

Los Angeles Times

L.A. to give people living in cars on Venice-area streets 'safe overnight parking'

By Martha Groves
July 26, 2010

In an effort to deal with the rising tide of people living in cars and campers on the streets of Venice and environs, the city of Los Angeles will soon begin seeking an agency to operate a



"safe overnight parking" program aimed at linking the occupants to social services and, eventually, permanent housing.

The program would be similar to efforts in Santa Barbara and Eugene, Ore., where participants sleep in their vehicles in designated parking areas and gain access to counseling and other services, including help finding subsidized apartments.

In Los Angeles, bathrooms, showers and trash facilities would be made available for participants, who would sign a contract and agree to a strict code of conduct.

Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, the city-county agency that would administer the program, has drafted a document that it plans to release formally in August to solicit bids from social service providers.

Councilman Bill Rosendahl, who represents Venice, secured \$750,000 in city funding for the program.

Venice residents have for years complained to Rosendahl about unpleasant and unsanitary conditions caused by some of the people living in recreational vehicles and autos. Many have clamored for overnight parking restrictions, but the California Coastal Commission has thwarted those requests, saying the city needed to deal with the larger social issue of homelessness in areas near the beach.

The Venice Neighborhood Council and others have called for creation of a safe parking program.

"This is a smart and cutting-edge program that builds on the successes of similar programs in other cities and improves and tailors them for our community," Rosendahl said in a statement about the proposed program.

LAHSA Executive Director Michael Arnold said his agency expected to select a provider by late September. The provider would then work with the community to identify several locations that could each accommodate three to five vehicles. A survey earlier this month identified more than 250 RVs and other vehicles that appeared to be occupied, Arnold said.

"It's going to focus on people living in their vehicles who have no other option available to them," Arnold said. "It's going to focus on those most at need and provide them a pathway from their vehicle back to stable housing."

Rosendahl said he hoped to launch the program by the end of the year, to coincide with implementation of a new oversize-vehicle ordinance. Last month, the Los Angeles City Council approved amendments to an ordinance to make it easier to restrict big RVs from parking at street curbs overnight.