

## **Official wants to delay RV law**

Matt Batcheldor

Though the City Council could pass a law tonight barring overnight parking of recreational vehicles on city streets, one council member said she'll ask her colleagues to delay implementing it so an interjurisdictional group can find places for otherwise homeless RV owners to park.

Phil Owen, outreach coordinator for the Family Support Center, said he's counted nine RVs with homeless people in Thurston County, and has found places for three of them.

"I'm asking that the ordinance not become effective for a couple more months just to give us some time," Councilwoman Rhenda Strub said.

Strub convened a group of leaders from the county, Tumwater and some social service agencies to find homes for the RVs.

"We're looking at partnering with churches and social service agencies to take one or two of these RVs," she said.

Owen would be the coordinator.

The council moved last month to ban RV parking on city streets after getting complaints about seven RVs that have been parked for months near the Olympia Transit Center on State Avenue — taking up parking spaces, dumping sewage and running generators.

The law would ban RV parking between 3 and 6 a.m., or for any 24-hour period, including weekends and holidays. People could obtain a permit for parking for up to seven days within a quarter of each year.

Violators would be charged \$75 for each offense, and after the third offense the vehicle could be impounded.

Assistant City Manager Subir Mukerjee said parking staff members and police would enforce the law. If passed tonight, the law could go into effect in 30 days.

Homeless RV residents said they have nowhere else to go. Other jurisdictions ban RV parking. In interviews earlier, some RV residents said they would move to another space if provided.

"The sense I get from most of them ... they'll actually be probably happier than where they are," Owen said.

Formerly a part-time worker for the Family Support Center, Owen last week began receiving \$5,000 emergency funding from United Way to work full time on finding homes for the RV campers. That funding will last for up to two months.

## **Funding sought**

The group Strub convened is asking the Thurston County Home Consortium, a social service group made up of local governments, to continue funding Owen's job for a year.

Owen said the Out of the Woods Shelter has offered space for two of the RVs that have families. The Olympia Union Gospel Mission has offered to take another.

Strub said city law might need to be changed to allow nonprofit groups to play host to RVs. Religious organizations could take them in now because of First Amendment protections for freedom of religion.

The goal is to disperse the RVs around the area, not concentrate them in one place, Strub said. That's similar to a solution in Eugene, Ore., for example, where campers were relocated to lots a few at a time, and managed by a social service provider.

Owen said finding places for the campers is the first of a three-stage process. Next he hopes to set up a tent and RV camp for families with children to cover the six months out of the year that an overflow shelter isn't open locally. An established tent city in Olympia, Camp Quixote, does not allow children.

Last, Owen wants to establish a block rental program, in which a nonprofit groups subleases apartment units to homeless tenants. Such a system can house people with credit problems or evictions, who have trouble finding someone to rent to them.

And the solution might not lie just in Olympia.

"I would love to see involvement from Tumwater and folks from the county," he said.