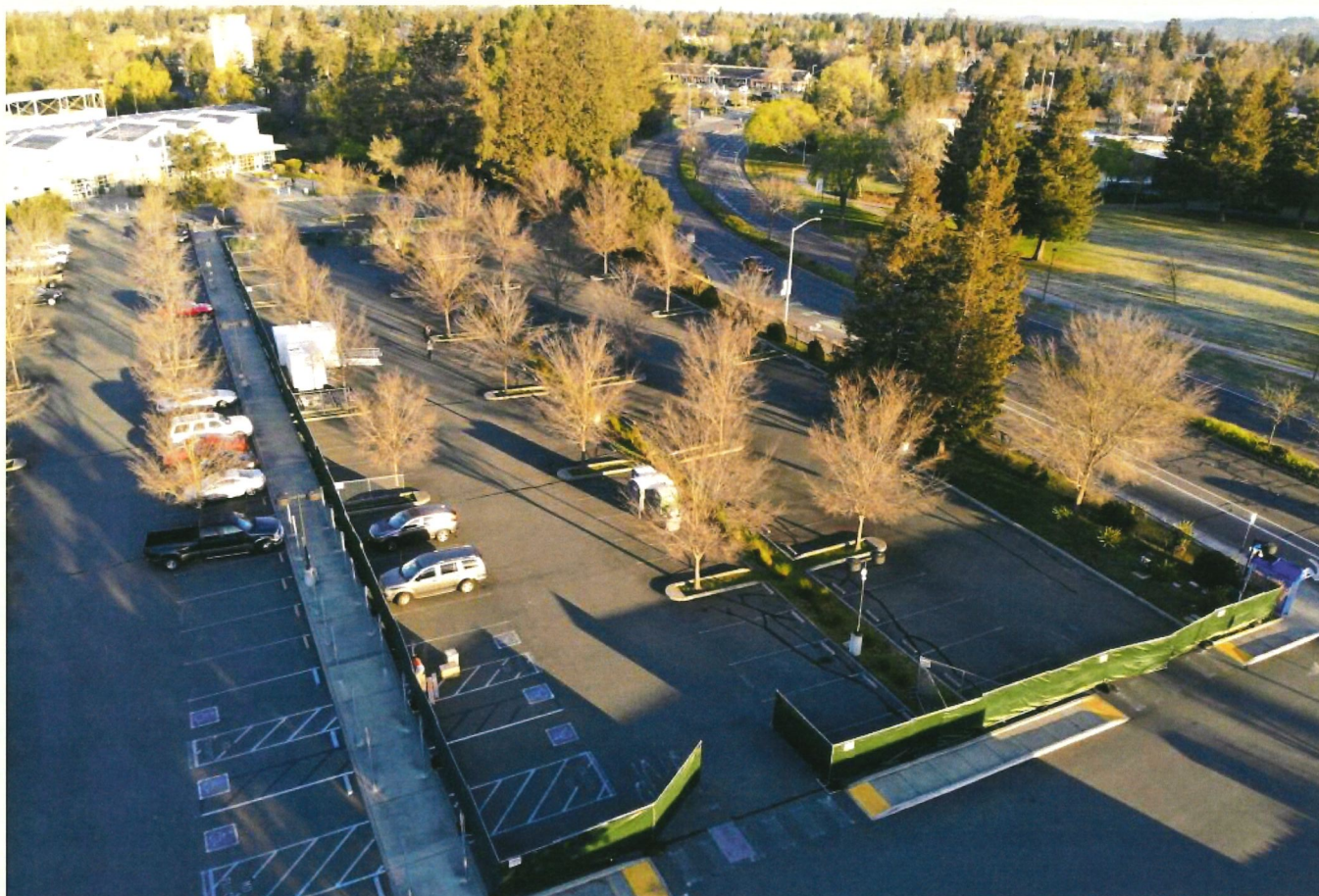


Project Safe Park

Secure Parking Facilities for the Vehicular Homeless



As of last count in 2020 there are over 132 persons in the Comox Valley that have experienced homelessness, with the number visibly increasing in the years since the last count. In the face of recent social and economic challenges a significant number of them find themselves living in their vehicles as a last resort.

This reality has led to a growing need for safe and secure parking facilities tailored to meet the basic needs of those who have been forced into this situation due to poverty. Such parking facilities would serve as emergency shelters, offering essential amenities like sanitation, electricity, and security to ensure the well-being of the occupants.

Ensuring **community and neighbourhood acceptability is vital to create a harmonious environment that benefits both occupants and the neighbourhoods they become a part of.**

The goal is to provide support to transition the transient vehicular homeless into regularized residents of the community.

The Wiseland Humanitarian Association **is looking for partners to help provide such a facility in the Courtenay area.**



About Project Safe Park

Project Safe Park will play a crucial role in providing a lifeline to individuals who are grappling with homelessness and economic adversity. A secure parking facility would serve as a **dignified alternative to sleeping in public spaces**, offering a more private and secure environment.

B.C. rest areas, park-and-rides fill with people who can't afford a home

"It used to be that to end up homeless, people had a combination of vulnerabilities — mental health, addiction, childhood trauma. Now, they just don't have enough money."

<https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/b-c-rest-areas-park-and-rides-fill-with-people-who-cant-afford-a-home>

It is important to note that the BC Supreme Court has upheld the charter right to dwell in public parks between 7pm and 9am. We all want a more harmonious solution than ever increasing homeless encampments, which makes providing humane alternatives for those facing housing instability a urgent concern.¹

A prime example of such a facility is the Safe Parking LA program in Los Angeles, California.² This initiative partners with faith-based organizations to transform their parking lots into safe havens for people living in their vehicles. The program offers not only a secure place to park but also **access to washroom facilities, showers, and social services**. This comprehensive approach tackles both the immediate need for shelter and the underlying factors contributing to homelessness.

¹ <http://archive.abbotsfordtoday.ca/bc-supreme-court-rules-homeless-have-right-to-public-spaces/>

² <https://safeparkingla.org>

³ <https://santabarbaraca.gov/government/priorities-policies/homelessness-initiatives/new-beginnings-safe-parking-program>

⁴ <https://lakewaumc.org/safe-parking-program-page/>

⁵ <https://www.cityofvancouver.us/cmo/page/vancouver-safe-parking-zone>

In addition to addressing hygiene and safety concerns, these facilities contribute to the overall well-being of individuals by providing access to electricity. The Safe Parking Program in Santa Barbara, California, for instance, connects participants to **power sources for charging essential devices and maintaining a basic level of comfort**.³

This simple amenity can make a significant difference in the lives of those who rely on their vehicles as their primary dwelling.

Security remains a paramount consideration in designing and operating these parking facilities. To ensure the safety of occupants, facilities could implement well-lit parking areas, surveillance systems, and on-site security personnel. The SafePark program in Seattle and Vancouver Washington, exemplifies this approach by partnering with **local law enforcement and security companies to offer a secure environment for vehicle dwellers**.^{4 5}

Creating safe parking facilities for individuals living in their vehicles not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters a sense of community and support. By offering **access to social services, mental health resources, and connections to housing opportunities**, these programs empower individuals to regain stability and work towards transitioning out of vehicular homelessness.

Sooke Homeless Coalition seeks safety for people sleeping in cars

"[Advocates push for] a two-year emergency billeting pilot program where property owners would offer their driveway or space."

<https://www.vancouverislandfreedaily.com/news/sooke-homeless-coalition-seeks-safety-for-people-sleeping-in-cars/>

Fostering Community Acceptance of Safe Park

The establishment of safe parking facilities is also about integrating these spaces seamlessly into existing communities. **The goal is to provide support to transition the transient vehicular homeless into regularized residents of the community.** Ensuring community and neighbour acceptability is vital to create a harmonious environment that benefits both occupants and the neighbourhoods they become a part of.

Facility design: By strategically locating safe parking facilities in areas that have limited impact on adjacent residential properties, noise and visual disturbances can be minimized. For example, positioning the facility near commercial zones rather than quiet residential streets could mitigate noise concerns.

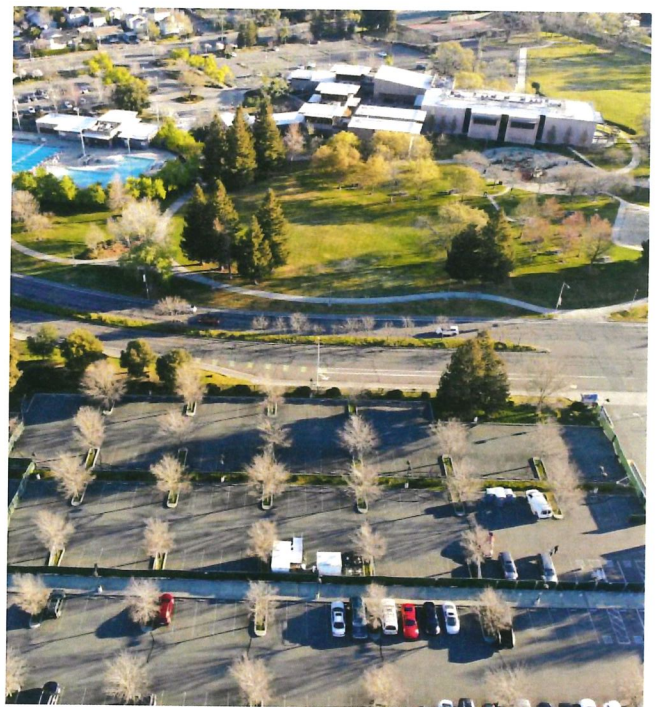
Screening procedures: Thorough background checks and verification processes can help ensure that individuals seeking refuge in these facilities do not pose a threat to the safety and security of the surrounding area. The San Diego Safe Parking Program, for instance, utilizes a stringent participant screening process to enhance safety and reassure the local community.

Crime concerns: Robust security measures are crucial, which can include 24/7 on-site security personnel, surveillance cameras, and controlled access points. Collaborating with local law enforcement to establish a visible presence and quick response in case of emergencies can alleviate fears related to crime.

Waste and cleanliness: Establishing strict protocols for trash disposal and waste management can prevent issues related to litter and messiness. Regular maintenance and cleaning schedules can ensure that the facility remains well-kept, contributing positively to the visual impact on adjacent properties.

Codes of conduct: Clear guidelines on noise levels, appropriate behaviour, and respecting neighbouring properties can help maintain a peaceful coexistence. The Denver Safe Parking Program, for example, provides participants with a code of conduct that outlines expected behaviour and responsibilities.

Community engagement: Holding regular meetings between facility operators, local authorities, and residents can provide a platform for addressing concerns, clarifying misconceptions, and building a sense of trust. Engaging community members in the design process and seeking their input can also create a sense of ownership and investment in the project.





Principles of operation

- Screening of participants limits access to only those with no other option i.e. No tourists
- Washrooms and basic sanitation, device charging and other basic amenities
- Decorative fencing, high quality materials, landscaping and site selection to make a positive visual contribution to the neighbourhood
- Codes of conduct and behaviour for residents i.e. no violence or threats
- Good neighbour agreements to address adjacent community concerns
- No narcotics, illegal or commercial activities
- No RVs, uninsured, or non-functional vehicles.
- Foot and vehicle traffic managed through access hours and gates
- Limitations on guests
- Police cooperation
- Integration with existing social and health services
- Active and present on-site supervision and security
- Non-discrimination and inclusion
- Duration of stay is variable with goal to transition to affordable supportive housing as it becomes available
- Trash and litter eliminated through professional maintenance contracts
- Preference given to local displaced persons

To learn more, donate, or partner with us contact us:

wiseland.human.assoc@gmail.com

250-334-2074 (office)

250-650-1230 (mobile)

wiseland-humanitarian-association.ca

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