments in several different ways—by contesting them, tolerating them, or legally recognizing them. On paper, the City of Eugene appeared to tolerate the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park. However, its residents tell a different story. Drawing on three months of ethnographic research in the park, this paper describes how paternalistic, inconsistently enforced park rules, combined with frequent evictions, undermined residents' sense of belonging and kept them trapped in a cycle of houselessness. It further examines residents' attitudes toward the city's proposed "Safe Sleep" sites, illustrating how these sites simultaneously promise to increase stability while at the same time reproducing many of the politically exclusionary aspects of life in Washington Jefferson Park. With these findings, it calls on the City of Eugene to limit future encampment disruptions and invest in more Safe Sleep sites that emphasize self-governance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Homelessness—or houselessness, as I will refer to it in this thesis—is one of the foremost social crises in the United States.[1] The 2021 Annual Homeless Assessment Report from the Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated that over 320,000 people experience houselessness in the United States on a given night (Henry et al. 2021). In the aftermath of the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, this number will continue to grow. Estimates from the Economic Roundtable project that the pandemic recession will contribute to a 49% increase in chronic houselessness in the United States over the next four years (Flaming et al. 2021, 31). However, tracking and statistically representing rates of houselessness is notoriously unreliable, as houselessness is often a temporary condition (Molinar 2018). HUD relies on the "Point in Time Count" (or PIT count) to calculate the number of people experiencing houselessness nationally, an episodic survey of the unhoused taken by city officials and volunteers during the last ten days of January each year (Henry et al. 2021). Yet the fluidity of houselessness, combined with the variability of PIT count accuracy across the country, results in a misleading statistical picture of national houselessness. In 2021, 40% of communities did not conduct a full unsheltered count of people living on the street, including many municipalities with high rates of houselessness, and most of the state of California (USICH 2022). Many scholars have calculated that the PIT count

[1] I have elected to use "houselessness" in place of "homelessness," which is the term commonly employed in most social and geographical research on the housing crisis. As explained by houseless activists Ibrahim Mubarak and Lisa Fay of Portland, Oregon, "houseless" better communicates that people "create homes in their tents" and still have a place of belonging even when they lack access to traditional housing (Vespa 2020). "Houseless" also accommodates the dynamic nature of the condition, rejecting the notion that a person can "be" homeless—that living on the street is endemic to their character.

chronically underestimates national levels of houselessness, with several arguing that, because of its inaccuracy, it is of little value to policymakers (Anderson 2019). Indeed, regardless of the number of people without homes nationwide, the increasing visibility of the unhoused highlights the various policy failures that have created this crisis. A lack of affordable housing, low minimum wage rates, and restrictive zoning laws have left thousands—if not millions—of Americans living on the street (Eggiman 2020).

In cities with high houseless populations and low shelter capacity, houselessness is most visible in the form of unhoused encampments. Ranging from legally sanctioned to illegal, temporary to permanent, and from 10 residents to hundreds, encampments have become a fixture of the modern urban landscape (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2017). Even when shelter space is available, many unhoused residents prefer to live outside, citing the loss of belongings, restrictive curfews, and high rates of violence that are commonplace in shelters (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 8). Encampments (often known as "tent cities") provide a sense of safety, stability, and autonomy not found in the shelter system (Loftus-Farren 2011). Living in these communities can mitigate some of the risks and stresses of street life.

However, encampments are often legally tenuous and subject to removal by city governments (Parker 2020; Herring 2014). Non-sanctioned tent cities may be swept at any time, leaving unhoused individuals with nowhere else to go and often dispossessing them of their personal property. As of 2017, 89% of American cities gave no warning before sweeping encampments, 89% did not require storage of belongings collected during sweeps, and 97% did not provide alternative housing options to evicted

individuals (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty). While the criminalization of houselessness often simply prompts the formation of new encampments, local governments continue to rely on arrests, citations, and sweeps to exclude the unhoused from urban public spaces (Herring and Lutz 2015).

Eugene, Oregon is a microcosm of this national houselessness crisis and its changing character through the pandemic. According to the 2020 census, 20.3% of the city's population lived in poverty, as compared with the national average of 11.4% (U.S. Census Bureau). High levels of poverty and astronomical housing costs directly contribute to the city's astronomical houselessness statistics: as of 2019, the city had the highest per capita level of houselessness of any municipality in the United States (Adams 2019). This number only increased following the pandemic recession, which has overwhelmed an already inadequate shelter system. When the encampment formed in Washington Jefferson Park at the end of 2020, 3,967 people were experiencing houselessness in Lane County in December, a year-long high (Lane County Human Services 2021). To house this population of almost 4,000, the county had 673 permanent supportive shelter beds, 199 rapid re-housing vouchers, 93 transitional shelter beds, 527 emergency shelter beds, and 249 drop-in shelter beds—less than 1,700 beds in total (Lane County Human Services 2021). These numbers demonstrate the stark visibility of Eugene's houselessness crisis. Unable to find space in shelters, many displaced by the pandemic have turned to public camping. Additionally, as with other areas of the country, many of Eugene's unhoused residents have chosen to live in encampments because they provide more stability and continuity than the shelter system (Loftus-Farren 2011).

Facing pressure from the public and houseless advocacy groups to address this growing crisis, the City of Eugene suspended its urban camping ban in December of 2020. It sanctioned public camping at two sites, one of which was Washington Jefferson Park ("Temporary Urban Camping" 2021). At its peak, the resulting encampment held over 250 residents, and while the city described the suspension of the urban camping ban as "temporary," the encampment survived in some capacity for almost two years (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022c). It remained a topic of local controversy throughout its existence, drawing support from progressive houseless activists and ire from many local home and business owners. These tensions reflect similar political divisions surrounding houselessness in other communities, with liberals generally criticizing them as insufficient forms of welfare and conservatives viewing them as governmentally sanctioned moral and social decay (Herring 2014, 298).

However, early developments in the encampment suggested that the city's policies may not have been as cut-and-dry "progressive" as advertised. Even before I began conducting interviews, news coverage revealed that the city had conducted dozens of campsite removals in the park after the suspension of the urban camping ban (Catalyst Journalism Project 2021). My early participant observations in the park noted dozens of tents positioned on the sidewalks across the street from the park, presumably residents who had been evicted from the park but wanted to remain close to the abundance of social services. These signs of distress would only become clearer as I spent more and more time in the park.

This thesis explores the complex, often detrimental impacts of Eugene's houseless management practices—encampment co-optation, toleration, and evictions—

on residents of Eugene's Washington Jefferson Park encampment. Drawing on 22 semi-structured interviews with tent city residents, I challenge the assumption that the city's "progressive" policies surrounding houselessness during the pandemic constitute a meaningful deviation from the nation's neoliberal norm. Instead, I demonstrate that management in the encampment exacerbated the material struggles and political alienation of many of its residents. I further explore residents' attitudes toward the city's proposed alternative to sanctioned encampments: legally recognized, non-profit operated "Safe Sleep" sites. While these sites appealed to many residents, their structure and seclusionary locations seem destined to repeat some of the same harmful management practices evident in Washington Jefferson Park. Despite my initial hesitations to do so, I conclude with several policy recommendations to amend the City of Eugene's approach to managing unsheltered houselessness in the future, an approach that, in its current state, is both ineffective and inhumane.

The proceeding section of the introduction discusses the ethnographic research methods used to collect evidence and the qualitative analysis methods used to interpret that evidence. I then review the literature on houselessness, strategies of spatial control, and the experiences of unhoused tent city residents in other cities, primarily those on the West Coast. Next, I provide a background on the state of houselessness during the COVID-19 pandemic in Eugene, concluding with a brief history of the development of the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park. I then discuss my findings in three chapters. Chapter 2 explores the various constraints that limited the formation of formal organizational and political structures in the encampment. It further explores how encampment residents engaged in political behavior outside those constraints. Chapter 3

discusses the material, psychological, and social impacts of evictions on encampment residents. Chapter 4 looks forward to the closure of the encampment and the relocation of its residents to Safe Sleep sites, capturing resident attitudes toward this new policy alternative. Chapter 5 offers two concrete policy recommendations based on the interview results and describes how these recommendations might better serve those grappling with unsheltered houselessness in Eugene. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the thesis and concludes with a brief examination of the current state of Washington Jefferson Park.

Methods

The purpose of this study is threefold: to describe the impact of evictions on encampment residents, to investigate the management strategies of the city and subsequent responses by tent city residents, and to center unhoused voices in a case study of the Eugene housing crisis. In keeping with the suggestions outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw in *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*, this research aimed to "capture a social world and its people" (1997, 68). However, it also recognizes that ethnographers enter the research site "in the context of preexisting relational dynamics," many of which are unknown to the researcher (Gills 1998, 5). Ethnographers may be tempted to approach unfamiliar research subjects under certain familiar theoretical frameworks, inherently constraining their findings to fit pre-existing assumptions. This has long been the case in positivist social science research that attempts to explain human behavior as the product of systematic forces. Instead of aiming for "objective measurements" and "outcomes," Robert Prus insists that social scientists must examine "the ways in which people meaningfully, actively, and interactively engage the world(s) in which they find themselves" (1998, 25). This means acknowledging the agency of research subjects but also substantively engaging in their communities—a particularly demanding task in unhoused encampments, where communities are constantly in flux and often wary of outsiders. Collecting quantitative data through interviews may further limit researchers to a more comfortable or sanitized view of residents' lived experiences. As evidenced by other ethnographies of tent cities, interviews provide only a proximate account of life in informal communities (Herring 2014; Mosher 2010). Nonetheless, this study aimed to follow Prus' suggestions and move away from a

positivist explanation of its research subjects' behavior and toward a social science "genuinely attentive to human lived experience" (1998, 43).

To this end, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 residents of the Washington Jefferson Park tent city. After submitting a research plan and receiving approval from the University of Oregon Internal Review board, I regularly travelled to Washington Jefferson Park to take observational field notes of the encampment. I then recruited participants by introducing myself to residents who were outside their tents or conversing with one another at the park's public benches.[2] I recruited participants from all three sections of the park where the City of Eugene permitted camping: in between 5th Avenue and the railroad tracks, between 6th and 5th Avenues, and between 6th and 7th Avenues. All prospective participants were given approximately ten minutes to review informed consent materials and ask questions regarding the informed consent process. Additionally, all participants confirmed that they were over the age of 18 before proceeding with the interview process. No participants were excluded based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, or other identifying factors.

Once I had conducted several interviews, residents often directly referred me to friends or neighboring residents. While this assisted in recruiting participants who would have otherwise remained in their tents, it likely constrained prospective

[2] Approaching potential research subjects was one of the most difficult aspects of my research. As someone whose dress and mannerisms marked me as an outsider, I was painfully conscious of the discomfort and even stress my presence caused many residents. Several residents seemed understandably wary when I would approach them, although most relaxed once I introduced myself as a student. Overall, most residents willingly and cheerfully shared their stories once I explained my project. Some politely refused, and a few sternly asked me to leave them alone, but most welcomed me into their space, even offering me a chair or cooler on which to sit as we conducted the interview. Inevitably, I became more comfortable with the recruitment process after the initial days of research. Many residents came to know both my face and my name, and awareness of my project spread through the community by word-of-mouth.

participants to certain social circles. Additionally, as an independent male researcher, I often avoided approaching lone female-presenting residents. This contributed to a research sample heavy with male-identifying participants; less than 30% of respondents self-identified using she/her pronouns. However, participant observations found that a large majority of residents were male presenting.[3]

Interviews were conducted on weekdays and weekends at random times between 9 A.M and 6 P.M. Each interview lasted a minimum of twenty minutes, with several interviews exceeding forty minutes. Upon completion of the interview, participants who gave at least a twenty-minute interview (which was all eventual participants) received twenty dollars as compensation for their time. Most residents felt comfortable conducting interviews outside their tents. Other interviews were conducted at the public benches in Washington Jefferson Park.

Once I had recruited a participant, given them time to review informed consent materials, and clarified any outstanding questions, I conducted a semi-structured interview approximately 30-45 minutes in length. I began each interview by asking residents to state their name, age, and how long they had lived in Washington Jefferson Park. I also asked where residents had been living before moving to the park, why they had become houseless, and what (if any) forms of housing they were currently seeking. I then proceeded to ask questions about residents' experiences with other forms of housing such as shelters, other encampments, or formal villages.

[3] These trends reflect national houselessness demographics: 70% of those experiencing houselessness nationwide are male (National Alliance to end Homelessness 2021).

After establishing a baseline level of trust with participants, I asked several questions about the frequency and process of evictions in Washington Jefferson Park. If residents reported having been evicted, I asked them to recount their most recent experience in as much detail as possible. I also attempted to elicit descriptions of the process by which residents were notified that they were being asked to leave the encampment.

I recorded all interviews using a voice recording application on my cellphone. All recordings were kept on the locked cellphone until they were transcribed using the transcription software Otter.ai. To protect participants' identities, all interviews were de-identified upon completion of transcription. Due to the sensitive nature of information discussed, each resident referred to in this document has been given an alternative name. Alternative names were selected to protect resident privacy while simultaneously emphasizing the individuality of those who shared their experiences.[4]

Once interviews had been transcribed on Otter.ai, all transcriptions were edited for accuracy against the original audio recording. The direct quotations included in this document are the verbatim words of participants. In the rare case that a quotation was unintelligible on the audio recording, I used context clues to estimate a participant's response.[5] These instances were usually no more than a few words long.

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[4] Many participants stated that they did not mind having their real names included in my research. Most were happy to share their stories without the promise of anonymity, while only a select few were thankful that interviews would be de-identified. No participants specifically requested that their real name be included, a request I would have honored.

[5] Located under a freeway overpass, beside a major highway, and adjacent to a railroad crossing, Washington Jefferson Park was a loud space. I often had to pause interviews to wait for a train to pass, and traffic would sometimes interrupt interviews at critical junctures. Most residents seemed unphased by these interruptions; several told me they barely noticed the noise anymore. It certainly impacted the accuracy of the transcription software, but I could usually make out a participant's words when referencing the original audio recording.

I then analyzed the edited transcriptions by coding interviews according to three broad themes I had identified during the interview process: sweeps and evictions, resident agency and inter-encampment relationships, and resident opinions of "Safe Sleep" sites, the city's proposed temporary solution to unsheltered houselessness. For each of these themes, I selected key quotations as the base to tell residents' stories, placing those quotations in conversation with the shared—and often contrasting—experiences of other residents. Following the practice of other ethnographers, I aimed for "depth over breadth" and attempted to "provide enough rich and thick description" to make my case studies familiar to readers and subsequently applicable to other settings (Tracy and Geist-Martin 2012, 4).

Near the end of the research process, I also conducted an impromptu interview with the Parks and Recreation crew responsible for maintaining compliance in Washington Jefferson Park. In this interview, I primarily conversed with the crew leader and one other Parks and Recreation employee. While I did not record this interaction, I did take extensive field notes. As a result, any quotations from city Parks and Recreation employees represent my paraphrasing and not their precise words.

Who Participated: Sample Demographics

Of the 22 residents I interviewed, 16 self-identified as male, five identified as female, and one identified as non-binary. Seventeen participants self-identified as White, three participants self-identified as Black, one participant as Indigenous, and one

as Latinx.[6] Respondents ranged in age from 21-67, with five respondents under 30, four respondents between the ages of 30 and 40, three respondents between the ages of 40 and 50, six respondents between the ages of 50 and 60, and four respondents over the age of 60. Over one-third of respondents (eight) reported having lived in the encampment for less than six months, while seven had lived in the encampment for six months to one ear, five between one and two years, and two residents for longer than two years.

[6] These racial demographics skew disproportionately toward White respondents as compared with national averages for those experiencing houselessness. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Black and Indigenous Americans are severely overrepresented in the national houseless population, experiencing houselessness at rates around 5 times higher than White Americans (National Alliance to End Homelessness).

Literature Review

Most literature on tent cities traces houseless encampments back to the Shantytowns (or "Hoovervilles") that emerged during the Great Depression. However, the growth of informal encampments has mainly attracted the attention of scholars in the last thirty years. Following the Reagan administration's disinvestment from social welfare programs and subsidized housing in the 1980's, rates of homelessness in the United States rapidly accelerated, as did scholarship on chronic homelessness (Sparks 2017, 87). With shelters overwhelmed and mental health services chronically underfunded, unhoused encampments soon emerged in dozens of U.S. cities. Since this initial boom, tent city growth has accompanied widespread economic crises such as the 2008 recession and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as Chris Herring notes, the resilience of tent cities even in times of economic growth (such as the early 2000's) speaks to a "new logic of urban relegation" and to the power of encampments as safer spaces for the unhoused (2014). A growing body of work chronicles the rise of such encampments across the American West, theorizing them as sites of protest, belonging, and in some cases, autonomous responses by the unhoused to a systemic lack of affordable housing (Herring 2014; Loftus-Farren 2011).

The 1987 McKinney-Vento Act, the first piece of national legislation to define homelessness, codified the language of "pathology, treatment, and rehabilitation" that has largely framed homelessness as an individual failure (Sparks 2012, 1514). The legislation and its successive amendments emphasized a market-based approach to solving homelessness at the individual level, placing the burden of homeless "management" on state and local governments. This neoliberal approach is particularly

visible in Eugene, where high rates of arrest, recidivism, and a dearth of mental healthcare and transitional housing services speak to the desire to treat the visible symptoms of homelessness, rather than its root causes. While the recent transition to Safe Sleep Sites and the allowance of temporary urban camping mark in an important shift in housing discourse away from narratives of homeless deviance and toward city responsibility, narratives of homeless deviance "continue to frame the homeless as unfit for rational self-governance and representation" and contribute to the creation of the "homeless Other" (Sparks 2012, 1514). These logics sequester unhoused people as anti-citizens in the public imagination, in turn facilitating their geographic seclusion into undesirable spaces. These spaces can be peripheral industrial areas, railroads, or shelters, which Chris Herring calls "the dominant institution of homeless seclusion in the United States" (2014, 286). Geographic segregation serves both to preserve the supposed aesthetic quality of cities and establish a paternalistic relationship wherein the city manages unhoused people not as people, but as a social ill. Herring refers to this process as "managing marginality," a strategy where cities "target sites of poverty rather than poverty itself" (2014, 303). City strategies of seclusion have long marginalized and isolated supposedly "undesirable" populations. In municipalities like Eugene, the modern containment of unhoused peoples is reminiscent of Black exclusion in the 1940's that attempted to erase a vibrant Black community (Beckner 2009).

Against the backdrop of these methods of seclusion, tent cities are often salient forms of political protest. Encampments have long made visible the affordable housing crisis and demonstrated the agency of the unhoused (Sparks 2017). Tent City 3 in Seattle, today one of the most well-known encampments in the city, originated from the

1990 “Goodwill Gathering” protests that brought together houseless activists in the location of Seattle’s former Hoovervilles. Several other tent cities have grown from protest movements, including Portland’s Dignity Village, Nickelsville in Seattle, and Safe Ground in Sacramento (Herring 2014; Parker 2020). Many encampments serve as ongoing sites of activism, advocating for both their resident populations and the rights of unhoused people across their home city. Even when not expressly political, tent cities call attention to who is excluded and who is included in the body politic. According to Cory Parker, they “disrupt the ‘partition of the sensible’, the taken-for-granted divisions of land, uses and relations that set the conditions of possible perception” (Parker 2020, 331). Particularly in self-proclaimed liberal cities like Portland, Los Angeles, and Eugene, the very existence of tent cities challenges the social welfare commitments of residents and city councils alike, frustrating logics of separation that attempt to hide glaring housing shortages and inadequate shelter beds.

Informal tent cities also serve as sites of political belonging. Most apparent in the few ethnographies available is the security and sense of community afforded by these encampments. Zoe Loftus-Farren identifies several benefits of tent cities: community, autonomy, self-governance, attention, assistance, and security, among others (Loftus-Farren 2011). Ethnographic studies indicate that tent cities are a draw for unhoused people seeking stability and social life not offered by shelters. Even informal encampments offer the opportunity to self-determine and escape reliance on government institutions (Loftus-Farren 2011, 1051). Despite these benefits, city governments and housed residents continue to reject tent cities as legitimate spaces for the unhoused. Once again, neoliberal discourses of homeless deviancy frame the tent

city as a site of collective failure and a symbol of poverty. Rather than adopting these conceptions, Andrew Heben suggests a more constructive view of these encampments that emphasizes their success in promoting direct democracy and mutual aid (2014). Such an approach might avoid the cycle of dispersion and reformation that characterizes encampments in several cities. This cycle does nothing to address houselessness and continually re-asserts the power of the tent city as a site of belonging. Ironically, the very policies that aim to sequester unhoused people in less visible spaces create the conditions for vibrant communities. Encampments "paradoxically serve as both tools of containing homeless populations for the local state and preferred safe grounds for those experiencing homelessness" (Herring 2014, 285).

Even a brief comparison of unhoused encampments across the country reveals that the tent city is not a monolith. Tent cities vary in scope, size, and function, all of which are shaped both by the desires of residents and the policy approaches by local governments. In his typology of homeless seclusion, Chris Herring places encampments along two conceptual axes: institutionalization (including recognition by local governments) and resident autonomy over the encampment. He subsequently identifies four distinct types of seclusion: contestation, toleration, accommodation, and co-optation.

CITY & COMMUNITY

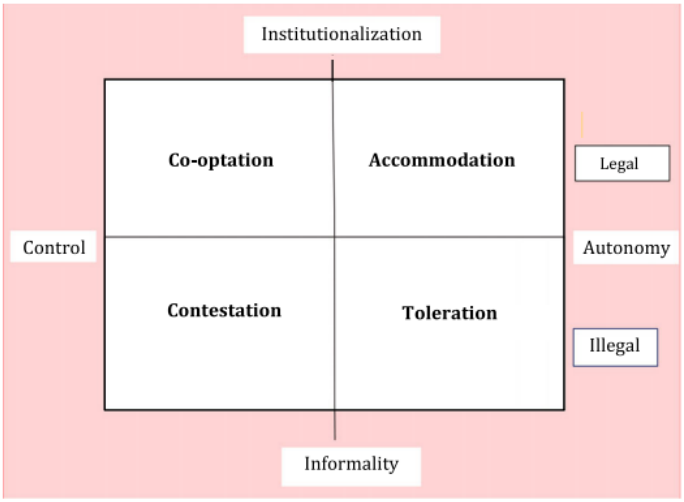

FIG. 1. Typology of Homeless Seclusion.

Figure 1: Chris Herring's Typology of Homeless Seclusion (2014, 290)

Seclusion through contestation is the most volatile form of unhoused encampment, often characterized by continuous dispersion and re-formation. Herring's study of various encampments found that unfavorable media portrayals of encampments, the ostensible safety concerns of housed residents, and complaints about declining property values all fueled political pressure to conduct regular sweeps of the unhoused—even in cities where encampments were geographically isolated from neighborhoods (Herring, 2014). In cities where public pressure to remove the unhoused is less intense, local governments will tolerate formally illegal camps, a strategy that reduces law enforcement and public works expenses. Camps characterized by "toleration" also provide more stability for unhoused residents and often attract NGO's that provide services to encampment residents (Herring, 2014). When cities choose to legally support encampments through accommodation or co-optation, residents have

reported higher levels of security, self-worth, and political participation. However, encampments that are organized entirely by the city, such as Ontario's "Camp Hope," also constitute a "form of spatial control" that "disperse the informal encampments they replaced" and exclude "particular groups of homeless" (Herring, 2014).

While not a perfect schematic, Herring's typology combines an analysis of both the "administrative strategies" of the local state and the "adaptive strategies" of the unhoused (Herring 2014, 290). Other studies (DeVerteuil et al 2009; Sparks 2012) have similarly emphasized the agency of the houseless as an important factor in examining socio-spatial exclusion, noting that the varying preferences, experiences, and identities of the houseless play an important role in determining the location and character of encampments. Over-emphasizing the role of "punitive" neoliberal policies risks situating the unhoused as helpless "others" and ignoring the ability of encampment residents to "redefine the meaning of socio-physical space and then act on those redefinitions" (Wright 1997, 254).

Several other studies of unhoused communities underscore the clear division in the literature between informal "tent cities" and authorized "villages." The location of camps along other descriptive axes—loosely to highly structured, horizontal to vertical in decision-making—gives a clearer picture of certain encampments and their relationship with the communities in which they are situated (Molinar 2010). While most ethnographies have studied the internal dynamics of larger, formal communities, informal communities host significantly more unhoused people nationwide (Molinar 2010, 24). Most informal tent cities, like the one in Washington Jefferson Park, are loosely structured and change significantly over time. These encampments face several

obstacles often avoided by formal villages: ethical challenges due to overcrowding, community opposition in the form of Not-In-My-Backyard-ism (NIMBY-ism), and legal constraints such as strict zoning laws and anti-camping ordinances (Loftus-Farren 2011).

Of course, the most immediate threat to the stability and existence of informal tent cities is the sweep: the eviction of tent city residents by police or city employees. As particularly aggressive forms of homeless seclusion, sweeps often dispossess tent city residents of their belongings and leave them with no viable living alternative (Banta and Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2020). They epitomize paternalistic attitudes toward the unhoused and often reflect the short-term preferences of housed community members. As Chris Herring argues, "it would be wrong to interpret the police sweeps as simply the neutral enforcement of legislation…reasons for dispersing camps were foremost political, depending on *material* and *symbolic* rationales given varying urban conditions" (2014, 291). Often preceded by legal decrees, such as temporary bans on camping, these events can occur with little to no warning. Scholarship on sweeps is notably sparse, likely due to their spontaneity and low visibility. However, displacement by law enforcement has been a feature of tent city life since the Great Depression. In Sacramento, tent cities have been dispersed, reformed, and contested repeatedly from 1930 to this day (Parker 2020). This pattern of resurgence characterizes unhoused encampments in cities nationwide, highlighting both the agency of the unhoused to establish safe living spaces and the ineffectiveness of sweeps in addressing the root causes of houselessness.

A growing body of legal literature also examines sweeps, anti-camping ordinances, and other laws criminalizing houselessness as civil and human rights issues. Several scholars have noted the dubious constitutionality of sweeps and laws banning public sleeping (Loftus-Farren 2011; Junejo, et al. 2016). In *Pottinger v. Miami* and *Jones v. the City of Los Angeles*, for example, courts found that ordinances banning sleeping in public and those permitting the confiscation or destruction of houseless individuals' property both violated the "cruel and unusual punishment" clause of the Eighth Amendment (Junejo et al. 2016). Similarly, the Court in *Lavan v. the City of Los Angeles* held that confiscating and destroying the property of unhoused individuals camped on the sidewalk violated the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures (Junejo et al. 2016). This strand of research also emphasizes the cyclical nature of criminalizing houselessness, as criminal records and fines further restrict the socioeconomic mobility of the unhoused, often harming their chances of acquiring stable housing. Evictions and camping bans can also expel or discourage houseless individuals from camping in busy downtown areas, geographically isolating the unhoused from lifesaving services and the community of other unhoused citizens (Murphy 2009).

However, both legal and geographic analyses of socio-spatial control have largely ignored the voices of the unhoused themselves (DeVertueil et al. 2009). Because ethnographies remain mostly reserved for studying self-governance, scholars have often failed to incorporate the houseless perspective into their analysis. DeVertueil et al. suggest that this approach lies "less with the geographies of homelessness per se…than with using homeless people as ciphers around which to build a wider critique of

gentrification, public space law, and so on" (2009, 660). This broad critique ignores the specific individual contexts of houselessness and too often treat "the houseless" as a homogenous population. Why someone becomes houseless—and how spatial policies impact them—are critical to understanding the various constraints imposed by a neoliberal policy approach to managing houselessness. Yet, despite persuasive legal and ethical arguments against sweeps, there is a "limited understanding of the direct human experience of enforcement of anti-homeless laws" in existing literature (Darrah-Okike et al. 2018, 638).

Background

Houselessness and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Eugene, Oregon

Following the surge of unsheltered houselessness prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic recession, many cities were forced to adapt their long-standing policies of criminalization. Shelters around the country became overwhelmed with applicants, and in some cases, outside encampments allowed those seeking shelter to better maintain proper social distancing (Benavides and Nukpezah 2020). In March of 2020, the CDC released guidelines stressing that "if individual housing options are not available," cities should "allow people who are living in encampments to remain where they are" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2021). These guidelines acknowledged both the negative mental and physical health outcomes linked with outdoor living, as well as the risk of separating the unhoused from service providers and dispersing them throughout the community. Despite the risks, several famously "liberal" cities—including Seattle, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C—continued sweeping encampments amidst the height of the pandemic (Zapata 2020). Others, like Portland, Oregon, temporarily relaxed their urban camping restrictions, while Austin, New Orleans, and Philadelphia rented empty hotel rooms to provide emergency housing assistance (Benavides and Nukpezah 2020, 653). In all cities, though, the pandemic has renewed public attention to the realities of outdoor living and re-emphasized the importance of housing in ensuring public health.

This has been particularly evident in Eugene, where the high visibility of unhoused encampments during the pandemic served as a stark reminder of the city's looming housing crisis. While most encampments have since been cleared, the central

problem persists. At the time of writing, over 4,100 individuals were experiencing houselessness in Lane County, an increase that underscores the City's failure to address its affordable housing shortage (Lane County Human Services 2022).

The City of Eugene has employed strategies of both toleration and dispersion in managing encampments during the pandemic. Following the release of CDC guidelines in March of 2020, the city relaxed what had been a previously aggressive campaign of campsite removals, allowing larger encampments to form near downtown and reducing sweeps of smaller encampments (Catalyst Journalism Project 2021). However, just three months later the city began issuing eviction notices at a rapid pace, mostly targeting smaller encampments. Evicted campers were given a 24-hour notice in advance of site cleanup.[7] In the final six months of 2020, crews were clearing about 50 campsites per week—a 40% increase from pre-pandemic levels (Catalyst Journalism Project 2021). Finally, in December of 2020, the city temporarily suspended its urban camping ban to formally allow public camping in two main locations: a vacant lot on the corner of 13th Avenue and Chambers Street and Washington Jefferson Park near downtown. Both locations had already sustained thriving encampments through the summer and fall of 2021. The urban camping ban suspension came after public backlash to an instance where city crews cleared over 100 unhoused individuals who had camped near Washington Jefferson Park (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a). As with most other evictions, the city failed to provide evicted campers with meaningful housing

[7] In January of 2021, the City changed its policy to give a 48-hour warning specifying what a non-compliant camp would need to change to meet criteria for camping. If campers failed to comply, the city would then post a 24-hour notice of removal (Catalyst Journalism Project 2021). In July of 2021, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 3124, which mandated that city governments give a minimum of 72 hours' notice before removing a campsite. The bill also required governments to collect people's valuables and store them securely for up to 30 days (Temporary Urban Camping 2022).

alternatives. Many had no choice but to illegally camp somewhere else. It had become clear that evictions would only cause the re-formation of encampments in other areas of the city, and with pressure from the public and unhoused activist organizations mounting, city officials ceased evictions for campers in designated areas.

The Case of Washington Jefferson Park

Located on the edge of Downtown and Eugene's eclectic Whiteaker Neighborhood, Washington Jefferson Park occupies a highly visible portion of the city. Two major thoroughfares, Oregon Highway 99 and Interstate 105, intersect at an overpass above the park. Its proximity to services for the unhoused—Whitebird Clinic, ShelterCare, Buckley Detox, the Food for Lane County Dining Room, among others—made it a popular destination for those seeking a place to sleep. Additionally, the park provided more stability than other locations approved for temporary camping. Because the Eugene Parks Department rents the land in Washington Jefferson Park from the Oregon Department of Transportation, Parks employees were required to give a 10-day notice ahead of cleanup, instead of the city's standard 72-hour notice period ("Temporary Urban Camping" 2021).

Despite this stability, the city performed frequent evictions in Washington Jefferson Park. Between March of 2020 and July of 2021, city records show over 250 camp cleanups in the park (Catalyst Journalism Project 2021). The site at 13th and Chambers originally formed as a camp for those who had been displaced from Washington Jefferson Park (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a). After the city intervened at both locations to provide bathrooms and trash services, evictions continued, with law enforcement and Parks employees regularly patrolling to monitor compliance. Residents

at both sanctioned encampments had to abide by certain rules—maintaining a trash free, 12’ by 12’ campsite, refraining from smoking and any illegal drug use, keeping clear of public walkways, and not disturbing vegetation (“Temporary Urban Camping” 2021). The criteria also included vague parameters for removal such as “negatively impacting properties adjacent to the parks” and “negatively affecting nearby business activities” (Temporary Urban Camping 2021). Removals for rule violations in city parks not only displaced hundreds of campers, but they also burned through significant public money. In total, the city spent an estimated $3.5 million on its houseless response between June of 2020 and June of 2021 (Banta and Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2021).

Consistent with trends across the nation, the centrality and visibility of the Washington Jefferson Park encampment was met with strong opposition from local homeowners and businesses. Encampments often provoke strong “Not-In-My-Backyard” (NIMBY) sentiment among housed residents, who worry that encampments will generate crime, trash, and devalue their property (Loftus-Farren 2011; Herring 2014). When interviewed by KEZI news, Denise Guelld, a longtime resident of the Whiteaker neighborhood, said “We're all just sick over this. All of my neighbors have lived here for a long time, and it was a nice neighborhood, and a safe neighborhood, and a clean neighborhood.” She urged the city to do more to address the crisis (Iacobazzi 2021).

The encampment in Washington Jefferson was particularly controversial because of its size. At peak occupancy in summer of 2021, the site had approximately 280 residents (Parafiniuk-Talesnick March 2022). However, the population steadily declined as the City of Eugene opened several “safe sleep sites” to provide more “safe

and lawful places for people to sleep" (Dixson 2021). At the beginning of research in January of 2022, approximately 100 tent sites were occupied daily. This number increased slightly after the city closed the camp at 13th and Chambers on January 10 and nearly a dozen campers relocated to Washington Jefferson Park (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022b). Near the end of the research period in late February, though, less than 80 tent sites were occupied daily, according to participant observations. Finally, on March 16, 2022, the city closed the Washington Jefferson Park encampment for good, relocating the majority of residents to a new Safe Sleep site at 410 Garfield Street (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022c). At the time of writing, the park remains fenced off and closed to the public.

Results

Setting the Scene: Initial Observations

I first took field notes in Washington Jefferson Park on a sunny Sunday morning in January. After introducing myself to a few nearby residents, I took out my notebook and set up at one of the benches near Jefferson Street. I sat for nearly an hour, observing, taking notes, and occasionally chatting with residents. My first impressions from inside the camp were mainly of its size—I counted over 120 tents, with many visibly housing two or more people. Most of the park remained occupied, and several clusters of tents had even formed on green spaces outside the park boundaries, presumably by those who had been recently evicted. The largest number of tents were concentrated under the freeway overpasses, which residents confirmed provide shelter from the rain in winter and shade in the summer. Many of these tents were grouped into distinct clusters. Some tent clusters even organized themselves around a "common" space that appeared to be reserved for cooking and eating, ringed by individual tents. Unlike what I had seen in local newspaper photos, most tent sites were clean and well-contained. A few residents' belongings lay scattered near their tents, and some trash littered the grass, but I also observed many residents cleaning their spaces.

The city's presence was also immediately visible in the park. City workers had constructed temporary roads dissecting the grass, several of which were used by city crews and law enforcement during my first visit. Police cars drove through the park almost every fifteen minutes, sometimes to patrol, sometimes to question a specific resident. City-provided amenities were also extensive: over 20 public toilets and dozens of public trash cans lined the outskirts of the park, and I observed several residents

frequent water pumps to wash dishes and collect drinking water. A single sign on the southeast corner of the park communicated the rules for public camping.

Figure 2: Posted Camping Rules in Washington Jefferson Park

Despite the 12-foot-by-12-foot requirement for campsites, though, I could not discern any visible grid system or other mechanism to help campers maintain proper spacing. Ironically, the words “no camping” remained printed in block red letters on each of the

overpass pillars—a constant reminder to residents that the city's tolerance of their presence in the park was merely temporary.

Even though it was almost freezing, the encampment was active on my first day taking notes. Near the center of the park, 10 or so residents crowded around one of the picnic tables, sharing a meal and conversing. Dispersed around the park, several smaller groups gathered outside their tents working on projects, smoking cigarettes, cooking, playing with their dogs, or chatting. It quickly became clear that the separate clusters of tents I had observed marked distinct social groups. Throughout my time at the park, I would observe many people in these clusters— "cells," as one resident called them—share labor, food, and responsibilities with one another. Often, these groups formed around pre-existing social relationships, such as friends, family members, and romantic partners. However, I did meet several groups that formed in the park, often out of the necessity of sharing food and cold weather supplies.

During subsequent visits, I observed significantly less activity in the park. On rainy days and later in the day especially, few residents would emerge from their tents, and those that did often quickly returned. The geographic distribution of tents also changed day to day; bare mud patches from recently removed tents constantly dotted the park grass.[8] Over time, I noticed that the largest and most densely populated section of the park—north of 5th Avenue and between Washington and Jefferson Streets—remained crowded, while the southern sections between 5th, 6th and 7th Avenues

[8] During my first few days in the park, I helped several residents set up their tents. Some were long-time residents relocating to a more favorable location (such as under the overpass or to higher ground less likely to flood), while others were new residents—many of whom had been displaced from an unsanctioned encampment in another area of Eugene. One person that I helped on my second day of participant observation set up his tent right before dusk and was gone when I came back the next morning. He told me that he was doing his best to avoid the police but did not say why.

decreased noticeably in population. This northernmost section had the most amenities, granted easier access to services such as ShelterCare and the Eugene Mission and had the most visible sense of community. Several people who slept in cars parked along Jefferson Street also participated in the encampment in this area of the park. Two of the residents I interviewed slept in their cars but still considered themselves to be "living in the park." Both had strong relationships with other encampment residents.

Often, I was one of several non-residents engaging with the encampment. In addition to law enforcement and the Parks and Recreation crew, churches, White Bird staff, and other community organizations frequently came to the park to distribute meals and supplies. However, I observed few individuals outside these organizations utilize the park.[9] While technically still a public park, it had become an exclusionary space.[10] The perceptibly strong network between many residents and the clustered groupings of tents suggested that an independent community had formed. However, most residents readily welcomed me into their space as I conducted my interviews.

The following chapters discuss the three most prominent themes in my data: how evictions and other city strategies of "managing" houselessness constrained residents' relationships and sense of belonging, the impact of evictions on residents, and resident's attitudes toward the city's proposed alternative to informal encampments: "Safe Sleep" sites. These are by no means the only themes that emerged from my data,

[9] One day before conducting interviews, a jogger even told me, "Be careful, man" as I walked into the park with my backpack and notebook. Aside from the occasional jogger or biker travelling through, I observed most pedestrians intentionally cross the street to avoid the park.

[10] Initially, I found it difficult to comfortably introduce myself in this space as a researcher. On one of my first days of participant observation, a resident vaguely threatened me and asked me to leave the park, which I did. Another time, later in the interview process, a group of residents threw bottles and rocks toward me as I approached their cluster of tents. While these behaviors do not reflect the attitudes of most residents, they did signal my status as an outsider and my unwelcomeness in the park.

but they are the most prominent and most compelling. Each chapter inevitably touches on some of the other themes identified by residents—such as drug use in the park, criminalization of houselessness and its effects, and the limitations of the shelter system–but these are not the focus of my work. Each of these topics deserves more consideration and depth than I could give in this thesis.

Chapter 1: Internal Dynamics of the Encampment

When I began this project, I intended to limit my investigation to the internal structure and dynamics of the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park. The studies I had read on formal projects like Opportunity Village in Eugene and Dignity Village in Portland piqued my interest on encampment governance structures, and I grew curious as to what modes of governance I might find in an informal encampment. As a result, my initial interviews in the park centered mostly on questions of organization, communication between encampment residents, and any forms of collective decision-making. This quickly changed. I discovered early on that, apart from the smaller clusters of tents I observed on my first day, the encampment lacked any formal organization. There was no apparent mechanism for making collective decisions, resolving conflicts, or setting guidelines around resident behavior.[11] People reported sharing duties and addressing problems within their distinct social groups, but largely, they remained confined to these groups. Not a single resident described the entire park as one community, and several even laughed when I inquired about the existence of formal governance structures. While some described feeling "a sense of community" in the park, and many were genuinely grateful for the assistance and support of their neighbors, most did not see the encampment as an explicitly political space.[12]

[11] Only one resident I interviewed described a process whereby residents would pressure problematic residents to change their behavior or even leave the park. Chris told me that if a resident repeatedly stole or damaged people's property, other encampment members would collectively "kick them out." However, no one else I talked with mentioned such a process. Several told me that they would take their disputes to the police or the Parks and Rec crews.

[12] As one might expect, residents' sense of belonging varied depending on how long a resident had lived in the encampment. Those who had been in the encampment longer than a year had deeper social connections and were more likely to share responsibilities (like cooking, cleaning, or gathering cans for the bottle drop). Most new residents seemed indifferent toward their neighbors.

Additionally, political organization was of little interest or concern to most of my respondents. Often, they were simply trying to survive—to find their next meal, scrape together a few dollars for supplies, or find fuel to stay warm. Residents were much more eager to share their experiences interacting with city officials and struggling with the various burdens of unsheltered houselessness. Their concern for these topics informed my subsequent research questions, ultimately leading to the following chapters on evictions and housing alternatives like Eugene's "Safe Sleep" sites.

Limitations on Political Organization

Several factors constrained the possibilities for political organization in the park. The first was a lack of trust between residents. When I asked participants why they didn't feel the need to make collective decisions, several said the same thing: they often didn't know or even like their neighboring campers. Residents might watch out for their friends and family, but often, this was to protect their loved ones and belongings *from* other residents. I was shocked by the frequency with which residents expressed anti-houseless sentiments in their interviews. Almost every person I interviewed cited concerns with the "crazy" or "disturbed" people living in the park. Several respondents simultaneously asked for more empathy from the city and were seemingly unwilling to extend it to their neighbors. They complained frequently about "lazy" and "greedy" campers who would hoard supplies and food and failed to maintain clean campsites. Interestingly, though, most agreed that this population constituted a small percentage of those living in the park. They also cited mental illness as the primary cause for such behavior, often lamenting the fact that residents struggling with mental illness failed to receive necessary support from the city.

Respondents spoke at length about the rash of drug usage, interpersonal violence, and theft in the encampment, all of which left them feeling insecure and suspicious of other campers. I heard several gruesome accounts of beatings and stabbings—rare but impactful moments that severely damaged people's faith that the encampment could ever be a safe community. Most concerning to campers was the threat of their belongings being stolen. Already under threat of being evicted by the city, theft by neighbors further isolated individuals and small groups from each other.[13] 'Jim,' 63, told me how he had lived all over the country but never struggled to protect his belongings until he arrived in the park.

> In the beginning it seemed like you had order. But there's no order here. I mean, if I try to go get a job, even off for a day, I know my tent's gonna get robbed. I'm going to be walking in and out and they know who I am. And that's what they do. All these people. This is the part I didn't know—all these people are linked together in crime. I didn't know that. They're in it for themselves. I never seen nothing like this. How people, how the homeless can steal from the homeless. It's sick.

While I found no evidence to substantiate Jim's claim that other campers were "linked together in crime," several respondents expressed similar worries that their neighbors were criminals. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced among long-time residents, who typically viewed newly arriving campers with suspicion. Like Jim, those who had lived in the park for over a year noted how the encampment felt safer in the summer of 2021, when over 250 tents occupied the park. They noted that the greater population helped disincentivize theft, as more residents meant more eyes watching over people's belongings. Generally, longer-established residents felt that "the new

[13] The harsh realities of outdoor living exacerbated these tensions. Residents had to compete for supplies, food, and optimal camping spaces, often drawing from the same community organizations for items like blankets, socks, and sleeping bags. While many residents navigated these challenges by sharing resources in small groups, sheer desperation forced some to steal as a means of survival.

people coming in"—many of whom were younger, more independent campers that were brought to the park as the city cracked down on dispersed camping—were responsible for the park's decline.

Additionally, racial tensions divided many of the tent clusters that dotted the park. 'David,' 50, a Black veteran who had lived in the encampment for almost two years, described how his younger, White neighbors openly harassed him with racist language.

> There's some things going on right now. Like racism, like those people over there, and I don't give a f**k if they looking over here and that doesn't matter to me. They're like, taunting people using epithets that are inappropriate in nature…There's a discrimination hotline or something like that on one of those cards [the city gave me]…I haven't really pursued it yet. I haven't had a chance to sit down and do it. I'm too busy guarding my stuff, getting somebody to watch my stuff.

David took his concerns to the Parks and Rec crew working in the encampment and seemed satisfied with their response. He told me they connected him with someone in the Parks office who handled complaints and spoke with the offending parties about moving them to a different area in the park. The other Black residents I spoke with described similar experiences with racism in the park. Unlike David, however, 'Eric,' 62, told me that he didn't feel like he could go to the city with his concerns because of his past experiences with racist police. Eric felt he had been repeatedly harassed and targeted by police because he was Black, and that the city "wants to keep the racial divide" in the encampment. "This helps their cause of injustice," he stated bluntly. While David's story underscores the central role of the city in managing disputes within the encampment, Eric's emphasizes how houseless seclusion can doubly alienate houseless people of color by reproducing the racist systems inherent to the "managing"

state. The material limitations of David's situation also constrained his response; as he noted, he was "too busy guarding my stuff" to follow through with the Parks office.

The City of Eugene's confusing policies surrounding the legal status of the encampment further constrained residents' ability to politically organize. While the urban camping allowance technically sanctioned the encampment's existence, the stipulations for camping and the prevalence of evictions undermined the notion that the encampment was a protected space for the unhoused. As Chris Herring notes, secluding and sanctioning houseless encampments "has the paradoxical function of extending state practices of poverty management and producing 'safe spaces' where the homeless, to varying degrees, have some level of autonomy" (Herring 2014, 306). In encampments with strong governance structures, a stable sense of independence from the city is crucial to cultivating residents' sense of political agency. Tony Sparks, who spent several months living and conducting research in Seattle's Tent City 3, found that the City of Seattle's legal recognition of the encampment allowed residents to practice direct democracy more comfortably (2017).

This was not the case in Washington Jefferson Park. On Chris Herring's model of "typologies of homeless seclusion," the encampment appears to occupy a unique space between toleration and co-optation, while also exhibiting certain qualities of a "contested" encampment. As is consistent with strategies of co-optation, the City of Eugene formally recognized the encampment as a legal place to sleep and provided various services for residents. It received more formal support than most "tolerated" encampments and was marked by strict rules that reserved the encampment for the "deserving poor" (Herring 2014, 301). However, the city's administrative strategies

aligned more with the policy goals of sequestering the unhoused in one space, thus "taking pressure off" important economic zones like downtown (Herring 2014, 295). Unlike co-optation, which aims to move people out of houselessness by meeting their basic needs, the encampment mostly served as a temporary seclusion strategy while the city worked to find alternative temporary housing solutions. Finally, the city's eviction policy complicated and often contradicted its strategy of toleration. Herring describes tolerated encampments as those that provide the unhoused with "a more permanent place on their own terms," yet few residents described the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park as such a place (Herring 2014, 297). As I will discuss in the following chapter, poor communication of park rules, frequent evictions, and inconsistent enforcement by police furthered the political exclusion of the unhoused without giving them the "safe space" to resist that exclusion. 'Bob,' a 63-year-old veteran, told me that he felt deprived of his right to full citizenship despite his past service to the country. The evictions he witnessed left him excluded from the community and confused about the legal status of the park. "I mean, this is public space, right? But that doesn't matter. They enforce rules on people that are really, you know, not cool." Other residents reiterated that camping in the park was "technically illegal" or that the city could "kick me out if they wanted." Without stable recognition of their right to camp, residents had no place in which they felt they truly "belonged." The city's eviction practices precluded the kind of "structured informality" that has developed in other long-standing encampments, denying residents a sense of full citizenship in both the broader "public" and within the encampment itself (Sparks 2017).

Additionally, many respondents felt that the city treated them paternalistically. [14] While they described having more autonomy than they would in the shelter system, the ubiquity of city officials in the park constantly reminded them that they were subject to the city's control. From the temporary roads that dissected the encampment to the strict rules for camping—all of which were set by the city without resident input—city authority pervaded every aspect of encampment life. As a result, residents felt little desire or need to take on governance roles.[15] Police remained the primary resource for resolving conflict, and day-to-day responsibilities, such as food collection or tent upkeep, were primarily individual or small group concerns. As Herring predicted, the city's approach thus extended "state practices of property management" without providing residents a safe space to exercise autonomy (2014, 306). In general, residents were more concerned about their relationships with city officials than their relationships with other campers. The former could determine their eligibility to remain in the park or find stable permanent housing; the most the latter could do, many thought, was provide them with a free cigarette or briefly watch their belongings.

The primacy of the city's paternalistic role shaped the encampment from its inception. Whereas many formal encampments begin with an explicit political purpose or shared goal, the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park lacked a structured,

[14] This critique undoubtedly reflects the libertarian political leanings of many respondents, especially younger, single men. Many residents expressed strong anti-government sentiments in our interviews, particularly those who had lived on their own for several years. This individualism contributed to suspicion of both city officials and other residents.

[15] To be clear, I do not mean to insinuate that the city's tolerance of the encampment created a dependent or lazy unhoused population. Such an idea—one unfortunately shared by many housed residents and local public officials—feeds on problematic neoliberal conceptions of "productive" citizenship and assumes that one's place in the body politic must somehow be "earned." The reality I discovered in the park was quite the opposite: toleration, when it was exercised, gave residents the stability they needed to seek employment or search for other housing options.

organic political beginning.[16] Tent City 3 in Seattle, for example, formed when houseless activists and advocates built a protest camp in response to rising housing costs in Seattle (Sparks 2017, 89). After various dispersions and re-formations, the camp subsequently earned formal recognition from the City of Seattle. Through each of these changes, the camp retained an explicitly political dimension, aiming to "restore community, dignity, hope and self-respect to homeless people" (Sparks 2017, 89). By contrast, the City of Eugene controlled the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park from the beginning. City officials chose the site of the encampment after reaching a new agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation, establishing criteria for camping to regulate access to the park. City policy, not any cohesive political movement by the unhoused, created the conditions for the encampment's existence. Though the city's stated purpose in establishing the encampment was to provide the unhoused with somewhere to shelter in place during the pandemic, allowing camping in the park also allowed the city to manage dispersed camping in neighborhoods and business districts while remaining publicly "progressive." Yet the encampment quickly became a catch-all for various systemic failures in housing, mental health services, and addiction treatment, attracting a variety of people experiencing a variety of types of houselessness to the park. Some had been in and out of the shelter system for years, some had been unhoused and living in dispersed encampments, and several had been

[16] Here, I do not want to discount the political agency of the 100 or so campers who first took advantage of the technicality that prevents the city from evicting people camping on ODOT land. These campers made visible the cruelty and ineffectiveness of Eugene's urban camping ban during the pandemic, highlighting the need for alternative solutions and significantly informing the city's decision to suspend the camping ban in Washington Jefferson Park. However, this group lacked the cohesion and public support to effectively resist the city's rebuttal, which led to their eviction the following month. The resulting sanctioned encampment bore little resemblance to the original group of campers and was formed primarily by city officials.

recently housed until they lost their housing during the pandemic recession. For a handful of residents, living in the encampment was their first time living with or even near other people experiencing houselessness.[17]

Many of the tensions between residents stemmed from this catch-all approach. 'John,' told me that he felt like the camp was designed with no consideration for residents' varying experiences.

> You try and stick a bunch of people in a box together, right? And there's nowhere else for them to go. They have no other way to release their stress. Yeah, you know, so they take it out on other people, even if the other people didn't do anything to deserve it.

The sheer magnitude of the encampment, combined with the heterogeneity of its residents, exacerbated the various tensions within the park. As, 'Jackson,' 32, succinctly claimed, "I think when you get a population with this size, and throw them all together, that creates issues." People's varying level of experience with houselessness, as well as their familiarity with unique aspects of street life like the informal economy (collecting bottles and cans, doing odd jobs, etc.) impacted their ability to equally participate in what little communal life existed within the encampment. Even in an informal encampment, certain rules and hierarchies give residents a chance to exercise autonomy (Wasserman and Clair 2011). While I did not discover the existence of any explicitly held, resident-established encampment rules in my interviews, residents generally expected other campers to refrain from theft and keep their campsite clean. For campers

[17] George told me that he had been living in Springfield until the family member from whom he was renting lost their house in the pandemic. After camping in Veneta and Mapleton, he and his partner moved to the park to be closer to services and escape wildfire smoke. He felt a lot of shame living in the public eye and frequently expressed his desire to live somewhere other than the park, but admitted the encampment was the only place he could get the community support he needed.

who were new to the park, had never lived in a larger encampment before, or were struggling to get by, these expectations were sometimes hard to follow.

Notably, several respondents used some version of the phrase "thrown together" in our interviews, suggesting that the city's approach explicitly deprived the unhoused of their agency in exercising control over how they experience houselessness. When I asked residents if they *wanted* to live in the park, most replied that they were only there because they had nowhere else to go. 'Zachary,' 29, had tried to leave the encampment several times to avoid the temptation of relapsing into opioid abuse, but the city evicted him whenever he attempted to camp somewhere else. He told me that "after moving so much and not being able to establish anywhere, I was kind of forced to come back here." The lack of viable alternatives frustrated not only those trying to leave the encampment, but those who lived there and wished to keep "undesirable" campers out. Without the ability to regulate the boundaries of their own community, residents subsequently lacked control over the shared social space inside the encampment. In their study of street houselessness and urban renewal, Wasserman and Clair found that, just as upper and middle-class Americans practice "exclusionary notions of community," so do lower-class and houseless individuals seek to secure bounded social spaces (2011, 94). Doing so allows them to self-govern more cohesively.

Informal Community and Belonging

Despite lacking formal governance structures, life in the encampment—like in any community—involved some degree of political interaction. Residents may have not seen themselves as explicit political actors, but they frequently engaged in joint decision-making and collective action, albeit mostly within pre-established social

groups. I have already touched on several of these activities above: sharing food, collecting cans to earn money at the bottle drop, maintaining tents, and keeping campsites in compliance with park rules. Yet several residents also commented on campers' willingness to assist those most in need. John told me that he first arrived in the park with no supplies and would have "frozen to death" without aid from other residents.

> I've been very fortunate in having a few people help me out with sleeping bags and blankets and stuff. Because about a month and a half ago, I only had a small blanket and a little tarp. And I ended up waking up when it was dumping rain outside. I woke up in the middle of the rain soaked. I was soaked for three days straight…I'm very fortunate that people here have been kind enough to help me out. I wouldn't have anything.

Here, John's definition of "the people" who helped him was limited to his group of friends. He explicitly stated in other portions of our interview that "we take care of our own," and that "if this group over here doesn't want to be part of our own, well, then they take care of themselves." John's testimony—shared by several other respondents—complicates Wasserman and Clair's findings that regulating membership in encampments is necessary for creating "private social space" (2011, 91). In city controlled, top-down encampments, the concept of "boundaries" constantly changes as new campers leave and enter the space. Residents in Washington Jefferson Park challenged the city's by establishing private spaces within the broader "public" space of the encampment—a deeply political act. Though they could not control the boundaries of the encampment as a whole, campers still practiced "exclusionary notions of community" where they could.

However, as I observed on my first day in the park, some political interactions occasionally occurred between distinct "cells" of campers. 'Chris,' 28, who was one of the few residents to use the word "community" in his responses, felt that residents of the encampment generally looked out for each other, regardless of their involvement with certain social groups.[18]

> Yeah, it's basically a community. Like if you don't have something, you can go and ask somebody and if they have it, or if they can spare it, nine times out of ten they definitely will. So yeah, it's pretty cool.

A handful of other residents shared his sentiments. 'Emmitt,' 25, said they felt "a sense of belonging in the park…just a little bit, but it's enough to hold onto when I need to just get by. It's a constant." They described sharing food with other residents and receiving assistance when they needed to relocate their tent. These acts of kindness helped them "feel safe here, for the most part."

Residents also participated in community by guarding each others' belongings, both from other residents and from city officials. I will explore the city's policies on clearing unattended campsites in the next chapter, but frequently, residents who left the park for extended periods of time would return to discover that the city had cleared their entire campsite, leaving them destitute. Campers quickly learned to ask others to guard their campsite or communicate to city officials when they would be returning. During evictions where residents were present, residents would even assist the evicted person with carrying their belongings. 'Rick,' 36, described how, at the height of the

[18] Importantly, Chris lived by himself and seemed to have a positive relationship with most of his neighboring campers. He was exceptionally generous during our interview, offering me food, a place to sit, and even a blanket when I began to shake from the cold. While some of the campers who lived on their own shared Chris' optimism toward the groups in the park, others felt isolated from these micro-communities.

encampment's population in the Summer of 2021, campers would frequently "help out" during evictions. They would also observe the eviction process—sometimes even filming it—to provide at least a modest check on police power.

These forms of political engagement were rare and practiced by select residents. Respondents like Emmitt and Chris remained in the minority; most people I interviewed described the encampment community as fractured and plagued by interpersonal conflict. However, all residents referenced some sort of shared houseless identity in their interviews. Though they might not interact with each other or have the same understanding of what it meant to live in the encampment, they felt united by their shared experiences with unsheltered houselessness. Even John, who understood the encampment to be a patchwork of smaller groups, differentiated between residents of the park and members of the broader Eugene community. He told me that encampment residents would refer to non-residents as "housies" (people with houses). The boundaries of this unhoused "community" included the unhoused living outside the park, suggesting that belonging was defined not by the geographic borders of the park but by their interactions with the broader Eugene community that marked them as "different." Respondents described becoming particularly aware—and ashamed—of their houselessness when they left the encampment. Chris told me that even something as simple as doing his laundry was an emotionally alienating task.

> Even just going in and washing my clothes at a laundromat or something, you know, like, I'll go in and we are two people washing clothes at the same place. Okay, so yeah, they have a home to go back to. But just because the way I look, I have dirty clothes or whatever, right? I can feel it. It's like they don't even acknowledge me. Sometimes they do make rude comments, but what's worse is I can feel the judgement just like coming off of them…It's a horrible, horrible feeling to just know that people don't even take the time to get to know somebody before

> they pass judgement on them. It's just a very degrading feeling. It truly is like we're less than, right?

Every resident I spoke with described similar feelings. For various reasons—their physical appearance, their struggles with personal hygiene, their drug use—they felt ignored and dehumanized by housed citizens.[19] Yet the geographic concentration of unhoused people in the encampment made this exclusion more visible and even transformed it into a productive force. The formation of an unhoused identity, while certainly not cohesive, contributed to residents' sense of safety and solidarity, even amidst the various social and material tensions that constrained political relationships.

While these practices may fall outside generally accepted definitions of "political" behavior, encampments provide space for new forms of political practice. Houseless campers must grapple with their simultaneous exclusion from the general body politic and their forced inclusion within the "public" space of the encampment. I follow Tony Sparks in arguing for a more expansive conception of political agency among the unhoused, rejecting the notion that to be "political," encampment residents must interact with the established state and advocate for the interests of the unhoused. Instead, encampments might foster a "political agency that is both relational and experimental," one where residents invent novel ways to practice community (Sparks 2017, 93). Though various material and policy constraints limited the development of such an agency in Washington Jefferson Park, residents certainly experimented with

[19] Here, I should mention that several residents acknowledged their sincere appreciation for the generosity of the Whiteaker community. The very first thing I heard from the very first participant I interviewed was that "there's a lot of community support here." The outpouring of material assistance helped many residents stay warm or find their next meal.

new forms of political agency by forming exclusive communities, sharing critical supplies, and collectively resisting the authority of city officials.

These findings speak to the wide range of residents' experiences in the Washington Jefferson Park encampment. Many expressed disdain for the encampment and their fellow campers, while some felt a deep gratitude for the community they had found in the park. Unfortunately, many of the stories I heard do little to dispel problematic stereotypes of the unhoused as violent, addicted to drugs, and dependent on the state for assistance. However, my analysis suggests that city policies—not the inherent deviance of unhoused persons—contributed to many of the problems within the encampment. By excluding resident input from the outset and ignoring the diverse backgrounds of the unhoused it forced into the park, the city created a community that was doomed to dysfunction from the beginning. But perhaps its most glaring error was its continued reliance on the encampment—originally meant to be a temporary solution—to alleviate its more permanent housing crisis. City officials and encampment residents alike admitted that the encampment lived long past its intended expiration date. The park remained occupied for more than two years—without the formal legal recognition, material support, resident input, and clear policy goals that have contributed to the success of encampments in other areas of the country. Undoubtedly, its existence signaled a moderately more compassionate approach to managing houselessness in Eugene, but in practice, the city sequestered many residents in a physically and socially unsafe environment. When they are contested, encampments should only ever be temporary. Building more affordable housing—with various housing options—is the only permanent solution to Eugene's housing crisis. To its

credit, the city recognized the encampment's long-term infeasibility and began planning to phase it out in fall of 2021. Unfortunately, the mechanism it employed to achieve this goal—evictions—destabilized already struggling residents and reproduced the very conditions that necessitated the encampment's existence in the first place. By the time I began my research in January of 2022, the city had already begun reducing the park's population in preparation for its closure in the spring. The following chapter will analyze the impact of these evictions on residents and describe the particularities of the eviction process in Washington Jefferson Park that made it a cruel and ineffective mode of houseless management.

Chapter 2: Evictions

While my interviews with encampment residents covered a swath of distressing topics, questions concerning evictions drew the strongest emotional reactions from residents.[20] Approximately a quarter of the residents I spoke to had been evicted from Washington Jefferson Park itself, while more than 75% had been previously displaced from dispersed encampments and relocated to the park by city officials or law enforcement. Residents who had not personally experienced eviction all knew at least one friend or family member who had been evicted or displaced. Many had witnessed several evictions themselves.

Material Impacts of Evictions

Because my research spanned the final three months of the encampment's existence, resident anxiety surrounding removal was particularly heightened. Several residents told me that they had seen more evictions in the early months of 2022 than they had in the Summer and Fall of 2021. This corroborates the decline in tents I observed in my field notes from early January to late February of 2022. 'Michael,' 48, divulged in an early February interview that "someone told me they want everybody out of the park by the end of the month." Various articles from local newspapers confirm that the city was working to reduce the size of the encampment and move residents to

[20] While I employed the term "sweep" in both my Background and Literature Review sections, I will be using the terms "evictions" and "removals" in this chapter. In literature surrounding houselessness—and public discourse more broadly—the term "sweep" implies the far-reaching, simultaneous removal of all or most of an encampment. This certainly describes the City of Eugene's response to houselessness in the early stages of the pandemic, but applies less to the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park, where city officials often removed encampment residents on a case-by-case basis. I feel that "evictions" and "removals" more accurately capture the city's decision to exclude campers from a space it had ostensibly reserved for those with nowhere else to go.

"Safe Sleep" sites as early as Fall of 2021 (Dixson 2021; Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a). While these articles largely describe the transition to Safe Sleep sites as a benign process, residents told a different story. Rick—whom I interviewed merely 30 minutes after police evicted and fined him as part of a multi-campsite eviction—described how police were aggressively issuing citations in an attempt to clear the park. He told me:

> If there's a piece of trash outside your tent, they can throw you out, and they will throw you out. I mean, it's that simple…Yeah, I've seen it more recently. I've been here since June…They just don't want the eyesore at the park anymore.

Rick went on to explain that he was evicted because he "stupidly" told police he was staying with his friends who had been arrested and evicted.[21] During our conversation, he remained angry, but not particularly surprised. Other residents expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that it was only a matter of time before they were evicted themselves. The threat of eviction loomed over almost every resident I interviewed.

For residents like Rick who had been removed from the park, the most immediate impact of their eviction was the uncertainty of not having a stable place to sleep that night. When I asked residents where they were supposed to go following an eviction, many simply shrugged. Some told me that they moved to one of the parks by the Willamette River, some tried to hide in bushes near other bodies of water, and some simply moved across the street from Washington Jefferson Park, setting up their tent on

[21] My interview with Rick was the most gut-wrenching interview I conducted during my time in the park. I arrived as police were arresting his two friends, one of whom had been, according to Rick, "beat up pretty good" just minutes before. The other friend I recognized as one of my earlier research participants. Rick explained that police accused them of stealing bicycles that were stored outside their tent, then searched their tent and found evidence of heroin use. After he admitted to living with them, police fined him $200 and gave him a 30-day ban from the park. When I arrived, he was looking for help to carry as many of his belongings across the street as possible before the Parks and Rec crew cleared the campsite. I helped him carry a few bags, and after we walked a few blocks from the park, he agreed to sit down and talk with me on a bench near the railroad tracks.

the sidewalk. In each of these locations, they risked receiving another citation, and in some cases, felt they had no choice but to return to Washington Jefferson Park—despite often being given a 30-day ban for violating park rules. 'Tim,' a 53-year-old veteran who had been evicted from the park twice, described the eviction process as a "shuffle." He told me that after his first eviction, he felt completely helpless. Having nowhere else to sleep, he attempted to set up in a different area of the park, but police recognized him, fined him, and after a court hearing, a judge banned him from the park for a year. Because he could not sleep in the park without risking jail time, he slept in a tent across the street, which he had to move every few days. Tim is in a wheelchair and needs help getting in and out of bed, so the lack of stable shelter placed great strain on his body. "I'm dying," he told me. "I know I am feeling my body die. We can't get well out here."

Tim's story highlights the ineffectiveness of evictions as a means of addressing houselessness. Clearly, the City of Eugene's temporary urban camping policy is not solely responsible for Tim's struggles. During this "shuffle," several systems failed him—the inadequate social safety net that initially left him houseless, the healthcare system that neglected his ailing health, and the overcrowded shelter system that could not connect him to services. Yet his eviction only exacerbated his physical health struggles and further stymied his search for stable housing. Instead of assisting him with escaping houselessness on his own, it reproduced the very conditions that had led him to the park in the first place. Tim, who relied on some help from others to obtain food, stay warm, and remain mobile, told me that the encampment was the only place he

received such support. Alienated from it, he could barely make it through the day, much less find himself housing.[22]

Every resident who had experienced a sweep also cited the loss of their possessions as a main source of stress and hardship. Property loss is one of the most destructive aspects of evictions; for those living in encampments, the seizure of critical supplies by cities can disrupt a person's progress toward finding stable housing (Junejo et al. 2016; Darrah-Okike et al. 2018). This is especially true in the winter. Several residents I spoke to complained about the loss of critical and expensive supplies like sleeping bags and blankets, which they had acquired for free from services like White Bird. When I asked Rick what residents lost in sweeps, he replied:

> Everything. All your valuables that you have to survive with. I mean, heaters to bedding to food. I mean everything, even clothes. Everything gets taken away.

Other residents described losing important personal possessions, cans they had saved to make money at the bottle drop, their bike or other form of transportation, and most critically, their tent. For many, evictions were a crippling economic setback. As Rick put it, "all of your progress just gets f***ing ruined." With fewer supplies, residents had to spend more time recovering what they had lost, just to ensure their survival. This damaged their prospects for housing, working toward sobriety, or even employment. Eric told me about the eviction of his neighbor and its impact on his search for a job. He described the eviction in a resigned tone, claiming:

[22] Like many of the residents I interviewed, Tim actively sought housing when he wasn't simply trying to survive. Contrary to the neoliberal stereotype of unhoused persons as lazy or dependent, most residents I interviewed repeatedly sought help from the city in finding employment or housing. But with year-long wait times for low-income housing or even Conestoga hut alternatives, many felt like their energy was wasted on the housing search. When I asked him about housing prospects, Tim simply told me, "There ain't none."

> The city is going to take your property, and they're going to take it to their site, and they're going to more than likely get rid of it. And usually, when they do their sweeps—and this is what's so horrible about it is like if it's raining or something like that, and most of the time when they was doing their sweeps it was raining during the winter season—and they say you're not allowed to take anything that's wet. Well, you're seizing these people's property in the rain. So, guess what, it's going to be wet. And so, they take all of their property, and they throw it away. You're taking all of this man's livelihood, this man's clothing, which he uses to get a job, and you're throwing it away. Okay? This is why some of these guys can't get jobs, because of the crew that has come through. I mean, they're screwed.

Several residents echoed Eric's complaint that the city was "more than likely" to get rid of their property. While some said the city would temporarily store their belongings, none could provide me with an instance when they or someone they knew successfully recovered any possessions seized during a sweep. The overwhelming message I heard from residents was clear: if you couldn't carry something with you as you left the park, you'd probably never see it again.

The City of Eugene tells a different story. On paper, it insisted that it provided free 30-day storage of belonging for all residents evicted from the park ("Temporary Urban Camping" 2021). In my interview with the Eugene Parks and Rec crew, they confirmed that they attempted to mitigate property loss by asking evicted residents to sort their belongings into three piles: one for the belongings they would like to take with them, one for the belongings they would like the city to store, and the other to be thrown away. The crew chief said they instructed every resident that their possessions could be claimed at a city facility on Garfield Street in West Eugene, approximately a mile from Washington Jefferson Park.

While this policy appears to be a good-faith effort by the city to protect resident belongings, several aspects of the eviction process that I observed and heard about from

residents significantly constrained residents' ability to recover their possessions. The most prominent was the speed with which residents were evicted from the park. Despite the 10-day notice required by ODOT, many evictions happened in a matter of minutes. Enabled by a provision in ODOT policy that allowed for immediate removal in "severe situations," police appeared to exercise broad discretion in performing such removals ("Temporary Urban Camping" 2021). Even the Parks and Rec crew described how, though ODOT rules stipulate that all evictions must occur with their approval, EPD often conducted removals without consulting them.[23] The Parks and Rec crew leader told me:

> Police can sometimes jump the gun and remove people without much warning. If they see a fire or have reasonable suspicion of drug use, they can remove people from the park.

It became clear after completing my interviews that "without much warning" functionally meant "immediately." Every resident I spoke to confirmed that if police evicted someone from the park, they had fifteen minutes or less to collect their belongings and leave. 'Ben,' 21, had experienced several rapid evictions at the hands of the Eugene Police Department. He described them as follows:

> When they roll around with the cops, they don't have to give you a 24-hour notice. They give you ten minutes to grab the things that you want

[23] The more residents I spoke to, the more it became clear that this dynamic undermined the trust Parks and Recreation employees had spent months building with campers. Most residents I interviewed spoke favorably of the Parks and Rec crew. David told me that he had "nothing but good things to say about the park ambassadors," while Chris admitted "they're helping me get into a Conestoga hut…they're here to do a job, you know, that's all they're here to do." The crew themselves acknowledged their interest in helping residents maintain compliance, with one employee claiming that "we do want to keep these guys here." The crew chief explained to me that he would encourage compliance with park rules by reminding residents that the police would only give them 20 minutes to move their belongings, while his team gave them multiple days to straighten up. This disparity between Parks employees and police shocked me. When I began my research, I entered with the assumption that all city employees represented an equally predatory authority for encampment residents. Yet I witnessed several strong relationships between the Parks and Rec crew and residents, relationships that would ultimately help residents find stable housing.

> to take with you. And they take the rest, throw it away, or they say they can store it. But the conditions as to what can be stored are basically…you can't get anything stored.

Some residents told me they were given five minutes to pack their belongings, while others said ten minutes, and others said fifteen. Regardless of the specific timeframe, rapid evictions made it impossible for residents to follow Parks and Recreation guidelines. When police evicted them, residents could barely collect and transport the belongings they needed, much less organize their possessions into three neat piles for the city. Often, fifteen minutes didn't even provide people enough time to pack up their tent. They would leave the park without shelter, and in many cases, the city would simply throw their tent away.[24] As Bob pointed out:

> When you're homeless, 72 hours to move all that s**t isn't very much, 24 hours ain't much, and when they get you to the 15 minutes, dude, I've watched them haul f***ing dump trucks full of people's s**t and haul it away.

Given the sheer quantity of supplies necessary to survive in the winter outdoors, it is unsurprising that residents could not sort their belongings in fifteen minutes. Between blankets, sleeping bags, bikes, food, cooking supplies, heating equipment, personal belongings, pets, and rain equipment like tarps, residents must move their entire lives when leaving the park. Expecting the unhoused to do so in fifteen minutes—and subsequently expecting that they will be successful members of the community after leaving behind so much—demonstrates the City of Eugene's failure to grasp the

[24] Not only did this process anger those who were evicted, it frustrated campers who saw the belongings left behind and were forbidden to use them. In particular, abandoned tents offered the opportunity for residents to upgrade their living conditions or obtain much-needed supplies. Yet several residents told me that the city instructed them not to move into an evicted camper's tent, citing safety concerns surrounding intravenous drug use. During the sweeps I witnessed, I also observed the city haul away several tarps, chairs, and propane tanks—all of which were needed by other residents. Not once did I observe city officials offer supplies to nearby campers.

realities and complexities of unsheltered houselessness. EPD's practice of conducting rapid evictions effectively nullified the city's promise to store belongings in these "severe cases." It also forced residents to be constantly prepared for eviction, limiting the extent to which they could truly settle down and establish a "home" in the park.

The logistical difficulties many residents faced in trying to access the storage facility further complicated the city's storage policy. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, "while length of storage is important, even more important is ensuring accessibility of storage… Opening times beyond normal business hours, not requiring ID, and accessibility by public transit are all important factors in creating adequate storage options" (2017, 32-33). Some residents cited the distance to the storage facility as an obstacle to reclaiming their belongings, noting that taking public transportation meant leaving their remaining possessions unwatched. If they were camping in the park, these possessions remained vulnerable to theft by other campers; if they were camping in unsanctioned areas, their possessions could be seized by the city. However, many residents never even bothered tracking down their seized possessions. Because they had never heard of anyone who had successfully recovered their belongings, many told me they were resigned to losing what they couldn't take with them. Additionally, after feeling targeted by the city for months or even years, the most residents were hesitant to navigate city bureaucracy and interact further with city officials.

The final obstacle I observed for residents attempting to reclaim their possessions was the noticeable lack of care taken by city workers when handling resident possessions. During the few evictions I observed, city crews gathered the

remaining belongings at a campsite, placed them in unmarked plastic bags, and carelessly tossed them in the back of a large garbage truck. I heard glass shatter and plastic snap on more than one occasion, as chairs, boxes, and bags of personal broke when thrown into the truck. Residents' accounts of evictions confirmed this pattern. George, 54, said that recovering possessions was largely a waste of time because those possessions were likely missing or damaged.

> For the most part, the way I see the park rangers taking everything out, it's busted up and broken. And most of the stuff is not really usable anymore.

Unsurprisingly, residents who observed this carelessness had little confidence they would successfully recover their lost belongings. If city workers failed to respect their belongings in the park, there was little reason to believe they would sort, label, and care for them once they had left the park. From what I could tell, this lack of respect stemmed from a deep misunderstanding of what possessions were important to unhoused persons. In my interview with Parks and Recreation, the crew repeatedly referred to the "garbage" surrounding certain residents' campsites as evidence of their non-compliance with park rules. However, much of this "garbage" included furniture, cans to be deposited at the bottle drop, and other tools that residents would use to protect their belongings from the rain. The crew's dismissal of residents' possessions as "garbage" is yet another example of how the city projected the standards of housed residents onto unhoused persons and punished them when they failed to meet those standards.

Psychological Impacts of Evictions

In addition to the material hardships caused by evictions, most residents expressed some degree of psychological trauma from experiencing or witnessing forced removals. Tim, whose story I share above, told me that the various evictions he's experienced have "f***ed me up pretty bad." He recounted several times he has struggled with depressive episodes, noting that the instability of his situation makes it hard to see his wife, who is wheelchair-bound and lives in a memory care facility outside Eugene. Not seeing her, he said, is "terrible. It f**ks my whole world up." The resulting property loss from evictions was also a considerable source of stress and anxiety for several residents. Having to replace lost supplies, losing items with sentimental or personal value, and struggling to recover lost belongings further dampened residents' already bleak attitudes toward their condition.

In severe cases, evictions triggered major mental health crises. John told me that the dehumanizing process of evictions alienated some residents to the point of suicidal ideation. "A lot of people have suicidal thoughts because of that kind of stuff. I personally dealt with severe depression and suicidal thoughts for the past few years now," he told me. John went on to recount a time when he saw the stress of an eviction overwhelm a neighboring resident. Earlier in the day, police had removed all his belongings and his tent from the park for "violating park rules." He had been gone at the time, but when he returned, the confusion and frustration of losing his belongings triggered a suicidal episode. John remembered:

> That night, he was actually screaming at two o'clock in the morning and threatened to kill himself and stuff like that. Like, he legitimately came over to our tent and asked if we had a cigarette. And he was like, "I need a cigarette, I just want to f***ing kill myself. And all my stuff's been

> stolen." And it's, it's disgusting. It's disgusting to see what they're doing to people. You know because we are all people. They shouldn't feel any greater than us. Just because they have a job and a house and this and that. It's hard.

Similarly, 'Elizabeth,' 29, described "feeling trapped" in the park because she knew the city would evict her anywhere else. When I asked her to expand on that feeling, she told me, "I just feel trapped. Depressed. I constantly try to OD."

Several residents described evictions as fundamentally dehumanizing. Being forced to move violated many respondents' perceptions of their own autonomy, individuality, and privacy. Utterly at the will of the city, and particularly law enforcement, many reported feeling as though they were treated like animals—or even objects. 'Dora,' 52, described the inferiority she felt when city crews removed her and her partner from the encampment at 13th and Chambers. "I mean, how would you feel if someone came into your house or your room and took all your stuff from you?" she asked me. "You have to start over. Out of the blue." She went on to describe how she would observe city crews evict residents without much consideration for their well-being or belongings—even making jokes while doing so.

> I've heard them laugh. I heard them laugh like, right before we were moving out of there. Like, they were saying, "Oh, it's okay because we give them a chance to get a fresh start. So they have to re-get all their stuff, all their belongings, you know, blankets, clothes, all that stuff."

Several other residents reported feeling belittled by city officials during evictions. [25] Tim confirmed the cruelty of the process, claiming: "there's a level of human decency missing." After hearing about so many evictions and observing several others, it is hard to disagree with him. Any system that so flippantly preys on those living at the margins can only justify itself by ignoring the humanity of those it displaces.

Notably, most of my interviews revealed that the psychological harm inflicted by evictions only exacerbated the various emotional stresses that are already intrinsic to coping with unsheltered houselessness. Those experiencing unsheltered houselessness must contend with social isolation, a lack of routine and stability, and internalized feelings of inferiority produced by social narratives of the unhoused as deviants (Herbert and Beckett 2010; Sparks 2017). They must also cope with the various difficulties of encampment life, including harassment by housed residents, drug use, and interpersonal violence. In Washington Jefferson Park, all of these emerged as stressors for residents. Several residents recalled being harassed or threatened by housed community members, with many telling me they had been shot at with paintball guns, hit by glass battles thrown from cars, or yelled at from passing vehicles.[26] As I

[25] This behavior by no means represents all city workers. As I discuss previously, most of the residents I interviewed reported having a positive relationship with the Parks and Rec crew working in the park. Feelings of dehumanization or alienation primarily stemmed from interactions with police. Additionally, I want to be wary of scapegoating individual (and often underpaid) workers who bore the lion's share of responsibility for several systemic policy failures. While some certainly acted cruelly, many worked to stretch the limits of city policy and keep residents in compliance with park rules as long as possible. The Parks and Rec crew I spoke with acknowledged that their work sometimes made them uncomfortable, but ultimately it was "a way to feed their families."

[26] One respondent even described how someone fired a gun into his tent in the middle of the night. When he attempted to call the police and solicit their assistance, they told him there was nothing they could do. This idea—that the police were significantly more willing to protect the housed from members of the encampment than they were to protect members of the encampment from the housed—came up time and time again during my interviews. As George told me, "Hit and runs don't matter around here. Assaults don't matter around here. They don't really care unless somebody's pretty well on their way to dead."

described in the previous chapter, almost every resident told me they felt unsafe in the park, whether it be from the threat of violence by housed persons or by their unhoused neighbors. In the very first interview I conducted at the park, George, who had been housed until the pandemic, me that living in the camp was "incredibly hard." "I break down, man. I break down a lot," he told me, attempting to describe the difficulty of caretaking for his ailing partner while living in the encampment. He choked up during our interview—a common occurrence during my time in the park—particularly when recounting the rash of drug overdoses he had witnessed.

> See that bare spot? Yeah, that guy died. That guy died over there. There was a guy right up on the top of the hill there. He died. One every couple of weeks. I mean, it's not necessarily in this area. But you know, all three of these areas. Somebody's going to the morgue because of the heroin…Nobody gives a shit about these kids. Yeah, you know, and most of these people are between 20 and 40. And it's the ones about 30-35 that are just f***ing dying. Excuse my French. But no, they're dying. People are dying out here. And they don't care. Nobody cares.

Several residents visibly shuddered when discussing drug use in the park. I heard gruesome stories of overdose deaths, failed detoxes, and bodies being carted from tents in the middle of the night.[27] Combined with the material stresses of surviving in the encampment, these tragedies weighed heavily on residents. Factor in the mental health struggles experienced by many people in the encampment, and eviction appears to be a dangerous approach to managing houselessness. In many cases, not only did it contribute to resident's anxieties, it removed them from the community that served as

[27] I could not find data from the City of Eugene tracking these overdose deaths, but both residents and Parks workers noted the pervasiveness of overdoses. Drug use hung heavy over the encampment. One of the participants even paused our interview to shoot up with heroin. It was the first time I had witnessed intravenous drug use in person.

their only form of support. John, who struggled with suicidal thoughts and depression for several years, noted that "I'm getting better…because my friends let me stay with them now. It's helped a lot." Isolated from the encampment and faced with the instability of dispersed, illegal camping, someone like John could easily revert to—and act upon—their suicidal ideation.[28]

Social/Political Impacts of Evictions

As established, several ethnographic studies of unhoused encampments chronicle the social and political dynamics of unhoused encampments, including their potential for cultivating residents' political agency and their reliance on exclusion to define their specific community (Sparks 2017; Wasserman and Clair 2011). Yet literature on houselessness says little about the impact of evictions on these dynamics. My qualitative interview data suggests that evictions may influence resident dynamics in two key ways. First, residents reported that evictions exacerbated existing divisions and tensions between residents. Second, evictions confirmed to many residents their status as "outsiders" living within the broader Eugene community. Both these outcomes further isolated residents from the body politic and weakened their perceptions of their own political agency.

According to several residents, the increased presence of law enforcement in Washington Jefferson Park in the early months of 2022 heightened pre-existing social stresses within the encampment. During the summer of 2021, when over 200 residents lived in the encampment, Rick told me that police acted with considerably less

[28] This is not merely a hypothetical. Suicide rates among the unhoused are estimated to be nine times higher than for the general population.

aggression. As I discuss in the previous chapter, residents exercised power by watching over each other's belongings and assisting during sweeps. However, as the population of the encampment dwindled and citations for illegal camping became more common, residents began to avoid police. Rick described how people would hide in their tents during an eviction rather than observe and assist like they did when the encampment was larger.

> Every time [the police] come by, they check outstanding warrants for everyone, and they run your name…so that's why everybody runs. Usually we'd have everybody out there, helping us get packed up. And we want to do it, right? But because then they got to run their name…it's just a risk.

Rick speculated that this lack of support by other campers subsequently emboldened police to conduct evictions more frequently.[29] Others, like John, noted that the stress of evictions turned residents against each other. Residents who experienced an eviction often expected support from other campers and occasionally blamed their neighbors for resulting property losses.

> It makes the campers get more irritated or agitated towards each other a lot quicker. It's like, "why don't you stick up for me? And why didn't you do this? And there's nothing you can do about it. And you try and defend it, you get in trouble and go to jail or something like that, you know, and so it's hard. It's hard to even try to defend your friend's stuff.

Like Rick, John cited the risk of retaliation by police as a primary deterrent for assisting other campers during an eviction. Yet the fact that evictions further fractured the community—instead of uniting it against police—speaks to the lack of cohesion and

[29] During Rick's own eviction from the park, he lamented the loss of oversight from other encampment residents. He described how police shoved his friend to the ground and repeatedly kicked him while arresting him, leaving him bruised and gasping for air. When I asked him if anyone captured the arrest on video, he told me that normally they would have, but everyone feared being evicted themselves. As a result, the arrest went unrecorded, and police likely evaded accountability for brutalizing a park resident.

organization within the encampment. As I discussed in the previous section, differences in residents' backgrounds contributed to tensions in the park, as did perceived competition over resources or space. Evictions highlighted these differences and exacerbated material inequalities. As Rick said, the process pitted "the haves against the have-nots." With nowhere else to go, many sought shelter with other campers or stole what they needed to survive. This was particularly evident in cases like that of John's friend, where city officials cleared the campsite of an absent resident, leaving them without shelter or supplies upon their return to the park.[30]

Evictions also facilitated the further political exclusion of unhoused people from the broader Eugene community. Zachary noted that, while the urban camping allowance fostered a sense of safety and community within the park, he became particularly aware of his status as unhoused whenever he left the park. During one extended absence of several days, he left the encampment for "personal reasons" and attempted to camp in the West University neighborhood, where police forced him to move four separate times. When I asked him if he felt like he belonged anywhere, he chuckled wryly. The whole situation felt ironic to him. "Some people get kicked out," he observed. "But then it's like, they're not allowed to be out there. So where do they go?" Not having a place to go was not only a question of where to sleep, but where to find community. Emmitt told me that the city had "politely" asked them to move on occasion, but even those transitions were difficult. "When I ask for help…it doesn't happen," they lamented. "I'm completely ignored. Like, made invisible."

[30] Encampment residents would often leave for days at a time for various reasons: replacing lost or stolen ID, visiting family, or investigating prospective housing options. George told me that he witnessed several instances where city officials would clear a camp less than 24 hours after posting a notice of removal, and residents would return to find their tent and all their possessions missing.

Over time, this exclusion from the general body politic left many residents jaded and unwilling to engage with local officials. In some cases, particularly disenfranchised residents felt themselves drawn to the very stereotypes that marginalized them. Rick described how the social alienation caused by evictions tempted him to adopt his assigned status as a social deviant.

> I've lived here my whole life. And up until like, the past few years, I would have said like, this place is like the best place ever, you know, but recently, it just makes me want to say just watch your s**t. Because I'm gonna get treated like a piece of s**t right? Like a thief and like this, and that, then I'm gonna be that, right? Because I've already been labeled as that. So I'm gonna get something out of it.

Other residents described similar temptations. Many felt they could not escape the various social stigmas that accompanied their houselessness. If the city and its housed residents expected them to be criminals, why not meet those expectations for material gains? This attitude reflects the self-fulfilling nature of the city's eviction policies. By "managing" a supposedly deviant population through removals, the city effectively condemned the unhoused to deviancy, denying them the chance to truly be a "community member" as advertised on the city website ("Temporary Urban Camping" 2021). [31]

Other Conclusions

These findings support the conclusions drawn from other studies on sweeps and evictions, namely that evictions exacerbate the material struggles of the unhoused,

[31] Not all residents resigned themselves to criminality. In fact, most—including Rick—expressed a sincere desire to be an engaged and productive member of the Eugene community. I ended all my interviews with the question: what would you most like to say to city officials? Almost every resident gave some version of the same response, the core of which was "give us a chance." They wanted to work, find housing, and escape the public eye, but felt that the city was hindering their progress.

negatively impact evicted persons' mental health, and further alienate unhoused persons from the body politic (Darrah-Okike et al. 2018; Junejo et al. 2016; Sparks 2017). As in other areas of the country, evictions in Washington Jefferson Park failed to address the root causes of houselessness. By attempting to manage its visible symptoms, the City of Eugene only contributed to its own chronic houselessness crisis. Far from being connected with housing and necessary services, the residents I spoke with experienced greater instability and social alienation following removal from the park.

Evictions are not only counterproductive from a policy standpoint, but also inhumane and anti-democratic. They blatantly violate several supposedly core values of American political life—the right to life, liberty, property, and an equal chance to participate politically. However, the resistance to the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park showcases the belief held by the City of Eugene and many of its housed residents that people experiencing houselessness simply do not have these same rights. As argued by Wasserman and Clair, evictions (and NIMBY attitudes toward houseless encampments more broadly) underscore the deep ironies embedded in our perceptions of "public" space by revealing our true beliefs about who is included in the "public" and who is not (2010). In our interview on a public park bench, Bob said it clearly: "This is supposed to be our land, too." Yet his experience living in the park demonstrates that he held no legally or socially defensible claim to that land, despite the City of Eugene's lofty progressive rhetoric.[32]

[32] Like many residents I interviewed, Bob was a former veteran. While that shouldn't impact his ability to access ostensibly "public" space, it does highlight how houselessness can obscure, in the eyes of city governments, even more privileged forms of citizenship. Bob also paid his taxes and had a part-time job. He was, by every standard measure, a "full citizen," except for his inability to afford permanent housing.

The reported behavior of police and city officials in Washington Jefferson Park blatantly contradicts such rhetoric. Particularly, the frequency of evictions stands out in the context of the City of Eugene's temporary urban camping allowance. What made evictions even more difficult for residents was their confusion as to why the park—for many the only place they were legally allowed to camp—would suddenly be off-limits to them. Every time an eviction occurred, it reminded residents of their legally tenuous status. Many did not know whether they were allowed to sleep in the park or not. In almost every interview, I found that a glaring lack of clarity surrounding park rules contributed significantly to resident anxiety about evictions. When asked if they could name all the rules for legally camping in the park, very few residents accurately listed every rule. Some told me they learned of a certain rule only after being evicted for violating it. Jim had lived in the park for over nine months and told me the primary cause of the evictions he observed was the city's failure to clearly communicate rule changes. "There's new rules, but it's not communicated," he told me. Several residents expressed similar frustrations, with John telling me "I've never really been told the full stipulations and regulations on how you keep your spot here," and Tim noting "They haven't set us up with a set of rules, period."

Inequitable access to information regarding rule changes also placed certain residents at a higher risk of being evicted. As Jim noted, the city often updated their camping rules online, even though many residents lacked cell phones and internet access. Some residents told me they couldn't read the sign the city had posted, and if they never communicated with city officials, they remained uninformed of new camp rules. As Chris remarked, residents who struggled to establish relationships with the

Parks and Rec crew (often due to traumatic experiences with removal in the past) faced a significant disadvantage in understanding and subsequently complying with park rules. When I asked him about how the city communicated these rules, he responded:

> Yeah, [it's] basically just the signs. Unless you specifically go up to them and ask them, then that's really it. Or like I said, if you've built that rapport with them, right, then they'll kind of say, "hey, you got to do this, blah, blah, blah." But other than that, there's no set communication for everybody. It's like, it could be fine one day, like I said, and then the next you're waking up to EPD and the city saying, "we're here, you got to get your stuff out now.

Many residents specifically identified the city's ban on fires as a source of confusion. Not only did most describe fires as critical for staying warm in the winter, but many also remained uncertain which types of fuel they were allowed to burn, and which were prohibited.[33] Other confusing rule changes involved spacing requirements between tents, the proper size of a campsite, and which areas of the park were open for camping.

Similar communication issues had marred the city's houselessness response since the beginning of the pandemic. In the summer of 2021, confusion surrounding sanctioned campsites contributed to high levels of eviction near downtown Eugene. At the time, City of Eugene Public Affairs Manager Brian Richardson lamented the city's lack of specificity surrounding where and for how long people could camp, saying "This is hard. It's hard for city staff, it's hard for the unhoused, it's hard for the housed, there's so many different needs" (Catalyst Journalism Project 2021). While it may have been "hard" for the city to communicate its policy changes, it became impossible for

[33] The Parks and Rec crew confirmed to me that no open fires were permitted in the park, but residents could burn propane or briquettes to stay warm. However, several residents reported they had been warned or cited for using a grill to cook food. Tim, whose story I relay above, told me that he was evicted for having an open wood fire when trying to cook dinner and was subsequently banned from the park for 30 days.

many unhoused people to find a stable place to camp. This remained true nearly nine months later in Washington Jefferson Park. For residents already at high risk of being evicted—particularly those who had contentious relationships with city officials—even the slightest rule change could be the difference between temporary stability in the park and dispersed camping around the city, where they risked fines, citations, or jail time.

This perceived lack of communication contributed to residents' belief that police and city workers enforced park rules arbitrarily and inconsistently. Several residents felt unfairly targeted by law enforcement and described being "at the mercy" of police. Michael noted how the police "will arrest you for just stupid things…like speaking your mind." He chronicled his struggles with one officer who "harassed" him for regularly smoking a cigarette near his tent. While park rules technically prohibited it, smoking was a commonplace occurrence in the encampment. It seemed that challenging an officer's authority—more so than committing an offense—would lead to trouble for residents. Several respondents described police as "power hungry" or "egotistical" and attempted to avoid the police at every turn, even when they might need assistance.[34]

The tense relationship between city officials and encampment residents is complex and—as was evident in my interviews—changed significantly from the encampment's inception to its closure. Asked to take on a variety of roles outside the scope of their normal duties, police and city workers often lacked the training or resources to adequately assist encampment residents. This itself is a glaring systemic failure that speaks to the tendency of local governments to address social issues with

[34] Notably, a handful of residents said they had a positive relationship with police and recognized that law enforcement was often asked by the city to make difficult choices. However, these residents were in the minority—and all of them were White. The Black residents I spoke to all complained about being targeted by the police. Eric told me that one policeman even used the n-word to address him.

institutionalized force. City officials also face a variety of public pressures, from homeowners who push for harsher camping restrictions to houseless activist organizations like Stop the Sweeps Eugene. In response to criticisms of evictions at a public panel on unsheltered houselessness, EPD Chief of Police Chris Skinner defended police behavior by claiming that officers had to balance the interests of housed residents with the safety and well-being of those experiencing houselessness (IS Media Services UO 2022). Yet my findings reveal that in practice, this balance tipped heavily toward the interests of housed residents. Amidst the pandemic and against the backdrop of its own temporary urban camping allowance, the city's use of evictions further excluded the unhoused from the body politic and divided campers between those "deserving" of a place to sleep and those with no "proper" place (Sparks 2017). The following chapter will explore how the city appears poised to repeat this same mistake in its next phase of houseless management. There, I will turn to residents' attitudes toward the City of Eugene's most prominent short-term solution for addressing the unsheltered houselessness crisis: "Safe Sleep" sites.

Chapter 3: Looking Ahead to Eugene's "Safe Sleep" Sites

On October 4, 2021, the City of Eugene opened the first of five approved "Safe Sleep" sites at a vacant lot located at 310 Garfield Street in West Eugene. Built on Lane Transportation District land and leased by the city, the lot is managed by the nonprofit organization St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County (Nelson 2021). When it first opened, the site accommodated up to 55 vehicles, a number that the city later increased to 60 ("City to Open First" 2021). City officials prioritized the lot for people sleeping in vehicles on the streets of West Eugene, promising future sites designed for tent campers. One tent site opened on city land at Chase Commons Park soon after, providing 20 Conestoga huts reserved for campers at 13th and Chambers and Washington Jefferson Park. These sites did little to address the growing populations at the city's sanctioned urban camping locations but made explicit the city's intention to use the "Safe Sleep" model as a replacement for urban camping. According to the city website at the time, "the goal of Safe Sleep sites is to provide safe, legal places for people experiencing homelessness to sleep and connect to services as well as reduce the impacts of unsanctioned camping across the city" ("Creating More Safe Places" 2021).

Eugene's First Safe Sleep site at 310 Garfield Street (Nelson 2021)

As the city began planning the closure of the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park, it opened three more Safe Sleep sites in early 2022: an 86-person indoor tent site at 410 Garfield Street (also managed by St. Vincent de Paul), a 30-site location at 2243 Roosevelt Boulevard operated by SquareOne Villages, and a 30-site location on Dani Street in West Eugene operated by the local nonprofit Everyone Village, an affiliate of Everyone Church ("Creating More Safe Places" 2021). Each site employed a different organizational model. Whereas the indoor camping site at 410 Garfield was designed with a top-down management approach reminiscent of temporary shelters, Everyone Village has described itself as a "planned shelter development with a mutual benefit model for the community" ("City set to Open" 2022; Everyone Village 2022). In total, the five approved sites provide legally sanctioned camping to over 200 people experiencing unsheltered houselessness in Lane County ("Creating More Safe Places" 2021).

My initial review of Safe Sleep sites left me hopeful that the city had turned the corner on its mismanagement of unsheltered houselessness during the pandemic. Its approach to the sites appeared compassionate and comprehensive: it partnered with local non-profits, reviewed over 300 different sites, communicated extensively with unhoused residents regarding the process for moving to the park, offered moving assistance to all campers who requested it, and coordinated with leaders at Everyone Village to ensure that campers with pets would have safe places to sleep ("Creating More Safe Places" 2021; "City set to Open" 2022). Almost every camper I spoke to had been in contact with either city staff or staff from St. Vincent de Paul regarding a placement at one of the sites. Unlike its self-contradictory approach in Washington Jefferson Park, where the city both tolerated and contested public camping, the Safe Sleep sites fall squarely within Herring's "accommodation" typology, whereby the city attempts to give unhoused people a "proper place" and partners with a third party to reduce government involvement in the encampment (2014, 299). Accommodation is typically accompanied by clear policy goals: ensuring resident safety, reducing illegal activity, and encouraging resident participation.

Yet the closure of the site at 13th and Chambers dampened my optimism. When the city gated the encampment on January 18, 2022, none of the Safe Sleep sites had opened. The city instead offered residents a choice between tents in a temporary hoop shelter managed by St. Vincent de Paul at Dawn to Dawn (a temporary shelter on Highway 99) or a bed in the Dawn to Dawn shelter.

Temporary “Hoop” Shelter at Dawn to Dawn Shelter (“Transition” 2022)

Of the 56 “recognized” residents of the encampment, 37 accepted beds in the hoop shelter (filling all available beds), 2 accepted beds at Dawn to Dawn, and the other 17 chose other shelter programs or opted for dispersed camping (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a). However, the activist group Stop the Sweeps Eugene estimates that the closure displaced approximately 75 people, many of whom were ineligible for the temporary hoop shelter because they had pets or a previous criminal record (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a). Some of these campers relocated to Washington Jefferson Park—I interviewed a handful of them—while others turned to unsanctioned dispersed camping.

The closure at 13th and Chambers highlights several of the shortcomings with Safe Sleep sites. First, the city’s inability to provide every displaced resident with stable shelter speaks to the insufficient capacity of these sites. While the city boasts that sites

give over 200 unhoused persons safe places to sleep, 1,610 people experienced chronic houselessness in Lane County as of March 2022 (Lane County Human Services 2022). If the city wants to truly "reduce the impacts of unsanctioned camping across the city," it must construct more sites. Second, only 2 of 56 campers from the 13th and Chambers site accepted a bed at Dawn to Dawn, underscoring the hesitance of many houseless persons to re-engage with the shelter system. For Safe Sleep sites that more closely resemble shelters, like the site at 410 Garfield, this should be a warning sign. Strict rules, curfews, and overtly sterile living conditions will inevitably alienate residents who valued the community and relative autonomy of outdoor camping. As one houseless advocate said, sites should be safe and legal but also *dignified* (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a). Finally, the geographic location of the sites mimics harmful planning strategies that isolate the unhoused from the urban core and subsequently critical forms of community support (Mitchell 1997; Herring 2014) Like many of its shelters, the Safe Sleep sites in Eugene were constructed on the city's periphery, away from its visible downtown and business districts—but also far from social services like ShelterCare and the White Bird Clinic. For people whose mental health makes it challenging or impossible to live with others, distance from these services only exacerbated the psychological stresses of displacement. Daniel Felts, a CAHOOTS crisis responder, worried that the location and structure of the sites made them "totally inaccessible" to some of the community's most vulnerable residents (Parafiniuk-Talesnick 2022a).

When the city announced the impending closure of Washington Jefferson Park in late February of 2022, it stated its plans to move most residents to the indoor tent site at 410 Garfield Street. Some of the beds were reserved for former 13th and Chambers

residents leaving the temporary hoop shelter, but the majority remained available to the campers I interviewed and their neighbors.

Indoor Safe Sleep site at 410 Garfield St. in West Eugene (Lindkvist 2022)

Worried that the closure of Washington Jefferson Park might similarly displace and distress its residents, I asked each of my respondents how they felt about Safe Sleep sites. Their responses reflect the mixed policy outcomes that had become evident during the sites' brief history.

Perceived Benefits of Safe Sleep Sites

Approximately one-third of the residents I spoke with enthusiastically endorsed Safe Sleep sites. To many, they promised more stability than the legally tenuous practice of camping in the park. 'Susan,' 43, who felt particularly unsafe as a woman in the encampment, said, "I think that's a great idea…it has just a sense of slightly more security and stability." Those in support of the sites consistently referenced the appeal of "having a place to stay." The concept of an explicitly sanctioned place to camp

promised to provide respite from the stresses of evictions and the confusion surrounding park rules. For his part, Chris acknowledged some of the drawbacks of the Safe Sleep sites, but still felt they represented a preferable alternative to camping in the park.

> The way that the rules are set up right now, I would much rather have that s**t than what's going on here. I mean, it does suck that you have to be back by 12 and you can't really have any visitors over and all that type of s**t, you know, but at least you got somewhere to stay, somewhere that you don't worry about your stuff getting stolen all the time.[35]

He went on to explain that the Safe Sleep sites would also alleviate the material stresses of living in the encampment and potentially help lift people out of houselessness. With access to more "livable conditions" with heated shelters and showers, Chris felt more confident that he could "change my life around."

Others found the Safe Sleep sites appealing because they promised a more cohesive sense of belonging and community. Elizabeth felt that the sites would be more dignified than her current living situation in the park. She told me, "I feel like it's a good idea. At least it gives us options on where to go, instead of just being thrown out on the sidewalk like we're nothing."[36] Of course, this sense of belonging would look different from site to site; a collaborative model like Everyone village might be more successful in fostering resident agency than a top-down approach like the one at 410 Garfield. But as several residents noted, the mere formation of protected spaces specifically designed for the unhoused marked a step in the right direction.

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[35] I could not discern where Chris had learned that sites required residents to return to their shelters by midnight. However, many of the Safe Sleep sites enforce a curfew or some version of "quiet hours."

[36] As this and the previous quotation suggests, the female-identifying residents I interviewed were generally more supportive of the Safe Sleep Sites. While several male-identifying participants lamented the inevitable loss of autonomy within the sites, female-identifying respondents expressed excitement at the prospect of a safer, more controlled living environment.

Perceived Drawbacks of Safe Sleep Sites

However, another one-third of the encampment remained skeptical—or even outrightly dismissive—of the Safe Sleep sites.[37] Residents primarily worried that the sites would restrict their privacy and autonomy. 'Kyle', 55, who had been in and out of prisons and shelters for nearly thirty years, was tired of being monitored by the state. When I asked him about the sites, he quickly responded "Oh, I wouldn't do that." After urging him to explain why, he said, "Well, for one thing, they're government owned, and there are police everywhere. So, you wanna keep an eye on me? You have no right to." While most of the Safe Sleep sites are patrolled by non-profit employees, not city police, many respondents explained that they would feel "observed" or "watched" at the sites. Like Kyle, their interactions with city officials in the park had left them jaded, and they were understandably skeptical of once again living in a in a city-controlled space. With similarly restrictive requirements and constant surveillance, they saw little difference between the Safe Sleep Sites and the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park.[38] "You're always constantly being scrutinized, I'm sure," Bob asserted. "Just as you are here."

Some respondents even questioned the humanity of the Safe Sleep Sites. When I him if he wanted to live at one of the sites, Bob visibly bristled at the notion.

> You know what they did with the people from 13th and Chambers and took them into that warehouse and put them in tents? Come on man,

[38] Some also expressed concern with the size of the Safe Sleep sites. Jackson, who had travelled across the country and lived in various encampments, worried that larger encampments would simply reproduce the same problems and tensions that existed in Washington Jefferson Park. "I don't think that'd be a bad idea if there were small, okay… If there's like a small group of friends, like five or six people, and they keep a keep a clean camp, I don't see any problems."

> that's Gestapo s***. They kick us out of our land…it's supposed to be our land, too.

Invoking his right to ostensibly "public" space, Bob questioned why he should have to surrender some of his freedoms to belong to the larger community. He felt less that the city was trying to establish an inclusive space for campers, and more that it was using the sites to exclude them from the public. 'Sarah,' 43, said plainly, "They're trying to box us in somewhere." The chain-link fence surrounding the vehicle site at 310 Garfield does little to dissuade this notion.[39] While ensuring the safety of the unhoused remained the city's primary motivation for building the sites, they simultaneously accomplish its goal of relocating unsheltered houselessness—the "eyesore," as Rick would call it—away from the public view. Several cities employ the same tactic. Even when they "accommodate" encampments with formal legal recognition and material support, this accommodation still represents "an official state strategy of poverty management" intended to contain the unhoused within a certain space (Herring 2014, 299).

As was the case with urban camping rules in the park, Safe Sleep site regulations also threaten to stratify and divide an already marginalized unhoused community. Regardless of intent, strict rules implicitly label some unhoused persons as "deserving" of housing and others as "undeserving." Sites such as Everyone Village and Chase Commons Park-–coincidentally the sites about which residents expressed the most excitement—have several rules that would exclude many of the residents I interviewed. Applicants to Everyone Village, for example, must clear an extensive background check, agree to refrain from drug use, and "maintain community

[39] I had a similar thought as Bob when I first saw the site in person. It was unclear to me if the fence was intended to keep me out or residents in.

cleanliness" (Everyone Village 2021). Some houseless activists and policymakers refer to such sites as "high-barrier" housing, as they usually remain unavailable to those struggling with drug addiction, mental health crises, or a lengthy criminal record (IS Media Services UO 2022).

Even for those who *can* access the sites, the abundance of rules can discourage them from applying. As they did with other state-managed solutions, such as shelters, some residents seemed to resent the various restrictions that might accompany life in the Safe Sleep sites. Dora, who had been evicted from the camp at 13th and Chambers and was given a tour of the site at 410 Garfield St., said that the promise of stable shelter came with too many regulations. She and her partner chose to live in the encampment at Washington Jefferson Park instead.

> It's good what they have to offer at the site, especially for some people, you know, whatever. But being that close to everybody, you know, like, bunched up. You know, not any freedom, can't have visitors. You know? And besides that, we have a dog, okay. And they don't allow pets. So that was a big reason why.

Fortunately, the Parks and Rec crew placed her in contact with the staff at Everyone Village, where she excitedly applied for a shelter that would accommodate both her partner and their dog. I asked her to describe what else about Everyone Village appealed to her, but before I could finish, she interjected to tell me more about her distaste for the indoor site at 410 Garfield St. She felt that the environment was uninviting and that the site staff refused to let her personalize the space.

> The rooms were really little. They were gonna put two together for us, you know. But when they walked us into the room and we took a look at the little box, they said, "You see the way it looks right now? Maybe you'll have a mat and a bed, or you know, a blanket. Other than that, that's exactly what we want to look like every day." So that means no

> stuff out. No homey environment, no paintings, nothing on the wall. Keep it bare like it is.

While she acknowledged that some of these restrictions were necessary to ensure resident safety, she still felt controlled by the site's regulations. In the encampment, though they struggled with theft and hygiene constraints, she and her partner had autonomy over their space. They could make their tent a "home," a place where they belonged and could welcome those close to them—including her partner's children, whose regular visits she described as a critical means of social and material support.

The final third of residents I interviewed held mixed attitudes toward the Safe Sleep sites. Many people in this group felt that the sites were promising in theory, but inaccessible in practice. Zachary, for example, described how he and his friends had largely given up on trying to secure a spot at one of the Conestoga huts in Chase Commons Park.

> It would help get a lot of us get out off the streets…we don't want to be here. It sounds great, but the wait is six months to a year. So it's like, to some of us, why bother signing up?

They, too, had been worn down by the longevity of their stay in the encampment and their repeated failures to secure permanent housing. While they possessed the desire to leave the park and escape the public eye, they remained skeptical that the city would follow through on its promises.

Summary

These inconclusive results suggest that Safe Sleep sites represent a polarizing and only mildly successful policy solution to unsheltered houselessness in Eugene. If the city's only aim was to achieve its stated goal of "provid[ing] safe, legal places for people experiencing homelessness to sleep and connect to services as well as reduc[ing]

the impacts of unsanctioned camping across the city," then the sites seem to have met these criteria. Resident responses describe how Safe Sleep sites promise to provide a newfound sense of safety and stability for many experiencing unsheltered houselessness. They also appear effective in attracting unhoused persons with promises of community and belonging, thus alleviating the "impacts of unsanctioned camping across the city." Some of these impacts were those felt most acutely by housed residents—such as perceived devaluation of real estate—but others affected unhoused community members as well. Most residents I spoke with acknowledged that the encampment in Washington Jefferson Park no longer constituted a healthy or safe community for many of its residents, citing frequent theft, drug use, and various social stresses. Despite the role that city policies may have played in exacerbating these pressures, many residents still expressed excitement at the prospect of a new, more controlled environment in which to camp.

However, analyses that look beyond the city's own policy goals reveal some important limitations of Safe Sleep sites. Their potential as a transformative force in the struggle against houselessness remains limited by significant barriers to access, resident concerns with privacy and agency, and most importantly, an overwhelming lack of capacity. Respondents' skepticism of continued "surveillance" and "containment" within the sites suggests that city's approach to designing sanctioned spaces preserved many of the same paternalistic tendencies that politically alienated residents of the Washington Jefferson Park encampment. A top-down, state-managed governance model threatens to further isolate residents who have previously tense relationships with the state. The city has even acknowledged that the sites are "reserved for those who lived in

the park in compliance with the city's rules," underscoring how the "new" approach continues to distinguish between "deserving" and "undeserving" residents (Parafiniuk-Talesnick, 2022a).

Though sites like Everyone Village offer a mildly more inclusive approach, these remain inaccessible to the most vulnerable community members experiencing unsheltered houselessness. On the other hand, lower-barrier sites like the indoor camp at 410 Garfield St. reproduce similar social tensions and material limitations to those that frustrated residents in Washington Jefferson Park. It seems the city has yet to find a solution that effectively balances resident autonomy with safety, security, and access to services.

Unsurprisingly, other research on unhoused communities has found similar struggles to strike this balance in both formal and informal settings. Robert Molinar's study of self-governance in Opportunity Village Eugene found that many OVE villagers likened political tensions in their community to those that define broader American democracy—including the tension between autonomy and belonging (2010, 60). In many ways, this tension is inescapable. Democracies are inherently paradoxical because they rely on a logic of inclusion yet must define the "demos" through exclusion. This paradox "can never be overcome but only negotiated in different ways" (Mouffe 2005, 5). In the following section, I will suggest some ways the City of Eugene might differently navigate the tension between autonomy and belonging in the unhoused community, subsequently empowering residents to develop a stronger sense of political agency while navigating ever-changing community boundaries.

Chapter 5: Policy Recommendations

I struggled for quite some time with the question of whether to include a set of policy recommendations in this thesis. As I read various tent city ethnographies in preparation for writing my own, I was struck by how many papers obsessed over specific policy proposals at the expense of richly recounting the stories of their research participants. The desire to remain neutral—to avoid "getting too close to the data"—steered many authors away from narrative-style ethnographies and toward ostensibly objective, outcome-based recommendations (Molinar 2010, 96). To me, these policy proposals seemed to cheapen the experiences of both the ethnographer and the research subjects they encountered. I wanted to avoid this same mistake. In an attempt to emphasize that residents' stories have cultural and social value on their own, separate from their "utility" in informing policy outcomes, I initially decided to omit any specific policy proposals.

Yet, as they did at seemingly every other stage of the research process, my research participants convinced me to change my mind. Several specifically requested that I share their story with city officials and said they "wanted to see" what recommendations I came up with.[40] To honor these requests, I have included two brief policy recommendations to the City of Eugene concerning the future management of unsheltered houselessness within the city. It is my hope and intent that these

[40] One of my biggest regrets in conducting this research is not taking more steps to ensure that I could reliably disseminate the final product to my original research participants. They deserve to see this work and give feedback on how I portrayed them, yet re-locating many of them will very well prove impossible.

recommendations accurately reflect the lived experiences and input of my research participants.

I limit my policy recommendations to the "management" of unsheltered houselessness because potential solutions to unsheltered houselessness are outside the scope of this paper. As I mentioned at the end of Chapter 1, the only long-term solution to Eugene's houselessness crisis is for the city to build more affordable housing. Reaching this goal will require the overhaul of Oregon's restrictive zoning laws, a massive investment in public housing, and assistance from the federal government (Eggiman 2020; IS Media Services UO 2022). A comprehensive long-term approach would also require significant investment in complementary public health and social safety net programs. Oregon is second worst in the nation when it comes to drug addiction rates and ranks dead last in access to addiction treatment, both factors that contribute to the state's high levels of houselessness (Aldous 2022).

However, before the city, state, and federal governments make these necessary investments, Eugene will still grapple with an epidemic of unsheltered houselessness in the short term. Some estimates predict that the spike in houselessness caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will peak in 2023, leaving an additional 100,000 people without stable housing across the country (Flaming et al. 2021, 29). In its current state, the city's shelter system—even with the added capacity of its new Safe Sleep Sites—cannot support this surge. As the city drags its feet on the construction of housing and temporary shelters, unsheltered houselessness in Eugene will persist in its most visible forms, including dispersed camping, people who live in vehicles, and potentially newer (albeit smaller) informal encampments. My research indicates that, if left unchanged,

the city's current approach to managing unsheltered houselessness will only exacerbate this crisis and further destabilize those who experience it day-to-day. Drawing on the findings of my interviews, I propose two specific policy changes that would better protect the civil and human rights of the unhoused and modify the city's exclusionary, top-down approach to temporary solutions such as Safe Sleep Sites.

1. **Adopt Indianapolis Removal Ordinance**

In 2016, the city council of Indianapolis, Indiana, voted 23-2 to alter its approach to clearing unsanctioned houseless encampments (Pyke 2016). Its new ordinance made three critical changes to city policy, all of which the City of Eugene should immediately adopt in its approach to clearing encampments.

First, the ordinance mandates that city officials give a minimum 15-days' notice before dismantling a camp. In Eugene, this change would provide residents with considerably more time to sort and move their belongings than the current 72-hour notice period. The 10-day timeframe mandated by ODOT policy in Washington Jefferson Park gives a glimpse of the benefits of longer notice periods: the Eugene Parks and Rec crew I interviewed cited the ten-day requirement as one of the keys to ensuring resident compliance with urban camping rules. It gave them more time to communicate to residents specifically what changes they needed to make. Conversely, the immediacy of police-conducted evictions only served to destabilize residents and contribute to their loss of possessions. A longer notice period might also mitigate the psychological cruelties of eviction. Several residents who had previously lived in dispersed camping sites emphasized the stress and anxiety that accompanied having to move every few days.

Second, the ordinance prohibits the seizure and destruction of any residents' personal property. Not only are such seizures likely unconstitutional under the Fourth Amendment, but they also complicate and delay residents' struggle to end their houselessness (Junejo et al. 2016, 23). My interviews overwhelmingly found that property loss re-entrenched campers in the material struggles of outdoor living, keeping them from critical activities such as jobs or the search for affordable housing. While the City's current "storage" policy attempts to mitigate these impacts, the realities of eviction and storage that I observed in the park permanently separated campers from their possessions. To truly protect resident's rights—and those supplies critical to helping them out of houselessness—the city must cease all property seizures.

Finally, Indianapolis outlawed encampment removals in all cases where the city could not immediately provide residents with a viable shelter bed or other housing alternative.[41] This approach appears common-sense, but unfortunately, remains an anomaly across the country. Cities continue to clear encampments without providing realistic alternatives, leading to the eventual reformation of those encampments. In Eugene, where shelter capacity remains woefully below the number of people experiencing houselessness, this provision would eliminate the "shuffle" of unhoused persons from one illegal camping spot to another, a cycle that frustrated and confused many of the residents I interviewed. It would also comply with the Ninth Circuit's holding in *Jones v. the City of Los Angeles* that ordinances banning involuntary activities, such as sleeping or camping in public, violate the Eighth Amendment's

[41] The Indianapolis ordinance carves out an exception to this rule: the city may suspend this decision if it declares an emergency regarding the state of houselessness. Given the leeway exercised by police in Washington Jefferson Park under the ODOT exception allowing eviction in "severe cases," I urge the City of Eugene to exclude any such provision if it were to adopt a similar ordinance.

protections against cruel and unusual punishment, especially when no shelter alternatives are available (Junejo et al. 2016, 20).

2. Increasing Self-Governance at Safe Sleep Sites

While the City of Eugene's investment in Safe Sleep sites marks an honest attempt to protect unhoused residents and eliminate the risks of unsheltered camping, my findings reveal that their structure continues to alienate many residents from the public. The top-down management approach in low-barrier, low-autonomy sites, such as the indoor site at 410 Garfield, constrains resident agency by excluding them from the community-forming process. Just as they did in Washington Jefferson Park, residents enter these spaces already marked as someone to be "managed," rather than someone with the capacity to shape their political environment.

Where possible, the City of Eugene should mitigate this form of exclusion by designing temporary sanctioned sites that facilitate and encourage self-governance. More sites like those managed by Everyone Village would help promote emotional well-being and a sense of shared identity among residents. Dignity village in Portland, for example, employs a horizontal organization model where residents have input over collective decisions and the rules for living in the village, a process that develops a "greater sense of dignity and autonomy" in the absence of coercive city authorities (Molinar 2010, 9). Several of the residents I spoke with lamented that their voice had been excluded from the policymaking process. Elizabeth, who advocated for resident inclusion in policymaking, wished the city would simply listen to her and her fellow campers.

> Life's already hard. You don't have to make it even harder. All they have to do is ask us, you know, some ideas, proposals. Get the ideas from the community members themselves. But mostly it's just that they don't want to look at us. Which I get it you know, out of sight out of mind.

While these more formal models often take years to stabilize, they typically begin with collaboration between local governments and organizations that support the unhoused (Heben 2014). This mirrors Chris Herring's model of "accommodation," which shifts responsibility for the site away from the city and onto local non-profits (2014, 298). In successful villages, non-profits then collaborate with unhoused residents to establish community rules and modes of governance (Molinar 2010, 14). In Eugene, this approach might help attract residents whose traumatic experiences with law enforcement have left them wary of further interaction with government authority. The physical structure of high-autonomy villages would also better serve Eugene's unhoused population. Several residents expressed excitement about the prospect of having their own shelter. Rather than the "warehouse" at 410 Garfield St., which crowds residents together in a manner similar to outdoor encampments, models like Everyone Village offer physical separation between villagers and a greater sense of autonomy over one's own space.

Unfortunately, there are several practical constraints to this recommendation. The city must first find non-profit partners willing to invest in self-governance and work extensively with unhoused community members. It must also fund more, smaller sites, as formally sanctioned villages come with inherent size constraints. Additionally, high-autonomy village models tend to also be high-barrier, excluding those who struggle with mental health or addiction crises. Some villages have experimented with workarounds, like permitting drug use in sanctioned spaces outside village property, but

largely, serious drug use and mental health struggles result in exclusion from formal villages (Molinar 2010, 10). As I explored in the previous chapter, the tension between autonomy and belonging in sites for the houseless can never be completely ameliorated. In cases where mental health and addiction entirely preclude someone from participating in self-governance, the city must adopt a "housing-first" approach, which aims to place vulnerable residents in stable housing as a prerequisite for treating mental health or addiction crises. The construction of more low-barrier sites must accompany any investment in formal, self-governed villages.

3. Resident Recommendations

Though it does not specifically concern city policy, my final recommendation comes from Chris, one of my participants. Chris spoke at length about his experiences feeling excluded from the community he used to love, claiming that the main thing missing from the city's response to houselessness was compassion. When I asked him what his one recommendation to city officials would be, he replied:

> If they could treat who they're talking to here as a member of their own family. You know, look at the person that they're talking to and ask themselves…if they would like to do that to somebody of their family…Because a member of their family could easily be in the same position. Not everybody chooses to be out here.

Chris knew this last point better than anyone I interviewed. Six months prior to our interview, he had been living in a large house in Springfield when his partner and daughter were tragically killed by a drunk driver. He fell into a deep depression, lost his job, his car, and his home, and after a stint of dispersed camping, found himself in the park. He admitted that, when he was housed, he would drive past the encampment and

pass judgement on its residents. “Not gonna lie, it was a little bit of judgement,” he told me. “And I mean, I didn’t realize. But look, now I know.”

Chris’ plea for compassion reaches beyond the police and city crews who worked in the park. It extends to city policymakers, city councilors, the mayor’s office—all those who make decisions that impact the houseless community, often without substantively getting to know them. It even extends to the city’s housed residents, whose NIMBY attitudes often pressure these officials to clear unhoused encampments. Yet, as Chris’ story demonstrates, many of us are merely one tragedy away from living in an encampment ourselves. This reality—and the compassion it hopefully engenders—should guide our policies surrounding houselessness. As Chris said, “we're all still humans. You know what I'm saying? Like, it doesn't matter where you’re living. We're humans and shouldn't be treated any different.” It is a simple but powerful message. Yet the week after our interview, I returned to the park to find Chris’ campsite cleared and his possessions gone. I can only hope that, wherever he ended up, he found the compassion he so desperately sought, and so joyfully extended to me during our interview.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

My findings suggest that these City of Eugene's policies surrounding houselessness management during the COVID-19 pandemic did not match its progressive rhetoric. On the "Temporary Urban Camping" page of its website, the city refers to unhoused persons as "its unhoused community members." In practice, however, its use of the temporary urban camping ordinance as a mode of "containment" and the frequency of evictions in the encampment further excluded unhoused people from the community. Rick's claim that "they just want the eyesore gone" speaks to how city policies eroded both the physical space that unhoused people could occupy and their perceptions of their own self-worth. A disheartening number of residents told me that they "understood" why the city wanted to clear the camp or even felt "disgusted" when they remembered where they were living. These are not the words of fulfilled "community members." They are the words of people who have been systematically excluded from public life at every turn, and who—in the middle of a pandemic and recession—could not even find stability in the one place they had been promised it.

However, there is cause for optimism. The brief cessation of sweeps that followed the CDC's pandemic guidelines forced many people to acknowledge the cruelty and inefficacy of "standard" practices of houseless management in Eugene. Advocacy groups like Stop the Sweeps Eugene gained political traction during the pandemic, while public opinion and press coverage appeared more sympathetic toward

the unhoused and critical of the city as the houselessness crisis developed.[42] These gains are certainly modest, but the increased visibility of houselessness as an issue has revived public conversations regarding affordable housing. Additionally, while problematic in some respects, the city's investment in different Safe Sleep site models represents an attempt to meet the varying needs of unhoused people. At the very least, providing spaces for those with pets, those struggling with mental illness, and those with a modest criminal record demonstrates the city's willingness to listen to unhoused activists and form partnerships with supportive community members. Hopefully, future investments will build on these relationships even as the economic fallout from the pandemic subsides.

The city officially closed Washington Jefferson Park on March 16, 2022. At the time of writing—nearly two months later—it remains closed. Barren and fenced off to the public, the space is a far cry from the bustling community I encountered on my first day of research. Now, nobody can enjoy it. The city cites "ecological concerns" as the reason the park remains closed, assuring that it will soon be open again "to the public" (IS Media Services UO). This language reveals the city's fundamental belief that the unhoused do not belong to "the public." As Wasserman and Clair argue, "taken literally, if the park "belongs to us all," this would include those who are homeless…But in the discursive frame of urban redevelopment, the line between legitimate and illegitimate citizens is markedly clear; "everyone" is not an inclusive category" (2011, 86). Certainly, my interview results suggest that many residents felt ready to leave the park.

[42]This is based purely on my own observations—no comprehensive study exists to confirm this trend. However, coverage of houseless encampments in the *Register Guard* became increasingly critical of the city's response as evictions continued to occur. One fascinating avenue for potential future research would be to investigate the differences in local news coverage of houselessness pre- and post-pandemic.

But for those who wanted to stay or were ineligible for placement at one of the Safe Sleep sites, remaining in the "public space" was not an option. Indeed, staying there in the first place only became possible when the city granted an exception to its "normal" policies that prevented the unhoused from using the park. My time in the park forced me to question my conception of the "normal" use of public space. I now firmly believe that, from December of 2020 to March of 2022, Washington Jefferson became a more "public" park than it had ever been. Despite being a product of the city's own design, the encampment's very existence challenged its prevailing logics of who belongs in what space. Jim, one of my final participants, said it best: "they have us in a cage…but sometimes, they have to listen when we rattle it."

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