

# WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



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## STAFF

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## SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

### Safe Parking Pilot Program

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to share information and seek direction from Councilmembers on Safe Parking programs for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including the status of a proposed pilot program in Fort Collins and the City's role in enabling Safe Parking programs to operate.

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## GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. Are Councilmembers interested in City staff proposing code changes to allow for Safe Parking programs to operate in Fort Collins?
2. If yes, what considerations for code changes and enforcement are top of mind for Councilmembers?

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## BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

City staff and various community partners have explored options for implementing Safe Parking programs intermittently over the past four years, with limited traction until recently. Now, local partners are prepared to launch a Safe Parking program; local codes prevent its implementation. As this type of program has not been discussed with the current Council, staff are seeking direction from Councilmembers regarding their interest in the City modifying codes to allow local partner(s) to operate a Safe Parking program in Fort Collins.

### Safe Parking Overview

Safe Parking programs provide designated parking areas where people experiencing homelessness and sleeping in their passenger vehicles can safely park overnight, without risk of citation. There is no standard program model for Safe Parking and operations vary between communities. Access to restrooms (either portable toilets or inside a building), case management, and connections to other resources are common features of Safe Parking programs.

Safe Parking programs can provide an alternative for people who are unable to stay in shelter or for whom shelter is not a good fit. Participants may prefer a safe parking option if there are limited shelter beds in

the community; if they have a partner, pets, or family members with whom they could not stay if in a shelter; if they have health issues that make staying in close proximity to others challenging or dangerous; if their work hours or other conditions do not align with shelter hours; or other factors that make sleeping in their car preferable. For people who would choose to sleep in their cars, Safe Parking provides a legal and safer option than staying in prohibited and unmonitored locations.

Outcome data for Safe Parking programs varies. In a review of Safe Parking practices nationwide, programs reported the rate of positive housing outcomes (i.e., percentage of participants moving into temporary or permanent housing) ranged from a low of 13% to a high of 98%, although the program with the 98% success rate was designed as a stopgap for households awaiting motel vouchers; success rates without the guaranteed motel vouchers was substantially lower (around 60%)<sup>1</sup>. The variation in reported outcomes may be related to the availability of affordable housing in the community, the population served in the program, and the program's design, including whether assistance and financial resources to access permanent housing are an embedded program component.

There has been a SafeLot operating in Loveland since November 2023, the only program of its kind in the region. Local partners have met with the team in Loveland and have designed a similar program. (A link to the Loveland SafeLot program website can be found in the attachments section of this document.)

While Safe Parking programs do not serve as a replacement for shelter programs in the community, they can provide a useful alternative for a limited number of unhoused residents while they seek permanent housing.

### **History of Safe Parking in Fort Collins**

City staff and community agencies have been exploring options to implement a Safe Parking program in Fort Collins since 2022. In 2022, there was interest among City leaders for staff to lead Safe Parking conversations. City staff met with partners including Larimer County, the League of Women Voters, Colorado State University, and presented to the Fort Collins Interfaith Council to identify potential partners and gauge interest in pursuing a Safe Parking program.

While initial conversations did not lead immediately to a proposed program, community partners did express interest in trying to build a Safe Parking option for Fort Collins' unhoused residents. City staff met with partners in Loveland, who opened a Safe Parking program in November 2023, and toured a Safe Parking site in Longmont, operated by HOPE for Longmont. City staff in Housing and Community Vitality (formerly Social Sustainability) also engaged a graduate student to complete a review of best practices of Safe Parking programs as part of their graduate capstone project.

With additional information gathered through these learning efforts, an internal staff team formed to examine steps the City would need to take to enable Safe Parking programs to operate in Fort Collins, with the expectation that programs would be operated by external partners. Departments and teams participating on this internal committee have included Sustainability Services, Housing and Community Vitality, Transportation/Parking Services, Code Compliance, Planning and Development Services, City Attorney's Office, and Police Services (HOPE Team). Staff have also been in contact with Poudre Fire Authority to understand any program parameters they would recommend or require.

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<sup>1</sup> McElwain, L., Schiele, D., & Waheed, L. (2021). Smart practices for safe parking: A nationwide review of safe parking programs for people sheltering in vehicles. The Center for Homeless Inquiries. Accessible at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e40681539b77957555f10e0/t/609ef366f1f5035bc056db19/1621029735677/Safe+Parking+Briefer+Final.pdf>.

Over the past two and a half years, staff have continued to meet as needed when local partners indicated they were making progress in developing a viable program. Different potential program operators and sites have explored the option of hosting or operating a Safe Parking program, with limited traction until recently when Family Housing Network and Catholic Charities decided to collaborate to work towards launching a one-year Safe Parking pilot program, in partnership with First United Methodist Church and Trinity Lutheran Church, who would serve as the parking sites for the pilot program. The one-year pilot proposed would enable program partners to assess program operations, outputs, and outcomes after one year and determine whether to continue to operate the program, modify program operations, or stop operations to focus on other programs.

### **The City's Role**

Were a Safe Parking Program to move forward, the City would determine parameters for approval of Safe Parking Programs in Fort Collins, with no direct client involvement or day-to-day operational oversight. This aligns with the role the City takes in other homelessness or human services program operations; the City has very limited influence over nonprofit program operations outside of requirements attached to funding. The City has not committed to providing funding to a Safe Parking pilot program.

Even with specific amendments to the code to allow for the safe parking program, the City would still be able to enforce other laws related to nuisance, health and safety, and criminal activity. Part of the City's role will be to determine, if a pilot program does proceed, what conditions would lead to early termination of the program through the reversal of any code modifications. This may include early termination due to failure to operate the program as outlined in any code modifications; nuisance, noise or other violations; or other issues that do not get sufficiently mitigated. Upon the completion of the one-year pilot, the City would assess whether to continue offering code options for sites to operate Safe Parking Programs.

### **Program Proposal**

The current program proposal involves the nonprofit partners of Catholic Charities and Family Housing Network and the parking sites of Trinity Lutheran Church and First United Methodist Church.

Catholic Charities and Family Housing Network are long-standing nonprofit organizations operating in Fort Collins. Each has experience in sheltering households experiencing homelessness and supporting them to access permanent housing. Catholic Charities and Family Housing Network are choosing to partner together to leverage each organization's capacity and expertise.

Trinity Lutheran Church and First United Methodist Church have each worked with their respective congregations and leadership to ensure support within their organizations, and have each conducted outreach in their surrounding neighborhoods. Additional information on the outreach conducted is included in a later section. Trinity Lutheran Church is located at 301 E Stuart Street, in Council District 5. First United Methodist Church is located at 1005 Stover Street, in Council District 1.

Table 1 (below) outlines the key details of the proposed Safe Parking pilot program. These parameters have been developed by the program partners of Catholic Charities, Family Housing Network, Trinity Lutheran Church, and First United Methodist Church.

**Table 1. Safe Parking Program Proposal**

|                                         |                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cadence                                 | Each site hosts every other month                                                                                   |
| Hours of Operation                      | 7pm – 7am                                                                                                           |
| Max Capacity                            | 7 passenger vehicles                                                                                                |
| Eligibility Criteria                    | Participants must pass a background check and have a valid driver's license, registration and vehicle insurance     |
| Screening and Intake Process            | Completed by Family Housing Network and Catholic Charities                                                          |
| Resource Navigation and Case Management | Case management available through Family Housing Network and Catholic Charities; encouraged but not mandatory       |
| Restrooms and Trash                     | Program partners will provide and maintain portable toilets and trash receptacles at each site                      |
| Pet Policy                              | Pets would be allowed and must remain in the vehicle or leashed at all times; owners must clean up after their pets |
| Security                                | Cameras will be installed and monitored by staff at Catholic Charities                                              |
| Extreme Heat/Cold                       | Will provide space indoors during inclement weather                                                                 |

### **Community Engagement and Feedback**

City staff advised program partners to conduct community outreach and engagement to gauge reactions from neighbors and gather input that could impact program design and operations. Staff from the City's Housing and Community Vitality Department (formerly Neighborhood Services) consulted with nonprofit partners and the church sites on methods to engage neighbors but were not directly involved in any outreach efforts.

First United Methodist Church (FUMC) hosted an open house in August 2025 and went door-to-door in the surrounding neighborhood in fall 2025, focusing on residences abutting FUMC's property. Staff from First United Methodist reported they received mostly positive to neutral responses. In response to concerns raised by one neighbor owning multiple properties in close proximity, FUMC opted to change the proposed location of the reserved parking spots to an area near where neighbors were more supportive. Staff in Housing and Community Vitality have not received any direct communication from First United Methodist neighbors, either in support or opposition to the proposed program.

Trinity Lutheran Church first met with nonprofit partners in June 2025 before working in-depth on a collaborative SafeLot model with FUMC. After meeting as a leadership team throughout winter 2025 and spring 2026, Trinity Lutheran hosted one open house and one panel presentation for neighbors in spring and summer 2026. Panelists at the June panel presentation included representatives from Catholic Charities, Family Housing Network, Fort Collins Police Services – HOPE Team, Outreach Fort Collins, and Loveland's SafeLot Program. While many neighbors or congregation members have expressed their support of the program, there are also several neighbors, particularly those in closest proximity to the church, expressing concerns or opposition to the program operating at Trinity Lutheran. Most communications received from Trinity Lutheran's neighbors by Housing and Community Vitality staff have expressed substantial reservations and concerns about the program operating in a heavily residential area and requested neighbors be able to provide input prior to decisions being made.

## NEXT STEPS

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Staff are seeking direction from Councilmembers regarding their interest in having code changes brought forward that would allow a Safe Parking pilot program to operate. If Councilmembers request staff continue in this direction, the internal staff committee will continue to work to bring forward code updates to allow for a one-year pilot Safe Parking program and will integrate other steps or components Councilmembers request, including additional community engagement, into the process.

## ATTACHMENTS / LINKS

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1. Presentation
2. First United Methodist Church Safe Parking Pilot website <https://www.firstchurchfc.org/safeparking>
3. Loveland SafeLot Parking Program <https://lovelandsafelotparking.org/>