

Supporting People Living in Cars and RVs

INNOVATIONS & SOLUTIONS
for Ending Unsheltered Homelessness

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Collective

The criminalization of homelessness significantly impacts people living in cars and RVs, even as Safe Parking sites continue to gain traction. Come learn from innovative communities and people with experience living in vehicles on how to meet peoples' needs while preventing harmful interactions with carceral, child welfare, and other systems.

Workshop Overview

Presentation:

- What is Vehicle Residency?
- Recent Research



Workshop on Vehicle Resident-oriented services:

- What are some benefits?
- What are some challenges?
- How can we better support vehicle residents in continuums of care?



What is *vehicle residency*?

The habitation of a vehicle as a primary residence.



"I Live in My Car," New York Times (2023)



NOMADLAND (2020)



Las Vegas "motorcoach resort"



Homelessness

Affordable
Housing

Vacationing

Vehicle Residency in the USA

- 1. People on low, fixed and limited incomes who cannot afford rising costs of housing are being displaced from their communities into vehicles as long-term accommodation**
- 2. Diverse individuals and families use different types of vehicles as privately-owned mobile shelters to connect with familiar communities, loved ones, employment, social services, health care, hygiene and waste facilities, and vital resources such as potable water, electricity, and internet**
- 3. When healthy private and open-spaces for vehicle residency are inaccessible, a variety of vehicle residents have few options but to sleep in public parking**

Recently Published Research

Study location and population:

- Vehicle residents living in public parking throughout Seattle, WA (2009-2019)

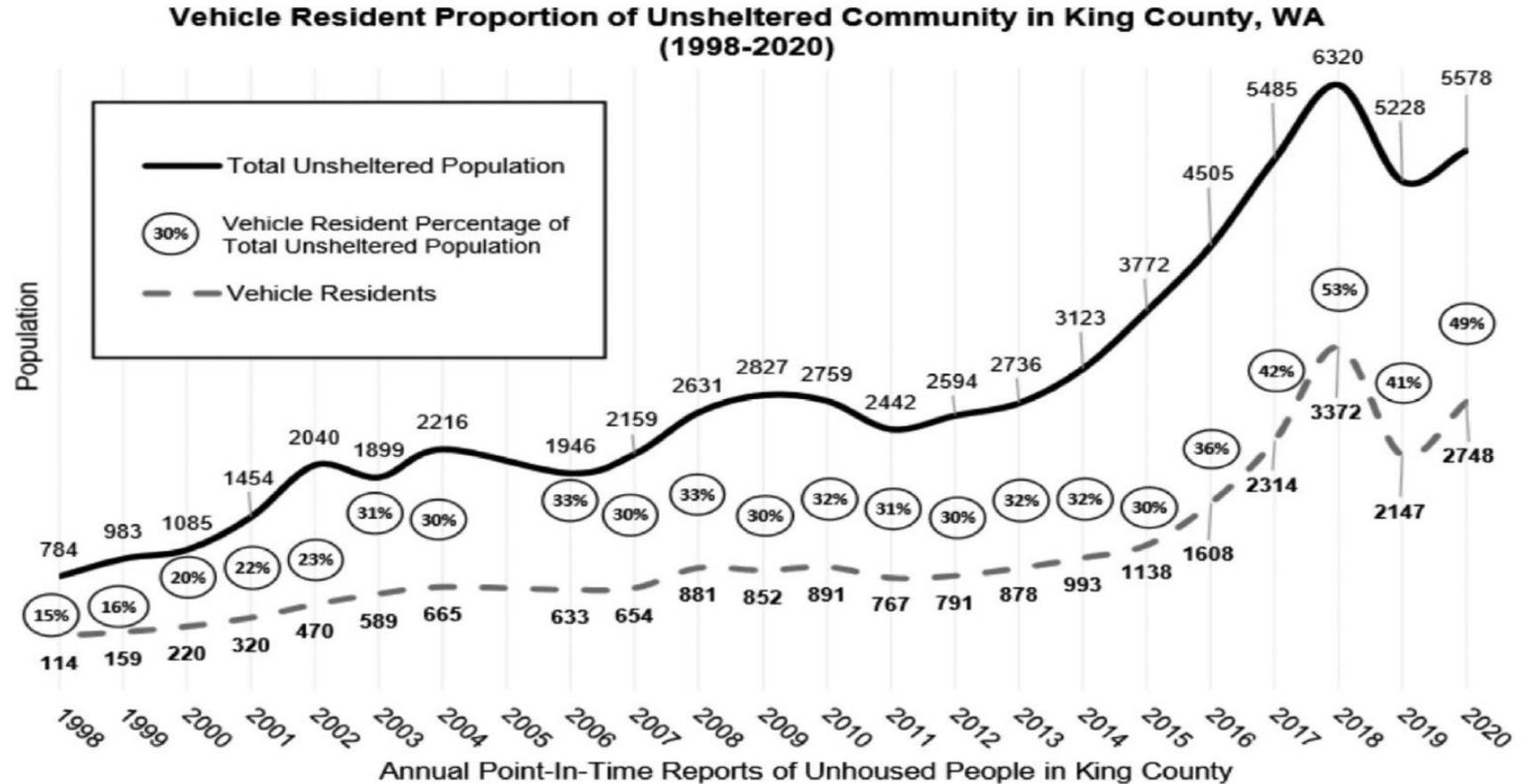
Homes Without Homes:

An Ethno-archaeology of Vehicle Residency in Public Parking

Human Organization: Journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology

Spring 2023 (82(2):153-168)

DOI: 10.17730/1938-3525-82.2.153



Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless, 1998-2014

All Home, 2015-2020

Data from 2001-2004 is based on reported percentages. No PIT count was conducted in 2005.



Mixed methods:

Participant Observation & Interviews

- Employed for **2 years as Outreach Specialist for approximately 1,500 vehicle residents** in Seattle (2013-2015); volunteered for **1 year as member of Executive and Governing Boards** for King County homeless services coordinating agency (2015), and **5 years coordinating subpopulation counts of vehicle residents** for annual point-in-time of unsheltered people in King County (2015-2022)
- Conducted **25 longitudinal, semi-structured interviews with 13 vehicle residents** (7 female and 6 male) over 3 years; **6 interviews with local housed people and business owners**



Vehicle Residents in Seattle
Pruss: July 13, 2014



“Bobby with the Bus” prepares our lunch
before an interview in his home
Pruss: July 16, 2015

Mixed methods:

Experimental Archaeology & Settlement Mapping

- Purchased, temporarily inhabited, maintained, and recycled vehicle residence: 17-foot (5.2m) long Dodge Tioga recreational vehicle (RV)
- Developed Vehicle Residence Identification System to map anonymous **vehicle residency settlement patterns** in Seattle’s public parking during 3 years



My RV, 12 hours after purchase, with a ticket & “orange-tag” for “parking more than 72-hours” in front of my house
Pruss: September 9, 2010

A vehicle should be considered a vehicle residence if it exhibits **3** of the following **6** characteristics:

1. The view through the front to rear windows is blocked.
2. The side and/or rear windows are blocked by sheeting, panels, and/or curtains to restrict visibility on both sides,
3. There is evidence of unfrozen condensation on windows.
4. At least one window is partially open.
5. There are items often associated with vehicle residency such as generators, bicycles, or storage containers externally secured.
6. There are unusually large volumes of possessions, sometimes appearing to be “refuse” (often in bags), within or near the vehicle.



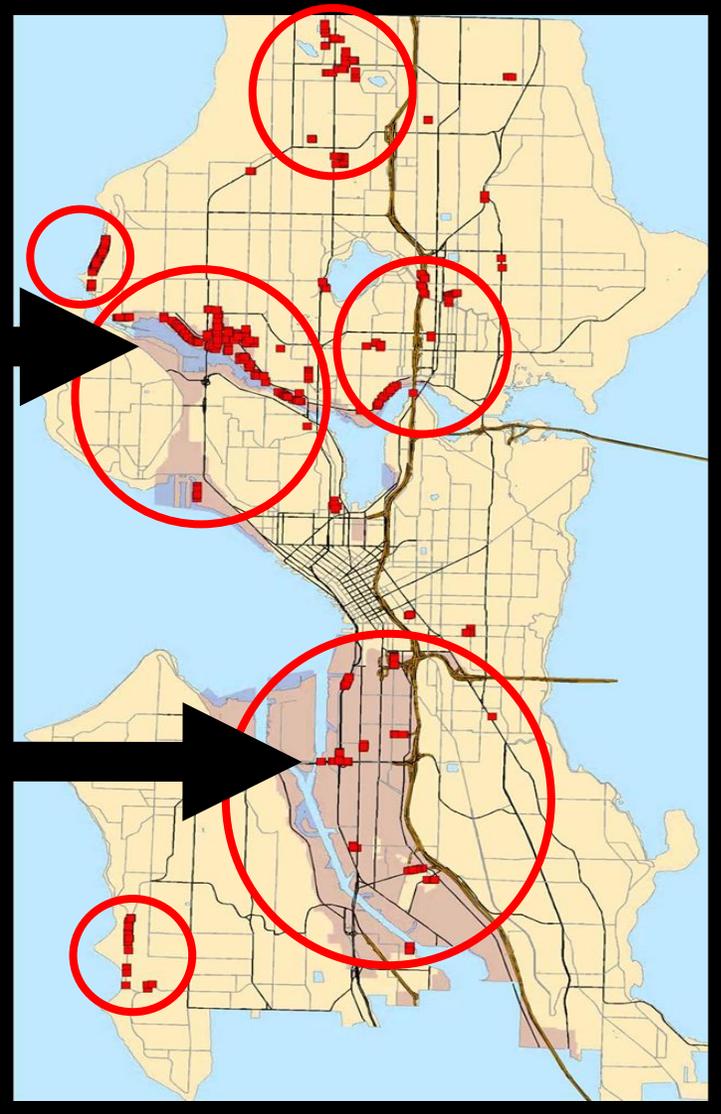
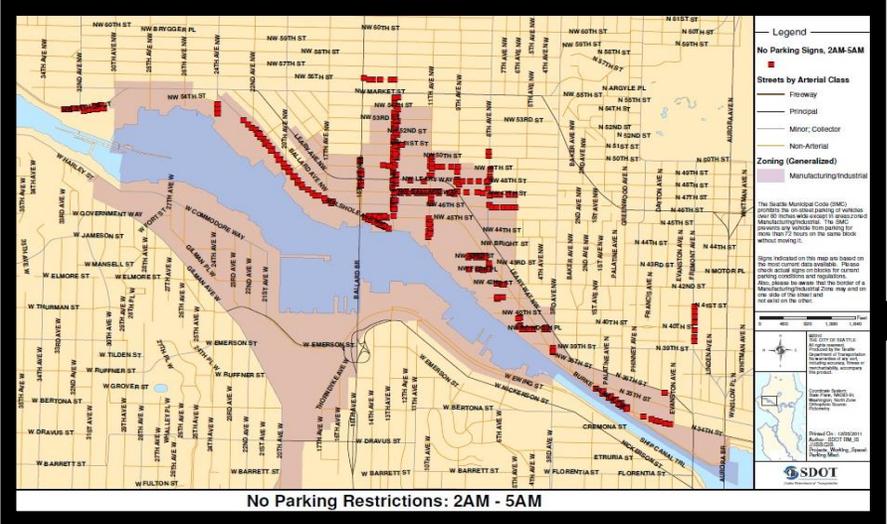
Bobby oversees the donation of my RV
Pruss: August 10, 2015

Common parking regulations disproportionately effected vehicle residents



1. Oversized vehicles (over 80 inches wide) restricted to parking overnight (12-6 AM) in industrial zones
 - SMC: 11.72.070
2. 72-hour relocation requirement
 - SMC: 11.72.440
3. Overnight (“No parking 2-5 AM”) parking restriction signs
 - SMC: 11.72.260; 11.72.330
4. “Junk vehicle” law
 - SMC: 11.72.500; 11.14.268
5. “Scofflaw” law (w/ immobilizing “boot” for unpaid fines)
 - SMC: 11.35.010-030

These limited legally habitable space



“EcoBlocks” used to banish vehicle residents from public space (2021)

Case Study: The “Punitive Push” on Mobile Homes

Cityscape: HUD Journal for Policy and Research

(Pruss and Cheng 2020)

Case Study: “Chris Smith” and the Punitive Push

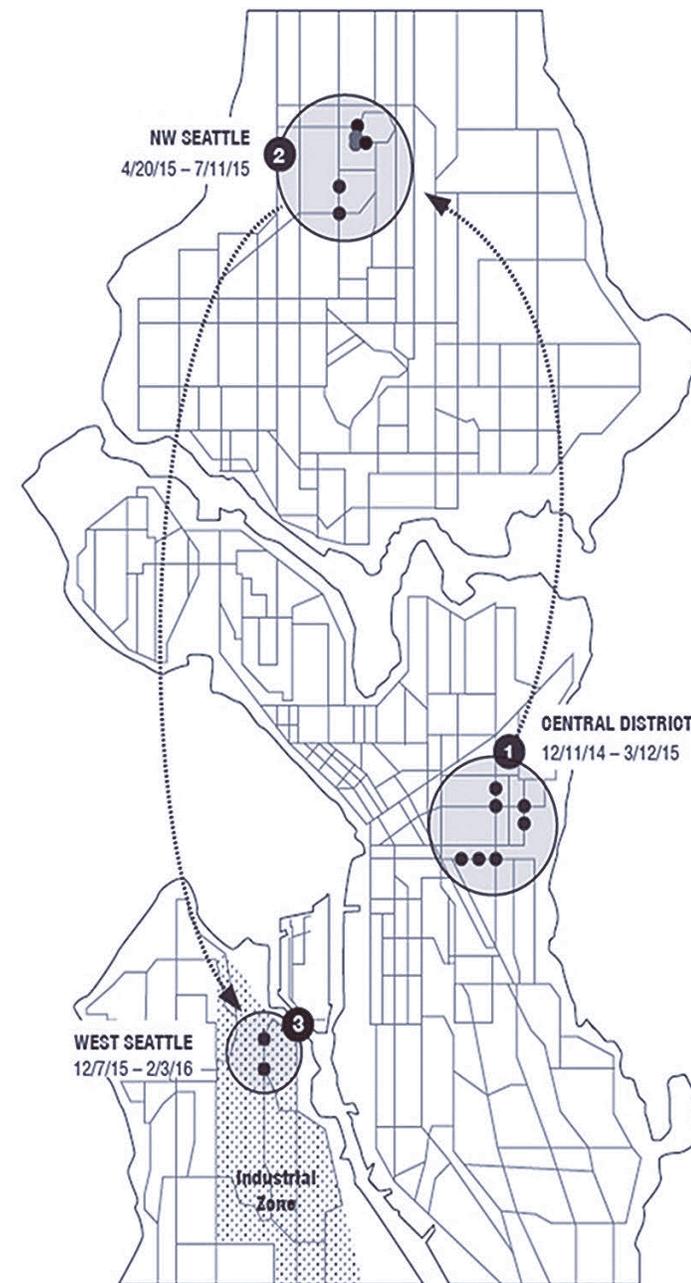
During the course of two years, Chris received fifteen tickets on a vehicle residency (an RV*). Specifically:

Thirteen tickets for Expired License Plates, SMC 11.72.145 (\$72 each)
All vehicles must display a valid license plate while parked, stopped or standing in Seattle.

Two tickets for Parking Over 72 Hours, SMC 11.72.440 (\$44 each)
In Seattle, no vehicle can be parked on the same block-face for over 72 hours.

*Seattle ordinance (SMC 11.72.70) requires that between 12-6 am, all vehicles over 80” wide (such as an RV) may only park within industrial zones.

- 1_Central District**
- 12/11/14 **1** In December 2014, Chris parked adjacent to Seattle’s commercial and manufacturing zones where they received seven tickets for expired vehicle registration. These tickets were \$72 each, and could be issued every day that the registration was not updated. Chris paid one of seven tickets; the remaining six unpaid tickets, late fees and interest were sent to a collection agency. Chris could not renew their vehicle registration due to these unpaid tickets. After 45 days, the mobile home was at risk of immediate impound without prior notice due to lack of registration (SMC 11.30.40).
 - 12/18/14 **2**
 - 12/23/14 **3**
 - 12/29/14 **4**
 - 1/13/15 **5**
 - 1/27/15 **6**
 - 3/12/15 **7**
- 2_NW Seattle**
- 4/20/15 **8** By April 2015, Chris relocated to Northwest Seattle, where their RV received four more tickets for expired plates. At the new location, Chris was issued two more tickets for parking on the same block-face for more than 72 hours (\$69 each). Chris did not pay these tickets and they were sent to collections. After Chris failed to pay four or more tickets within 90 days, their RV was added to the “scofflaw list” and was therefore eligible for a tire “boot” (SMC 11.35.010-030).
 - 4/23/15 **9**
 - 4/29/15 **10**
 - 4/29/15 **11**
 - 6/18/15 **12**
 - 7/11/15 **13**
- 3_West Seattle**
- 12/7/15 **14** Chris moved their RV to an industrial zone in late 2015, specifically the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund toxic clean-up site. Like many industrial zones, this area was disconnected from housed communities, vital resources, waste disposal and hygiene facilities. At this location, Chris received two more tickets for expired plates that they did not pay. The RV was immobilized with a mechanical “boot” and impounded after 48 hours. After 15 days of impound, Chris’ RV was auctioned for \$10 on 2/27/2016.
 - 2/3/16 **15**



Findings



Vehicle residents showcasing their homes at the 2021 Rubber Tramp Rendezvous

1. The (economic, social, and use) value of a vehicle residence led occupants to identify their primary shelter as a home; refuse an often stigmatized identity of “homeless;” and avoid housing, social or medical services where they could not retain their vehicle-home.

2. Overnight parking restrictions constrained vehicle residents to inhabiting limited areas, such as on-street public parking and business lots.



Findings

3. Increasing legal constraints forced a growing, diverse and often unassociated population of vehicle residents into social conflict.
4. There was a lack of accessible space for people using their vehicle as long-term residence, whether or not they needed assistance to secure permanent housing, healthcare, social services or vital resources.

3/15/2024



What is vehicle residency?

The “Big Tent” of Vehicle Residency

Geographically Tethered

Located within a 100 mile area for more than 12 months



Geographically Semi-Tethered

Located in a 100 mile area between 5 and 12 months



Geographically Untethered

Located within a 100 mile area no more than 4 months



A Continuum of Vehicle Residency-Oriented Services

Vehicle Residency “Triage”						
	Long-term Parking		Medium-term Parking		Short-term Parking & Amenities	
Model	Mobile Home or RV Park	Stable Parking Program	Supportive Parking Program	Safe Parking Program	Rentable Parking Program	Temporary Amenities Site
Description	Low- & Fixed-income Mobile Home or RV Park	Subsidized Mobile Home or RV Park	Long-term Transitional Parking	Short-term Transitional Parking	Short-term Parking	Time-limited Facilities & Services
Analogous Housing	Affordable Housing	Permanent & Supportive Housing Voucher	Transitional Housing	Emergency Interim Housing	Temporary or Itinerant Housing	Rest Stop w/ Service Navigation Hub
Duration w/ re-entry	More than 1 year (lease)	More than 1 year (lease)	Less than 1 year	Less than 1 year	Less than 120 days	8 to 12 hour max (i.e., 12-8, 12-12)
Amenities	Long-term leased space for vehicle residence with vital resources (e.g., electricity, water, showers, toilets, septic drainage, waste disposal) and access to social services or medical assistance as needed	Long-term subsidized space for vehicle residence with vital resources (e.g., electricity, water, showers, toilets, septic drainage, waste disposal) and access to social services or medical assistance as needed	Long-term transitional space for vehicle residents with vital resources (e.g., electricity, water, showers, toilets, septic drainage, waste disposal) and access to social services, medical assistance, and housing navigation as needed	Short-term emergency interim space for vehicle residents with vital resources (e.g., electricity, water, showers, toilets, septic drainage, waste disposal) and access to social services, medical assistance, and housing navigation as needed	Affordable off-street parking space for vehicle residents with vital resources (e.g., electricity, water, showers, toilets, septic drainage, waste disposal). Navigation for social services, medical assistance, and housing as needed	Time-limited parking space for vehicle residents with vital resources (e.g., electricity, water, showers, toilets, septic drainage, waste disposal) and access to social services, medical assistance, and housing navigation as needed

Workshop on Vehicle Resident-oriented services

What are positive outcomes from these programs?

Examples:

- Overnight parking programs
- Vehicle resident-focused outreach
- RV septic pump out/drainage
- Vehicle maintenance programs
- Mobile health & dental clinics
- Itinerant vehicle resident parking



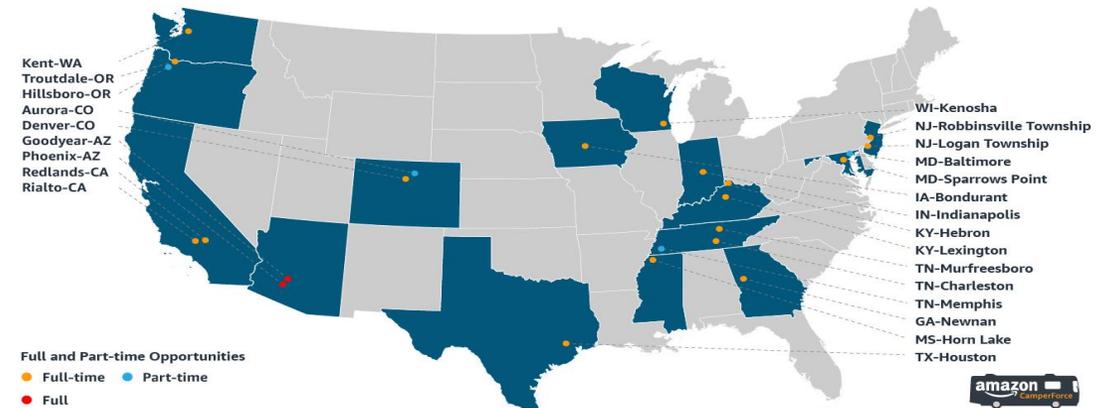
Safe Parking Program in Kirkland, WA



RV Pump Out Program in Portland, OR



Health Wagon in SW Virginia



Amazon "Camperforce" Program that employed RV residents, cancelled in 2023

How have you addressed program challenges?



Examples:

- **Operation & rules**
- **Securing funding**
- **Linked program development and criminalization**
- **NIMBYism**
- **City & CoC support**
- **Locating space**

How can we better support people living in cars and RVs in continuums of housing and care?

Examples:

- Mobile Home or RV Parks
- Stable Parking Programs
- Supportive Parking Programs
- Safe Parking Programs
- Rentable Parking
- Temporary Amenities Sites



Thank you



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Principal, Developmental Research on Vehicle Residency Consulting

Works cited:

Homes Without Homes: An Ethno-archaeology of Vehicle Residency in Public Parking (Pruss 2023)

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