Piloting Leave No Trace Programming with People Experiencing Homelessness on Public Land in Austin Texas

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Abstract

This Master's Report explores the use of Leave No Trace™ (LNT™) programming with people experiencing homelessness (LNTPEH) on public land in Austin, Texas and a close analysis of the systems impacting innovative change. Increasingly, Austin’s municipal land is negatively impacted by unauthorized camps housing people experiencing homelessness (PEH). A pilot study conducted in the spring and summer of 2019 documents the impact of LNT™ programming with PEH, while allowing delayed eviction and connecting residents to social services. This report begins with an introduction to the state of homelessness in Austin and discusses challenges faced by urban land managers when mitigating the impact of PEH on public land. Next, this report discusses adaptations made to LNT™ programming to address the unique challenges found in urban unauthorized camps. This analysis uses a systems thinking lens to examine common system archetypes that impacted the outcome of the pilot project. Finally, this report outlines a strategic plan for Leave No Trace™ programming with people experiencing homelessness, which can serve as a framework for reducing the impact of these camps while engaging residents in stewardship activities and social services. Several recommendations are outlined for the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

Key Recommendations include:

- Use the LNTPEH Strategic Plan outlined in this report as a framework to begin a systems analysis of current conditions impacting PEH on public land
- Identify small-scale projects to mitigate for current systems archetypes addressed in this report.
- Provide training for staff in systems analysis and in navigating interactions with PEH
• Procure a third-party consultant versed in systems thinking and analysis in order to facilitate a more robust discussion and action plan addressing PEH and the associated impacts to parkland.

These recommendations serve as a starting place for land managers within Austin and beyond to examine the impacts of homelessness from a systems thinking lens and to ultimately open a discussion about what role public land managers hold in mitigating the impacts of homelessness to people and the land.
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<tr>
<td>AWPD</td>
<td>Austin Watershed Protection Department</td>
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<td>COA</td>
<td>City of Austin</td>
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<td>ECCO</td>
<td>Ending Community Homelessness Coalition</td>
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<td>Leave No Trace</td>
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<td>PEH</td>
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<td>Long Range Plan</td>
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<td>NIMBY</td>
<td>Not in My Back Yard</td>
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<td>Parks and Recreation Department</td>
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<td>PEH</td>
<td>People Experiencing Homelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>OID</td>
<td>Office of Innovation and Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPOC</td>
<td>Single-point-of-contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWOT</td>
<td>Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats</td>
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State of Homelessness in Austin

The City of Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the south. This unprecedented growth challenges the city’s ability to provide affordable housing and gainful employment resulting in more people using public land as a temporary home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The impact of homelessness to communities and to the environment results in an increase of illegal camps. Each year, Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) conducts a point-in-time count to maintain current trends in homelessness in Austin and Travis County. According to the latest count, there are a total of 2,147 people who are considered homeless. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, homelessness is defined as, “an individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing” (42 U.S.C., 254b). According to Pathlight Home (n.d), “a homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation.” Of those who are homeless and without shelter, over a quarter are sleeping in parks, drainage easements or other publicly maintained areas. Of the 2,147 estimated homeless, over 81% are single-headed households, and 61% are chronically homeless. It is important to note that while homelessness affects every demographic, African-Africans make up an estimated 42% of Austin’s homeless population but only represent 8% of the total population in Travis County (ECCO, 2017).
Cost & Causes of Homelessness

The typical response to homeless camps by the City of Austin Parks and Recreation and Austin Watershed Protection Department (AWPD) is eviction and removal. This response, while sometimes appropriate in the event of an immediate threat to the safety of other campers and/or the surrounding community, further destabilizes people experiencing homelessness and makes coordinating services difficult for health care providers.

![Diagram of the Costly Cycle of Homelessness for Many](image)

Specifically, the cost of Criminal Trespass notices and arrests associated with repeated camping violations on public land is estimated to be around $153.00 per day, per individual.
arrest. Arrests for repeated camping violations rarely end in permanent housing. In addition to the cost of incarceration, homelessness also increases the cost of healthcare within Travis County. Combining the cost of incarceration, healthcare, and temporary shelters, the average annual cost of homeless individuals using public services is $222,000.00 per person (ECCO, 2017).

There are many factors contributing to homelessness in Austin. ECCO points to four primary contributors:

- Inadequate support services
- Economic and Environmental Factors
- Lack of Family or Support Network
- Criminal Justice Involvement (2017)

Many of these factors lay outside of the scope of PARD to address independently, however, the parks department can help direct PEH to support services, offer employment development opportunities and engage PEH in programming as proposed in the *LNLTPEH Strategic Plan* included in the appendix of this report.
Change in Department Response

The typical PARD response to homeless individuals is eviction and subsequent clean-up of unauthorized camps. After evictions, many camps returned to the same location, or relocated further into remote areas to avoid future detection. Figure 1 demonstrates the conventional eviction process for PARD.

![Diagram of PARD Conventional Eviction Response](image)

This historical response strains relationships of trust between municipal workers and homeless individuals, increasing the footprint of large camps. The five contributing factors to homelessness are complex problems and will take time to solve. City Council is acting to create
more affordable housing, provide support services and address inequalities but systematic changes take time to implement and people experiencing homelessness need stability to prevent worsening human and environmental conditions.

**Environmental Impact of Homelessness**

The environmental impact of homelessness to public land is difficult to measure. Factors such as location, terrain, material found on site, location of site within a floodplain, and the location of the camp within protected areas such as preserves, can all drastically change the cost of camp removal. When camps are located near trails or public amenities, although unsightly, service personnel can easily locate and interact with PEH. Evictions and removals, as is the current practice, often exacerbate environmental impact. Camps that were initially located on a relatively small footprint move deeper into park or preserve land to avoid detection. Relocated camps after eviction increases the overall footprint, widens trails and destroys more protected brush and wildlife habitat.¹

Managers concerned with habitat connectivity and fragmentation often cite homelessness as a threat to protected areas (Reagan, 2019 and Eco Bear Biohazard Cleaning Company n.d.). Relocated camps worsen this concern as PEH move deeper into protected wildlife areas. Once

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¹ During the pilot, I attempted to gather data about the overall cost of camping and the recidivism of camps and campers. At the beginning of the pilot project PARD had no system of collection for camps but through the course of the pilot we formed a GIS layer displaying camp location to track the process of camp clean-ups. As we examined and gathered this information, we noticed a few hotspots where camping reoccurs often and where the impacts of re-habitation are easily seen. For future study, PARD is seeking to collect more robust information to track this eviction and occupancy cycle.
Opponents of using public land to temporarily stabilize PEH argue that camps are often located in environmentally sensitive areas, such as 25-year floodplains, drainage and detention areas (Hammons, 2018). While these areas are less than ideal, having designated LNT areas where camping evictions are deprioritized and LNT programming is prioritized allows us to inform campers of potential risks and engage them in services. This engagement is critical to keeping degradation centralized within a landscape as opposed to scattered deeper into wooded or underdeveloped areas making connections to services difficult. Waste associated with camps
is a serious environmental concern. Unchecked camping where homeless individuals create fire, dispose of human waste and eliminate food waste all degrade the environmental health of a site.

**Leave No Trace with People Experiencing Homelessness Pilot (LNTPEH)**

In the spring and summer of 2019, the Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Watershed Protection Department (AWPD) teamed up to better address homelessness on their respective properties. Instead of using the traditional law enforcement response of eviction, the departments created a prioritization scale and an alternative response to eviction, referred to as The Leave No Trace with People Experiencing Homelessness (LNTPEH) pilot project. Through this pilot, AWPD and PARD implemented a prioritization scale to de-escalate camps that do not pose an immediate threat to human health and safety (Figure 4).

This scale was created during the LNTPEH pilot to quickly evaluate major hazards and potential mitigating efforts. This scale also informed how LNT principles were prioritized during workshops with PEH.

The LNTPEH pilot approach provides a more prescriptive and proactive method than conventional eviction methods. Rather than treat every homeless camp as criminal, we developed a method for evaluating safety hazards. The cost to city staff and residents from serving evictions or arresting homeless individuals is reduced. Staff will assess the risk to campers and the public
and then work to reduce the risk before moving individuals away from locations on public land (City of Austin Environmental Commission, 2019).

Opponents argue that offering low impact education through the LNT may encourage more homeless to relocate to the Austin or disincentivize current homeless individuals from finding permanent housing (PARD AWPD Working Group, personal communication June 2019). There is no evidence to support this assertion. Staff have reported that through indiscriminate eviction, PEH report losing contact with caseworkers and valuables, such as
medication, identification, and bus passes. The chaos that ensues after eviction from public land is not linked to quicker access to permanent housing. While LNT is a recreational model, this system can use low-impact techniques of fire building, cooking and waste disposal that can reduce environmental contaminants to the watershed. By using LNT principles and deemphasizing target LNTPEH camps, staff can direct resources, encourage low-impact techniques and concentrate environmental degradation in places that are easy to access by support services.

Pilot Design, Implementation and Challenge

Phase One: Location Selection and Staff

Two pilot locations were chosen based on the frequency and use illegal camping on public land. Location One was in an underutilized water quality area which was densely wooded with easy access to clean water sources, bathroom facilities and trash disposals. Location Two exhibited increased camping activity near impending construction. This site was an underutilized, former RV park managed by PARD. Many participants, due to the close proximity of these two sites, migrated between locations One and Two throughout the pilot project.

Staff trained in LNT practices with prior experience working with PEH served as the primary educators. PARD staff would attempt to provide access to additional service providers at each visit to both sites. The LNT program was initially piloted with education staff within PARD’s Park Ranger Unit. Class A uniforms are the most formal uniforms for public service personnel, _______.

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2 May LNTPEH participants and the Lived Advisory Committee discussed the disruption caused by the eviction process; including the loss of valuable documents needed for access to social services.

3 Both PARD’s team leaders for the LNTPEH pilot were trained in advanced LNT principles. LaJuan Tucker is a Leave No Trace Master Educator and Wendi Laws is a LNT Trainer.
including PARD Park Rangers. Class A uniforms are typically worn to convey authority. The LNT Center for Outdoor Ethics recommends using the “authority of the resource” as a method to gain park patron compliance and shared understanding of resource protection based on mutual appreciation rather than the threat posed by law enforcement (Tilton, 2015). They explain that:

The ‘Authority of the Resource Technique’ [...] transfers the authority (or that which asks a person to think or behave in a certain way) from the manager[r]anger or agency, to those things in nature (resources) that have their own requirements [...] the AR technique goes one step further and asks the ranger/manager to suddenly de-emphasize the regulation and transfer part of the expectation back to the visitor by interpreting nature’s requirements” (Tilton, 2015, p. 74).

Complying with LNT principles, the LNTPEH pilot staff decided to reduce barriers to interactions with PEH by wearing clothing which identified staff, appeared professional yet relaxed fears or expectations of a potentially punitive interaction. Staff members wore polo shirts with COAPARD logos as opposed to “Class A” uniforms to reduce fear and increase workshop participation with PEH in camps.\(^4\)

Phase Two: Evaluation and Program Modifications

In each pilot site, PARD staff announced their presence prior to entering a camp. This announcement allowed people to cover any personal belongings, which prevented staff from surprising pilot participants. We emphasized announcing oneself as a way of respecting for PEH space as individuals before all interactions and transactions. After initial introductions, one staff

\(^4\) See Civile and Obhi (2017) for further discussion regarding the effects of uniforms on community hypervigilance and attention. Many studies have documented the effect of uniforms on human interactions. Clothing conveys status, authority and information that influences human behavior. In the case of uniformed personnel who appear or who actually are law/compliance enforcement, certain demographics may be influenced the response of both staff and participants when addressing problematic behaviors. No staff participating in LNTPEH site visits were members of law enforcement, however, law enforcement did serve in the interdepartmental team informing the pilot’s design and implementation.
member would educate on park rules while the other staff member conducted an initial assessment of materials found on site. A copy of this assessment is provided in the appendix. Prior to documenting any site photographs, educators asked for permission to take pictures of their camps and explained the reason behind photos and workshops. No personal data was collected by PARD staff from individuals aside from their preferred name for reference. The number, duration and content of LNT Awareness Workshops were tailored to site conditions and interactions with the individual(s) found onsite.  

Phase Three: LNT Workshops

LNT workshops are loosely formatted with customized material to fit problematic behavior on site. Although created for recreational impact, many of the front- and back-country techniques recommended by the Center for Outdoor Ethics are useful for improving low-impact techniques within campsites in an urban context. Each LNT workshop contained an introduction to program history and a deep focus on the seven core principles of LNT. Examples of traditional messages of LNT for recreational impacts and the modifications used are given in the appendix.

Workshops consisted of an overview of all seven principles with a focus on one principle relevant to the most problematic behavior found on site. For example, when educators were made aware of a recent fire at a nearby site, we used this educational moment to focus on *Minimize Camp Fire Impact*. After the brief workshop, educators would identify site specific changes to improve prior to the next workshop. This encouraged participants to work towards

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For example, if fire was documented in the LNT survey as a percent onsite, we would prioritize LNT principles associated with fire over less problematic behaviors that occurred less often in those specific sites.
compliance in anticipation of future visits. Service providers to services outside of the scope of Leave No Trace programming were provided at each workshop.

If at any time an initially ameliorated behavior reemerged, such as the storage of open food after the *Dispose of Waste Properly* workshop, educators would re-evaluate the principle’s lesson and re-address the principle until compliance was achieved. Workshops also served as follow-up visits for social service providers. By joining with groups like Integral Care, Emergency Services, the HOST and PATH team, LNT workshops became an unofficial channel of communication regarding pilot sites and needs of PEH located with pilot sites.

After the initial evaluation phase (Phase Two), subsequent visits were documented with a survey created by PARD staff recording the amount of refuse found on site. Each visit, educators would take photographs and if appropriate fill out a litter survey to determine if conditions were improving with subsequent visits. There were many challenges with the design, consistent completion and recording of LNT follow-up litter surveys which will be discussed in the results and discussion sections.

**Phase Four: Ongoing Evaluation and Further Programming**

After all LNT principles were covered through workshops and site-specific recommendations, educators would evaluate the effectiveness of education workshops and make recommendations on adaptation to future material. After initial evaluations, (Phase One) large-scale cleanup efforts were organized with participants’ encampments to assist with participant compliance. Later workshops and adaptations to the LNTPEH pilot education sessions were combined with organized cleanups by The Other One’s Foundation’s (TOOF) Workforce
Program. This program was an unrelated pilot which employed PEH in unskilled labor crews to remove abandoned illegal camp material from public land.  

**Results**

The initial results from this pilot were promising. When educators conducted workshops, the majority of PEH engaged with parks and service staff. Workshops were met with a willingness to discuss low impact techniques and site protection and to work towards LNT compliance over time. Between Phases Three and Four, the political climate within the City of Austin around homelessness and public land reached a boiling point. Two events precipitated the discontinuation of this pilot: the recension of vagrancy laws and ensuing politicization of homelessness on a state level.

**Revocation of Austin’s Vagrancy Laws**

During the summer of 2019, The City Council removed the sit-lie ordinances within the jurisdiction of Austin. Sit-lie ordinances pre-date the US Civil War. Texas criminalized activities such as loitering, sitting and/or lying in unauthorized spaces in public. In 1865, after the end of the Civil War, Texas experienced an influx of newly emancipated African Americans. African Americans lived in Austin prior to emancipation, giving rise to several black

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6 There have been internal discussions about the use of work crews comprised of PEH to clean up camps on parkland. Some of the work-crew members are reported to still be unsheltered and experiencing homelessness while being employed by PARD to clean evicted camps. Some staff have argued that the nature of cleaning camps could be traumatic, triggering and physically dangerous for those seeking to transition out of homelessness. Others argue that this program provides a pathway out of homelessness through gainful employment. It is unclear what potential long term effects (for better or worse) this program will have on individuals participating in this program and there is no current research on the effects of this program on the outcome and mental health of participants.
freedmen towns within the city’s boundaries. In the 1860’s, Kitcheonville, Tarrytown, Clarksville and Wheatville, currently gentrified, upper-class Austin neighborhoods, were sections of Austin where African-American families were allowed to settle.

Post-Emancipation, City Council responded to the influx of recently emancipated people by enacting vagrancy laws. Dr. Kevin Foster with the University of Texas’s African and African Diaspora Studies Department explained the link between racism and vagrancy laws in his statement directly to Austin City Council in July of 2019.”

It should be known that our homeless ordinances are eerily similar to our past racist policies. In the 1860s, when Texas was an exceedingly dangerous place for African Americans, Austin happened to be less so. As a result, African Americans migrated in and joined the black population that was already present. They came seeking safety, autonomy and opportunity. This is why we had Kitcheonville [sic], Clarksville, Robertson Hill, Wheat[s]ville, Gregorytown, Red River, Reyna Branch, and a dozen other freedmen communities – each with an autonomous school and church[…].And then we messed up. Our response to the Black presence was to build a police force, criminalize Blacks, and control them. In June 1865, the mayor and city council met to deal with 'the fact that a large number of Negroes turned loose by their owners are congregating in and about Austin, as also perhaps desperate white men, making it necessary to organize a police force to deal with them.' And how did we put our new force to use? Council immediately passed an ordinance to deal with 'all able-bodied Negroes who have abandoned the service of their employers, for the purpose of idleness, or who are found loitering or rambling about, or idly wandering about the streets or other public thoroughfares.' Today we no longer whip the idle or lease them to the lowest bidder, as we did then, but we do still saddle people with debts that make their escape from homelessness less likely. And we do, by the way, still disproportionately target Black folk. (Foster, 2019).

After City Council’s recension of vagrancy/sit lie-ordinances in 2019, Austin’s police response to camping ordinances shifted due to the confusion regarding the new sit-lie ordinance recension. While rolling back vagrancy laws in public rights-of-way, council reinforced camping bans on parkland, clarifying the new rule change to exclude parkland. No longer able to clearly enforce vagrancy in the downtown corridor or public rights-of-way, police increased enforcement on parkland where camping prohibitions were explicit. In both pilot site One and Two campers
reported multiple interactions with police threatening widespread evictions. Normally, evictions are conducted with the permission of the respective public land holding entities while eviction notifications are conducted in coordination with police when necessary. Camp evictions without prior land owner authorization (PARD) are highly unusual unless an illegal activity (not illegal camping) warranting an arrest occurs. Participants within the LNT programming areas reported fear of retaliation and mass eviction. Many participants left the pilot sites as a result of police antagonization, leading to the disruption of the LNT program.

State-Sanctioned Intervention in Austin’s Homeless Population

As cooler months started to reveal camps normally hidden by lush summer vegetation and news of City Council’s revocation of vagrancy laws spread, Governor Greg Abbott began communicating his opinions about Austin’s new policy (Jankowski, 2019). Governor Abbott tweeted disapproval of Austin’s new stance on homelessness on multiple occasions, eventually threatening to send the Armed Guard to enforce vagrancy laws if Austin Council refused to reinstate sit-lying ordinances. After two official letters to Mayor Steve Adler, Governor Abbott opened a five-acre site in the Montopolis neighborhood of Austin. While this area has consistent police presence and a few social services, transportation and transitional housing assistance is limited (Tatum, 2020).

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7 Three separate campers reported being told by police that PARD was going to conduct mass evictions. After initial investigations LNTPEH pilot staff could find no PARD manager who approved mass evictions or who were aware of police communicating this message at the pilot site. Within meetings, our police liaison confirmed, unofficially, that there is confusion with Council’s new policy and that parkland was the only clear place for camping violation enforcement actions.
In 2019, there were approximately 22 total campers. By February 2020, there were over 100 campsites on Governor Abbott’s site (Tatum). In addition to the Governor’s aggressive stance towards Austin’s homeless population, the tense political atmosphere was further exacerbated by impending funding short-falls for the parks and other similarly funded city departments (City of Austin, 2019). This funding shortfall makes continued justification of social services and education as a temporary response to the impacts of homelessness difficult to justify. Under this political climate, internal departmental pressure and confusion regarding Council’s new legislative direction, the LNTPEH pilot ended prior to scheduled completion.

Systems Thinking Reflection of PEHLNT Pilot Program

In reviewing the LNTPEH pilot and its discontinuation, I argue that a number of factors contributed to the pilot’s cancellation. Contrary to staff’s initial expectation, the difficulty in pilot continuation was not PEH’s willingness to participate or refusal to adhere to LNT recommendations. LNT participants readily attended LNT workshops and willingly made amendments to their campsites and refuse disposal in order to reduce their footprint, as discussed in the workshops. As the LNT staffers evaluated barriers that led to pilot cancellation, we noticed that larger systems outside of the pilot’s scope had a greater impact on refuse reduction than participants’ behavior.

David Peter Stroh, a leading systems analyst, explains the challenges that can be analyzed with systems thinking. He asks:

Why do seemingly well-intentioned policies produce the opposite of what they are supposed to accomplish? If you look closely at these solutions and many other stories of failed social policies, they have similar characteristics. They:

• Address symptoms rather than underlying problems.
• Seem obvious and often succeed in the short run.
• Achieve short-term gains that are undermined by longer-term impacts.
• Produce negative consequences that are unintentional.
• Lead us to assume that we are not responsible for the problem’s recurrence. (2011 p.13)

Elements of these characteristics can be observed from the current departmental policy towards PEH as well as specific barriers to pilot implementation. Donella Meadows in *Thinking in Systems* describes systems as “an interconnected set of elements that are coherently organized in a way that achieves something (2012)”. For example, our conventional eviction process is one system. PARD and AWPD staff, cleaning contractors and law enforcement all work together in order to mobilize an eviction system. This system is intended to reduce the impact of PEH to public land, manage areas for recreation and natural resources protection and ultimately stop illicit camping.

Stroh expands on Meadow’s definition with systems thinking which is defined as the “ability to understand the interconnections in such a way to achieve a desired result (16)”. Stroh and Meadow both point to systems as interconnected elements that work together to achieve *something*; systems thinking is the ability to understand, change or create conditions within a system to achieve a *desired result*. By examining the LNTPEH pilot from a systems thinking lens, the challenges observed during the pilot point to larger systemic trends. Analysis of these trends could assist the department in creating a system-wide response that achieves the intended purpose of staff and resource mobilization. We observed that many actions intended to assist in the reduction of camping on public land, such as the conventional eviction process, serve to exacerbate the problem public land managers are attempting to solve.
System Archetypes

Systems theorists use common archetypes to analyze complex problems. This discussion focuses on three specific systems archetypes as a method of dissection: *Fixes that Backfire*, *Shifting Burden* and *Accidental Adversaries*. Archetypes are discernible patterns in system behavior. Archetypes do not represent the actual problem; theorists suggest that archetypes “describe families of problems generically. Their value comes from the insights they offer into the dynamic interaction of complex systems” (Braun, n.d., p. 25). All systems archetypes are a series of inter-related cycles that give feedback to an overall system that eventually accomplishes a purpose. I will also discuss the causes of the above archetypes within the LNTPEH pilot and offer mitigating efforts to these archetypes.

**Fixes that Backfire**

*Fixes that Backfire*, as described by Stroh, are solutions that appear to work in the short-term but that exacerbate the problem instead. (Stroh, 2015). Quick fixes are often adopted because they are easier to implement, cheaper in the short-term and usually have easily discernable outcomes. The conventional PARD eviction response is an example of this archetype (Figure 2).

When camps are initially established and reported to land managers, several responding processes happen—notifications are issued by parks staff, law enforcement responds with criminal trespass notices, warrants are checked, arrests are made, and, if needed, forceful removal. Once a camp is vacant, public land managers organize clean-ups using internal staff or a contractor. The timing and ability of managers to quickly clean cleared camps varies based on staff and equipment availability. Camps are rarely cleared immediately after eviction. Whether or
not a camp is cleared immediately or weeks after eviction, the former camp shows continued signs of habitation. Damaged vegetation widened social trails and continued human waste deposits demonstrate consistent use of these sites. Disturbed areas, we observed, can become inhabited quickly by the same PEH or a different party. Post-eviction camps become larger as they become re-inhabited. Each subsequent eviction and staff interaction during evictions results in more PEH reporting missing important belongings, such as identification, social security cards, transportation cards, medication and other valuables. This displacement makes it more difficult for service providers to find PEHs who have taken coordinated assessments or who are scheduled for follow-up services. As a result, PEH’s are further distanced from permanent housing.

Due to larger systemic shortages of affordable housing, PEH often end up back on public land close to their original camp. Frequently evicted camps often become harder to find, moving deeper into protected areas to avoid further eviction. Public land managers—following the conventional eviction response—continue to evict and consequently, thereby moving eviction processes into deeper areas. On the surface, this cycle of eviction and re-habitation may seem harmless but over time this cycle spreads the impact of PEH on parkland and intensifies both the situation of PEH and the mitigating efforts of public and managers.

Camps in deeper areas that are more difficult to detect still exhibit the problematic behaviors and refuse of camps closer to services. Camps closer to trail systems and roadways have easier access to bathrooms, clean water, social service providers, transportation and medical services. By moving further into protected areas, access to these elements are disconnected or strained. Bathrooms are replaced by unburied latrine-style areas; trash is usually heaped into a pile for disposal as opposed to readily accessible receptacles. Open fire also becomes more
problematic in deeper camps, now surrounded by thick vegetative fuel. The location of a fire determines how first-responders take action. Wildland backcountry fires and small-scale front country fire suppression is particularly difficult and dangerous due to terrain, vegetation and access for fire equipment.

In the short term, the conventional eviction process appears to work. Community members and managers see immediate results after the eviction and clean up. When examined over time, the *Fixes the Backfire* archetype points to the aforementioned affects. *Fixes that Backfire* occur because:

People implement a quick fix to reduce a problem symptom that works in the short run (B1)... however, the quick fix also creates long-term unintended consequences that exacerbate the problem symptom over time (R2). Moreover, people do not recognize these negative consequences as deriving from the quick fix because of the time delay. Therefore, when the symptom returns, they incorrectly assume that the solution is the implement *more* of the quick fix (Figure 5). (Stroh 53)

Stroh argues that a time delay contributes to the perpetuation of this archetype. The conventional eviction process—the quick fix—initially clears the illicit camp but when examined over time, this process eventually pushes some PEH further away from service providers and deeper into parkland areas exacerbating the effect of the camp on public land and straining relationships between public land managers and PEH. Figure 5 demonstrates the processes of the *Fixes that Backfire* archetype.
Recognizing this system archetype points to possible mitigating efforts. First, analyzing this trend over time will allow managers to fully understand the extent of this trend and identify potential areas for a more targeted response outside of the conventional eviction process. Second, tracking staff hours, dollars allocated towards clean-up and revegetation efforts and partnering with service providers to better understand the effects of eviction and service disruption could assist in informing PARD’s response. Third, building relationships with PEH could limit problematic behavior by leveraging a common stewardship ethic, such as LNT programming. In many initial discussions with PEH on public land, people often share information about their
campsite selection rationale; some important factors were safety, access to bus routes and food, proximity to water and bathrooms. PEH also shared information about the conditions on site when managers were not present. These discussions provide valuable information for system-wide analysis regarding which public lands are attractive, why and where future support services (tangential to public land) can be located. This also provides a relational foundation for managers and PEH to discuss site protection and LNT principles.

LNTPEH pilot was designed to engage multiple systems within this archetype to mitigate the long-term consequences of housing shortages and illicit camping. LNT workshops, regardless of camp locations, can impart valuable land ethic and low impact techniques that PEH can apply across a wide range of site locations. The accompanying LNTPEH strategic plan outlines the importance of relationships as a possible mitigating factor to camp refuse and problematic site behaviors.

**Shifting Burden**

The *Shifting Burden* archetype occurs when quick fixes are relied upon over time, becoming the primary symptomatic response to a problem (Figure 6). When this occurs, the reliance on quick fixes depletes critical resources needed to respond to the issue systemically (Stroh 2015 and Braun 2002). This was observed throughout interdepartmental meetings between AWPD and PARD. During LNTPEH interdepartmental staff meetings, two other proposed projects aimed solely on trash collection competed for resources with the LNTPEH
pilot. The Violet Bag\textsuperscript{8} program, a spin-off project from the LNTPEH pilot, became the leading topic of discussion within staff meetings in order to show quick measurable results to City Council in order justify future funding (City of Austin, 2019).

In addition to the Violet Bag program, AWPD and PARD also diverted staff to work on securing a pilot contractor for more frequent clean-up on high-profile visible areas. These two programs, proposed in tandem during the LNTPEH pilot, were at the expense of deeper systemic responses, a common trait of the \textit{Shifting Burden} archetype. The LNTPEH pilot required staff to interact more frequently with PEH, learn and understand barriers to housing, navigate social services and to directly recognize systemic issues. Trash collection through the Violet Bag program and securing contractors for more frequent clean-ups is a much easier task for managers but in the long-run, this solution only addresses the symptom of trash and not larger systems around homelessness. Stroh explains that:

\begin{quote}
In the short run, the success of the quick fix, which is easier of the two alternatives, creates temporary improvements in the symptoms, which in turn, undermines people’s modification to implement the more fundamental solution… One common way in which this ability is reduced is the quick fix consumes resources (people, time and money) that would otherwise be available to solve the problem more fundamentally. (Stroh, p. 56, 2015)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{8} The Violet Bag program is a trash collection pilot that places trash from PEH on public land in violet bags to be collected for disposal within the City of Austin’s waste stream.
Over time, as the Violet Bag program and PEH camp clean-up projects dominated internal meetings. The LNTPEH pilot often competed for funding and staff resource allocations and eventually became less of a focus for the interdepartmental pilot team. Ironically, most staff members agreed that trash collection and securing contractors was not a systemic solution and LNTPEH pilot was more difficult to implement because of the systems surrounding homelessness.

FIGURE 6. This diagram from Peter Stroh’s *Systems Thinking for Social Change* illustrates the Shifting Burden Archetype. Here B1 shows a quick fix that works in the short term by addressing the symptoms of a dysfunctional system but not the more fundamental solutions. B2 shows that the more fundamental solution is jeopardized by the long-term side effects of applying the quick fix over time (R3). Over time this results in the depletion of resources (time, energy, money etc.) to pursue long term fundamental solutions.
Accidental Adversaries

*Accidental Adversaries* occurs “when partners take independent action to improve their own individual goals [and] each of their actions jeopardizes the success of the others. In essence, parties A and B create *Fixes that Backfire* on themselves by making life more difficult to the partner that could potentially help them” (Stroh p 62 2015). Each entity works independently to maximize their part of a system, but by maximizing in isolation, they jeopardize each other’s success, accidentally turning them from partners into adversaries (Figure 7). Through systems thinking, we see that maximizing each individual part does not necessarily maximize the whole or accomplish shared goals. Accidental adversaries were observed on three levels within the

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**FIGURE 7. SYSTEMS DIAGRAM OF ACCIDENTAL ADVERSARIES ARCHETYPE**

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**FIGURE 5.** This diagram from Peter Stroh’s *Systems Thinking for Social Change* illustrates the Accidental Adversaries Archetype. Here we see that both parties A and B are taking actions independently to maximize their own results (B2) which jeopardizes the success of the other party R4. Over time both parties *threaten* the individual success of the other inadvertently which also exacerbates the problem with increased time.
NTPEH pilot: (1) Interdepartmental Accidental Competition (2) within the pilot’s implementation, (3) as observed through PARD’s organizational structure.

The initial LNTPEH pilot started from an interdepartmental working group comprised primarily of AWPD and PARD. Although both departments experience the impact of homelessness on public land, their departmental funding mechanism allocated by City Council differs drastically. PARD’s budget is allocated through the General Fund. This essentially means that they only receive a portion of the General Budget of the city and are not a revenue generating department. AWPD, on the other hand, is a revenue generating department, and has the ability to collect money and adjust budgets to respond to increased management challenges such as homelessness. Neither department, at the beginning of the LNTPEH pilot, had budget allocations directed towards responding to PEH and the associated environmental impacts. When City Council allocated funding directed towards the interdepartmental working group, each department sought to use the funding in a way that maximized efforts on their respective properties. This Accidental Adversarial relationship inhibited true cross-departmental collaboration because each department prioritized their own need over a collaborative response.

During the site selection phase of the LNTPEH pilot, members of the interdepartmental team would scout locations for potential sites. One pilot sought to reuse single-use hygiene products by collecting them from the hospitality industry in order to redistribute them to PEH. While this is an innovative idea, it is adversarial to LNT ethics and the overall goal of reducing the amount of refuse on site. Although members of the team were all working to reduce impacts, introducing single-use plastic hygiene products increases the amount of refuse on site, making compliance to LNT principles more difficult by expanding the amount of refuse through single-use plastics. On a larger scale, it is important to note that a lot of the refuse that we observe
comes from non-profit free meal services seeking to end hunger. Hunger is an important factor, and no one should be hungry. The packaging found in these specific food distribution systems contributes to more refuse found on site.9

**Accidental Adversaries** were also observed in PARD’s hierarchical organizational structure. During the course of the LNTPEH pilot, PARD leadership created an environmental program coordinator over the department’s response to PEH. While this is a departmental response, it is unclear if this response will lead towards progress. Prior to the creation of this position, individual sites and employees would respond to homelessness *locally* and *personally* in the absence of clear direction. While this is problematic, one benefit to this open structure is that more staff are focused on responses and more of PARD’s system is engaged. Local and diffuse responses resulted in more managers invested in responding to PEH. 10

Concentrating PARD’s response into a single-point-of-contact (SPOC) has resulted in less participation department-wide in creating innovative solutions to homelessness’ impact on public land.11 Additionally, concentrating our efforts towards homelessness into a SPOC resulted in internal competition between pilot projects. Ideally, these pilot projects should work together. Systemically, due to the hierarchical organizational structure of PARD, local programs were forced to compete as adversaries as opposed to collaborating synergistically. The LNTPEH pilot and the interdepartmental working group are both results of an open structure where employees

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9 *The LNTPEH Strategic plan* covers the use of the private sector or nonprofit sector in engagement about recyclable and biodegradable food containers.

10 Prior to the creation of a SPOC, managers were responsible for evictions, directing services, allowing access to facilities etc. based on their own discretion. This also means that managers less favorable to the plight of PEH could respond in negative ways with relative impunity. In the absence of a policy, the responsibility was shared but an ideal, uniformed response could not be implemented.

11 Since the creation of the SPOC position, there has been a decrease of inter/intra-departmental working groups regarding PEH in current responses lie solely with the park rangers and the SPOC.
responded outside of their organizational chain-of-command to find solutions to PEH on public land.

Better systemic analysis may lead to more efficient use of PARD resources and collaboration across different sectors, departments and industries. Systems thinking and close examination of archetypes may not only reduce the refuse and degradation associated with PEH on public land but also illuminate common pitfalls of conventional responses. The LNTPEH pilot and accompanying LNTPEH Strategic Plan integrates many of these systemic and archetypical insights into action items for the department’s consideration.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on the aforementioned systems archetypes and the resulting analysis, I posit that the City of Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department should consider the following recommendations:

- Use the *LNTPEH Strategic Plan* as a framework to begin a systems analysis of current conditions
- Identify small-scale projects to mitigate for systems archetypes
- Mandate holistic system engagement by establishing a policy and organizational cultural expectation that addressing the impacts of PEH and directing PEH to social services is required of all supervisory level staff and above
- Provide training for staff in systems analysis and in navigating interactions with PEH
• Procure an outside consultant versed in systems thinking and analysis in order to facilitate a more robust discussion and action plan addressing PEH and the associated impacts to parkland

Specific recommendations and action items are outlined in the *LNTPEH Strategic Plan*. This document is designed to facilitate and outline a framework towards meaningful and impactful discussion concerning public land access and PARD’s role in addressing homelessness. A larger department-wide engagement and feedback plan, facilitated by a systems consultant, may provide critical insights into how to avoid *Fixes that Backfire, Shifting Burden* and *Accidental Adversaries* archetypes that typically impede true departmental goals. Other systems archetypes were not addressed within the scope of this argument but a competent systems thinking consultant with experience in applying systems thinking to complex social situations may be able to identify specific points of improvement. The City of Austin’s Parks and Recreation department’s mission is “inspire Austin to learn, play, protect and connect by creating diverse programs and experiences in sustainable natural spaces and public places” (p. 2, 2019). This mission of inspiration includes PEH. By leveraging resources that engage PEH in stewardship activities around LNT principles accomplishes this mission through deliberate action. The role of PARD is to protect public land and PARD has an opportunity to strengthen programming through the integration of community members into the management process. I hope the end of this pilot project signals the beginning of a new paradigm shift, not only in our response to how we think about and engage systems but also in how we address and end homelessness.
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United States of America. Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b)
Appendix

Examples of Conventional Leave No Trace Recreational Message and LNTPEH Adaptations

(LNT 2020)

- Traditional Recreational Message
  - Evaluate recreation equipment prior to use
  - Research weather, terrain, special regulations
  - Evaluate skills and abilities of group prior to embarking on a trip (LNT, 2020)

- Modification to LNT
  - Advise about upcoming weather/storms forecasted that may impact safety—direct to shelter services
    - Advise of possible heat advisory—direct to food services inform about heat illnesses
  - Advise of alternative low impact to large home furniture within camp—advise on tree protection for hammock use.
Principle 2: Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Traditional Recreational Message
  - Choosing locations of high use for camp set up
  - Location of campsites away from water bodies
  - Staying on trail to reduce impacts to undisturbed areas
  - Comparison of the durability different travel surfaces in a game (rock, gravel, dirt, mud etc.) (LNT, 2020)
- Modification to LNT
  - Examination of onsite social trail with increased use and habitation
  - Examination of previous photographs of site to see impact over time
  - Examination of onsite erosion due to frequent foot traffic and how this impact flooding onsite
  - Discussion of site’s location to water bodies, advise about potential flooding in areas due to camp location.

Principle 3: Dispose of Waste Properly

- Traditional Recreational Message
  - Disposal of human waste based on front country, backcountry and climate/ecosystem restrictions
- Location, depth and proper creation of “cat holes” for defecation in remote areas
- Removal of all other waste from back or front country setting, basic information of the impact of waste in natural areas
- Removal of other waste type from recreational sites

**Modification to LNT**
- Included the traditional recreation message
- Disposal of hypodermic needles, condoms and other human waste related to the urban environment.
- Location of nearest restroom and hours of access to avoid onsite defecation and urination.
- Education of pet and human waste impact on water quality
- Flammability of fuel commonly found onsite (gasoline containers, Coleman propane canisters) and proper disposal methods
- Location of publicly accessible recycling receptacles for plastic and other common recycled materials
- Hazards of drinking untreated open standing water in an urban setting
- Partner with the Harm Reduction Coalition for disposable sharps containers and safety education

**Traditional Recreational Message**
- Minimizing impact to vegetation and wildlife
- Leave cultural artifacts and leave natural objects for nature

**Modification to LNT**
- Advise of cultural importance of location to community and impacts of illegal camping
- Impacts to landscape that degrade landscape and methods for reporting or discouraging degrading behavior (such as graffiti)
- Lessons on wildlife onsite and needs of habitat found in landscape
- Point out illegal cutting found onsite and advise of environmental and park impacts
• Traditional Recreational Message
  o Fire vs stove comparison
  o When to build a fire
  o Types of fire and associated impacts
  o Fire impacts
  o Fire Safety

• Modification to LNT
  o Includes traditional lessons
  o Education on local fire ban due to dough conditions and increased vegetation flammability
  o enforcement of fire prohibition by extinguishing fires found onsite.
  o Education on the hazards of open and unattended fires
  o Advise on location of food services to avoid need for cook fires, if available

• Traditional Recreational Message
  o Keeping a safe distance from wildlife while traveling and camping
  o Hazards of sick or wounded animals
Effects of stressful interactions on wildlife with humans

- **Modification to LNT**
  - Included traditional recreational message
  - Site specific information about wildlife found onsite through wildlife monitoring projects
  - Conversations about what animals are frequently observed by PEH on parkland after hours.
  - Effects of unsecured food on wildlife behaviors, mosquito, red fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) frequently found as a nuisance onsite.

- **Traditional Recreational Message**
  - Typical recreational transportation patterns of use (example: hikers yield to equestrian users while bikers yield to both hikers and horse riders)
  - Effects of uncontrolled pets and excessive noise level on recreational experiences

- **Modification to LNT**
  - Review of frequent complaints from residents and park patrons near illegal camping areas (excessive noise, trash level and illicit activities)
  - Examples of activities onsite that could be disrespectful to park patrons and possibly result in eviction and negative interactions with law enforcement, code compliance or other enforcement-oriented agencies.
  - Review of the effects of detrimental site behaviors to site specific wildlife (Leave No Trace, 2020)
# Leave No Trace Assessment

Date: __________ Observers: ____________________________ Start Time: _______ End Time: _______

Location (address, tract name, gps coordinates): ____________________________________________

Was this camp entered into ARC COLLECTOR? □ Yes □ No

## Part 1. Seven Principle Evaluation

### A. Plan Ahead and Prepare—where does this camp fall on the PARD prioritization scale?

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<th>4</th>
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</table>

### A. Plan Ahead and Prepare—how many people are living in the camp?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>Present, Not Significant</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Abundant</th>
<th>Extremely Abundant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</table>

### B. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces—has the site been significantly altered?

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<tr>
<th>None</th>
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<th>Significant</th>
<th>Abundant</th>
<th>Extremely Abundant</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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</table>

| No signs of camp activity | Camp present but has a small footprint and no alteration of vegetation. Site minimally visible | Site is visible from trail or access points, has visibly altered vegetation, fire contained with small foot print | Fire ring present, some removal of vegetation, no shelter | Site has significant evidence of alteration such as: clearing site, large structures, obvious removal of vegetation, evidence of uncontrolled or unmonitored fire |

Score for potential water quality impacts in creek, add scores from Part 1A, 1B, 1C:

____□ High: total of >21 or a ten in one or more category

____□ Medium: total of 9-20 or a seven, eight or nine in one or more category

____□ Low: total of <8
**Part 2. Dispose of Waste Properly**

### A. Potential for human enteric bacteria contamination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Circumstantial Evidence</th>
<th>Apparent</th>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>No physical/circumstantial evidence of contamination</td>
<td>Contained/secured excrement or soiled toilet paper not easily mobilized by storm water</td>
<td>Easily mobilized excrement or soiled toilet paper (uncontaminated or contained)</td>
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</table>

### B. Evidence of pollutant container (e.g. chemical/battery/oil/solvent/pesticide/paint/etc)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present, Not Significant</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Abundant</th>
<th>Extremely Abundant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>No presence of containers/items that currently do, or would normally have pollutants</td>
<td>An empty container/item or two, but no apparent contribution, − OR − low potential of chemical contaminants past or present (score higher if close to creek)</td>
<td>Several containers/items, with no apparent contribution of chemicals, but a clear potential of contribution of chemicals past or present (score higher if close to creek)</td>
<td>Clear and present pollutant contribution from containers or items, but only a small amount such as residue (score higher if close to creek)</td>
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</table>

### C. Miscellaneous trash (all items including above parameters)

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<th>Extremely Abundant</th>
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<tr>
<td>No litter present</td>
<td>Occasional items throughout, but there are no pockets of accumulated litter (score higher if close to creek)</td>
<td>Litter is not contiguous but is evident throughout OR − very little litter throughout but with a few small pockets of accumulation (score higher if close to creek)</td>
<td>Almost contiguous litter throughout with a few gaps OR − litter is not contiguous but with some large pockets of accumulation (score higher if close to creek)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score for potential water quality impacts in creek, add scores from Part 2A, 2B, 2C:

- □ High: total of >21 or a ten in one or more category
- □ Medium: total of 12-20 or a seven, eight or nine in one or more category
- □ Low: total of <11
### A. Respect Wildlife and Pet Care

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<td>pets onsite</td>
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### A. Be Considerate of Other Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Mitigation Action Needed</th>
<th>Apparent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No complaints of</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loud noise reported,</td>
<td>Loud noises, non-courteous behavior,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noise of</td>
<td></td>
<td>minor complaints from</td>
<td>frequent complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-courteous</td>
<td></td>
<td>neighbors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>behavior</td>
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### Requested Materials to Comply with LNT:

### Site Restrictions/Considerations:

### Site Participants: (6 max)

1)
2)
3)
4)
5)
6)
The following *LNTPEH Strategic plan* should serve as a framework for PARD or other agencies to address the effects of PEH on public land. This framework is specific for the City of Austin and is designed to engage multiple stakeholders within the systems surrounding PEH and public land management.

**Strategic Plan:**
Leave No Trace Programming with People Experiencing Homelessness on City of Austin Parkland

By

LaJuan D. Tucker
City of Austin
Parks and Recreation
Natural Resources Division
The mission of the City of Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department (COAPARD) is to “inspire Austin to learn, play, protect and connect by creating diverse programs and experiences in sustainable natural spaces and public places” (City of Austin, 2015). PARD manages over 300 parks and 22,000 acres of public land. Austin’s unprecedented growth exacerbates the challenge of providing affordable housing and gainful employment, resulting in increased unauthorized camps on public land. PARD’s land management and programmatic goals require employees to interact with people experiencing homelessness (PEH) daily. Current PARD response includes reactive clean-up efforts, which further exacerbates environmental degradation and destabilizes PEH by disconnecting them from established social services and support networks.

Leave No Trace (LNT) is a land ethic, comprised of seven principles, designed by the Center for Outdoor Ethics (LNT, 2020) to reduce the impact of recreational activities on public land. The City of Austin’s Leave No Trace (LNT) pilot project was designed by a team of parks employees to use the seven principles of Leave No Trace as an alternative response to immediate relocation and reactive cleanup efforts when unauthorized camps are found on public land. LNT principles can be used to deemphasize safe camps and stabilize PEH while social services work to find housing and support.

The Leave No Trace with People Experiencing Homelessness program (LNTPEH) adapts the LNT recreational model to reduce the impacts of camps, build relationships around land stewardship and stabilize PEH on public land who are compliant with LNT principles. Identified camps are visited by LNT educators and social service providers, assessed based on the size, contents and the willingness of participants to engage in education workshops. If a camp is deemed low risk, instead of immediate eviction, LNT educators conduct a series of educational workshops and provide tools—such as appropriate trash disposal and fire education—and connections to social services. As workshops are conducted, participants are monitored for gradual compliance with LNT principles, reduction of waste within campsites and willful interactions with social service providers. The goal of this project is to use public land as a temporary transitional space for PEH until more permanent housing can be secured, encourage stewardship activities at pilot locations and increase positive interactions between PEH and surrounding residents. This strategic plan is designed with both an internal and external audience
in mind and further discussion of audience and key messages are outlined in the communication section of this strategic plan.

**Mission, Vision, Values**

**Vision:**
Leave No Trace with People Experiencing Homelessness (LNTPEH) protects parkland as a foundation to build inclusive communities grounded in compassion, equity, accountability and stewardship.

**Mission:**
The Mission of LNTPEH is to facilitate COA PARD staff and people experiencing homelessness to jointly care for public spaces and remove barriers to public land access.

**Values:**
Community: We believe that community is a constantly evolving identity that must include the most marginalized.

Equity: We believe that some have more than others but that all can help someone.

Stewardship: We believe that all can protect public land for future generations

Accountability: We believe that people should be accountable for their actions and work to resolve any action that takes away from others.

This LNT PEH Pilot strategic plan is needed in order to:
• Develop a plan to leverage recreational capital toward chronic causes of homelessness and the associated environmental impact to recreational lands.

• Identify broad stakeholders who could benefit from and contribute to this program

• Reconcile PARD’s mission with the current practice of mass relocation without engagement by developing a communication plan to manage internal and external public perception of PEH’s use of public land.

Stakeholder Analysis

Internal Stakeholders
PEH pilot participants—current and past participants who are/were enrolled in the LNTPEH at pilot locations.

Parks and Recreation Department Executive Team—PARD Director and Assistant Directors specifically operational Assistant Director and Natural Resource and Nature Based Programming assistant directors and division managers

Land Holding City of Austin Departments such as Austin Energy, Watershed Protection Department, Austin Water Department

External
External stakeholders can be categorized into three broader categories: Passive park Users, Active Park Users, Regulating Bodies and Service Providers. The below section will define each stakeholder and the stake they would have in this LNT with PEH program and their potential partnership or power to have a significant impact on the execution of the LNT PEH program.

12Recreational capital in this context means energy, resources, funding, attention and public power leveraged through the civic engagement process that determines the use of public land for conservation and recreational purposes.
The delineation of these groups is not concrete but often fluid and individual members of the public are often a part of many of these categories simultaneously.

**Passive Park Users**
Passive park users are members of the public who may visit pilot locations or areas with frequent camps or presence of PEH. This group may become active park users and could belong to either the corporate or NGO group but generally does not have a large impact on parkland management or civil actions (such as boards and commissions or city council meetings. Passive park users can have an impact on the overall conversation about PEH within the City of Austin and drive complaints or initiatives that City of Austin must respond to but does not give reoccurring feedback (such as frequent 3-1-1 calls about a single location).

**Active Park Users**
Active parks user are volunteers, Adopt-A-Park Group or other organizations that have an impact on park maintenance, funding and rulemaking outcomes. This group often participates in civic action such as parks boards meetings or general council and community meetings to collectively give feedback to parks and recreation practices.

**Regulating Entities**

- **City of Austin Council**—this is the primary regulating body for the municipal rule and law making within the City of Austin. This body approves or denies budgets related to homelessness, parks and recreation funding and changes to municipal ordinances and rules that impact enforcement efforts for sit and lie ordinances. Council governs the ability for police and municipal departments to evict or arrest PEH for overnight camping or loitering on public property.

- **Parks and Recreation Board**—this board is comprised of community members appointed by Council that act as an oversight body with the PARD Director and City Manager. Parks Board gives feedback and comment about any new initiative undertaken that has a significant impact on parkland use, funding or future outcomes of parks strategic plans.
Corporate Partners

These are potential stakeholders that can be identified specifically at a later phase within the communications and strategic plan but bares mentioning. Ideal partners are recreational stores, local food markets or other local companies that are impacted by homelessness. REI, a local outdoor store, could be identified as a potential partner that lends and disposes of large amounts of recreational equipment that LNTPEH participants could use.

Organizational Structure

The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (COA PARD) is delineated into four total divisions with a single director who reports to City of Austin Council, Parks Board and Assistant City Manager. Local departmental decisions are approved by the director and executive team. The executive team consists of four assistant directors. LNTPEH would be under centralized programming within the Natural Resources Division. Currently, this division consists of five main components: Environmental Centers, Park Rangers, Forestry and Garden and Preserves (See Parks and Recreation and Natural Resources Division LNTPEH proposed staff Organizational Charts in Appendix). The purpose of this division is to apply and teach natural resource conservation and responsible recreation. Each section of the Natural Resources Division is comprised of four Program Managers who are ultimately responsible for budget monitoring and resource allocation for their

This diagram shows differences between open/adaptive/collaboration compared to closed/traditional/hierarchy organization and communication. Although PARD’s organizational style is traditionally closed, LNTPEH programming would encourage an open adaptive style by incorporating open communications into the future design of LNTPEH programming. (Constantine 1993)
respective areas. As a municipal entity, COAPARD is organized in a hierarchical manner and has many attributes associated with hierarchal paradigms as outlined by Constantine 1993. The graph below shows the relationship between four organizational paradigms. The structure of COAPARD fits within a traditional hierarchy paradigm where communication and reporting are organized in a gradable manner. In this organizational structure hierarchies can discourage communications, create silos within direct chain of commands and stifle interdivisional and departmental collaboration.

Increased volume of PEH on parkland and increased political scrutiny of homelessness in Austin has increased encouragement for working groups and divisions to work towards more open and adaptive paradigms. The origins of the LNTPEH program and the resulting proposed changes represent a shift from a closed hierarchy to an open adaptive collaborative environment. A new position has recently been added to the program manager level within the Natural Resources Division in order to combine overlapping areas of Natural Resource management and programming related to PEH. This change signifies a bottom-up approach resulting from the initial pilot of the LNTPEH program (See Natural Resources Division Organization Chart in Appendix).

Priorities and any changes to priorities (depending on the scale) are made in collaboration with Executive Director, Director and Division Managers. Since the adoption of the PARD strategic plan, originally launched in 2017 and relaunched in 2019, any new directions or additional priorities will need to be justified by meeting the outlined strategic initiatives within this plan (PARD 2017 and PARD 2018). In 2019, the COAPARD completed the Our Future, Our Parks Long Range plan (LRP). This plan, along with the PARD strategic plan, lists park access as the major theme in community feedback sessions. PARD’s LRP demonstrates that over 50% of community members who participated in feedback sessions felt threatened by the presence of PEH in the park (COA, 2019 p 108). Respondents listed homelessness as one of the top five reasons patrons feel unsafe in parks. While some patrons expressed fear at the presence of homelessness within parks, the LRP also demonstrated that respondents wanted to create a park ambassador program by enlisting the assistance of workforce development programs who partner with PEH (City of Austin, 2019). Any major decisions impacting the strategic plan, LRP or the department are discussed with Parks Board. Parks Board members are directly appointed
by Austin City council members. There are mixed responses amongst the COA council, as well as the community, regarding the relationship between parks and PEH. The LNTPEH program is being discussed within the midst of this debate and could serve as a shift in department response.

Intradenartmental communications regarding changes in direction within PARD is communicated through several mediums (listed from top down communications):

- policy and procedure changes, rolled out through direct memo through the chain of command
- internal trainings to convey to relevant workgroups new procedures relevant to LNTPEH implementation
- article, video or other media on CITYSPACE intranet highlighting changes.

The implementation of LNTPEH would address McKinsey’s seven S’s of organizational change (see appendix McKinsey and Company, 2008).

For the implementation of LNTPEH, the new policy would need to be drafted then communicated through the chain of command. My communication plan includes developing video and internal trainings to ground-level staff about the new policy. We would inform team members who helped to brainstorm the LNTPEH program and staff from the operations division about the new changes. We would allow these team members to inform their own staff.

Specialized LNT workshops would be conducted with the Center for Outdoor Ethics To support implementation. The Center for Outdoor Ethics, a non-profit, researches and teaches low-impact camping and land-use techniques. Grounds staff would participate in LNT workshops related to waste disposal and dissemination of low-impact techniques to PEH. Staff would also attend Mental Health First Aid training.

This diagram demonstrates the adaptive management process. Where design is informed by monitoring evaluation and redesign based on this cycle (Waterman et al)
through Integral Care. As staff are trained, interactions would be monitored by LNT trained staff within respective units in adherence to the prioritization scale and LNT principles. These changes speak to the Structure, Strategy, Skills, Systems within McKinsey’s model. As grounds staff begin to implement the prioritization scale and LNT principles, feedback sessions will be incorporated into staff and team meetings wherein feedback will be solicited about their experiences with the program (McKinsey and Company, 2008). Team leaders and supervisors will bring staff feedback to an internal homelessness working group that will approve and recommend changes as needed. This is an iterative process of feedback adhering to the adaptive management framework. The graph above demonstrates the six steps of adaptive management which incorporates monitoring into future implementation and design of a program. LNT feedback sessions will likewise incorporate future implementation and updates to the prioritization scale for LNTPEH and LNT workshops.

**SWOT Analysis**

An inconsistency between land managers on how to respond to PEH on public land, both internal to and external to PARD, will have an impact on LNT pilot locations. Increased cost of living and fear of PEH within the city will prove challenging. Strategic partnerships outlined below can help to mitigate some of the negative impacts of PEH on public land.

As the cost of living rises, recent changes both in City Council and in the Texas State Legislator could pose risks to existing budgets, challenging LNTPEH as a viable option. This threat could encourage land managers and department directors to prioritize large scale cleaning efforts and the use of hostile infrastructure such as placing elements within a landscape to discourage sleeping or lying, in order to reduce PEH visibility rather than the service approach expressed through LNT with PEH. See Table One in Appendix.

1. Partner with the Office of Innovation and Design to document the stories of participants to share with community members in an effort to combat NIMBY, or Not in My Back Yard.
2. Partner with REI, Whole foods, Whole Earth Provisions and other local ‘green’ business
and NGOs to leverage their reputation, skills and products to reduce cost of LNT supplies and increase profile of program

3. Analyze other potential corporate partners in addition to the ones identified above.
4. Work towards acquiring AmeriCorps positions to supplement pay and incentives for participants when working toward an exit strategy, while enrolled in the Leave No Trace Program.

**Strategy One: Partner with the Office of Innovation and Design (OID) to document the stories of participants to share with community members in order to combat (NIMBY).**

The Office of Innovation and Design (OID) pilots projects for a short amount of time and helps with mapping resources while providing lived experience advisors\(^{13}\) into pilot program design. They also have the staff and expertise to use videos, presentations and other mediums to show the human side of homelessness and its effects on public land. Leveraging their expertise to succinctly tell the story of participants could combat NIMBYism, bring awareness and potential funding to the LNT project. This department has been working with PEH and piloting many projects to find low cost solutions to complex issues like PEH.

**Probability:** High probability of occurring. This partnership exist to some extent already and with just a small amount of effort and planning the OID could easily compile existing material to tell the story of LNT participants to humanize participants and combat NIMBY\(^{14}\).

**Impact:** High impact if occurred. This strategy could help to decrease NIMBYism if it could also highlight community involvement of the LNTPEH project. Community members who have embraced the program and have contributed to the initial phases of this project could serve as a

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\(^{13}\) Lived Experience advisors are people who have or were chronically homeless, who give feedback on programs and initiatives designed to help PEH. Participants are paid for their honest feedback through grocery store gift cards or other means of compensation.

\(^{14}\) NIMBY is a colloquial term for “not in my backyard”, a phenomenon where community members support housing and programs for PEH, just “not in my back yard”. This effect could directly impact pilot locations around COA.
model for other neighbors who have been reluctant to do so and award their behavior with public recognition.

**Opportunity Capture:** Continue partnership with OID for LNTPEH would result in this type of exposure for LNT. Currently an interdepartmental working group is convened weekly. PARD participation and incorporation of this strategic plan could strengthen this partnership and guide outcomes of meetings towards reduction of NIMBY.

**Cost:** Medium cost: this type of project (documentary or video project) can be done in-house with existing staff but may cause other projects to fall to the side or be deprioritized for upcoming projects. If this video is not done well, this could send the wrong message to potential stakeholders and make partnering difficult for the future.

**Implementation:** This can be undertaken with the current staff and current pilot sites without minimal increased cost.

**Strategy Two:** Partner with REI, Whole foods, Whole Earth Provisions and other local ‘green’ business and NGOs to leverage their reputation, skills and products to reduce cost of LNT supplies and increase profile of program.

**Probability:** Low: strategic partnerships with NGOs or for profit “green” business takes a long time to establish within PARD. Any sort of contribution with entitles outside of the city where a current partnership does not exist can take up to a year to draft and finalize with contacts from both entities. PARD does not have an efficient mechanism to streamline partnerships and avoid the perception of impropriety or advocating for private entries.

**Impact:** High impact: if this partnership with REI or NGOs could be established quickly this could mitigate for any immediate shortages of LNT material, backcountry camping gear (LNT) and long-term planning outside of the municipal budget cycle. This relationship could also strengthen pilot locations by bringing in larger partners with a lot of clout within the Austin environmental arena
Opportunity Capture: Start work now with non-profit groups such as Texas Conservation Corps or Texas Parks and Wildlife Department that are NGOs which make partnering a bit simpler. Use strategic partnerships to help leverage for profit ‘green’ businesses (REI) instead of directly working with for profit organizations directly.

Cost: The cost of such a partnership varies and would need more analysis based on who from the department and which NGO or for profit “green” business was targeted.

Implementation: Partnering with businesses is a viable option but would need a long-term outlook to establish strategic partnerships with the Texas Conservation Corps, The Other One’s Foundation and REI. Single projects like It’s My Park Day, National Public Lands Day and National Trails Day are all projects where existing partners are working together on stewardship activities. First, we need to establish projects in which PEH can participate during these days to start the dialogue with these groups about further investment in pilot locations. For additional strategies Strategic Plan Appendix

Strategy Three: Work towards acquiring AmeriCorps positions to supplement pay and incentives for participants when working towards an exit strategy.  

Probability: Low to Medium
Impact: High Impact

Opportunity Capture: Partner with existing AmeriCorps slot host, to avoid managing AmeriCorps positions within individual departments. By reducing the administrative burden of hosting AmeriCorps positions, PARD can rely on existing AmeriCorps positions to host and provide AmeriCorps volunteers for LNT programming

15 AmeriCorps is a network of local, state, and national service programs that connects over 70,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet community needs in education, the environment, public safety, health, and homeland security. AmeriCorps’ members serve with more than 2,000 non-profits, public agencies, and community organizations. (AmeriCorps, 2019)
**Cost:** Depends on the mechanism of acquiring AmeriCorps positions. If we are the host organization the administrative cost could be high but if we rely on NGOs to supply and manage positions the cost could be reduced.

**Implementation:** This is a viable option since there are many host organizations within the City of Austin who currently administer AmeriCorps positions. Strategic partnerships could take some time to establish but the City of Austin has current Master Agreement contracts that are often under used each year. If we can secure a portion of the Master Agreement contract for LNTPEH projects this could provide a job opportunity for community members and LNT participants.

**Strategy Four: PARD budget reductions impact the mission of Park Ranger and Natural Resources Division. There may be some political pressure to shift away from service providers towards enforcement and evictions.**

**Probability:** High—Texas Legislature has capped property tax increases, lowering the threshold of municipal tax increases to 3.5%. PARD is already projecting a budget deficit that will impact normal operational functions. This budgetary impact may force current full-time employees within the Natural Resources Division to focus on eviction and clean-up efforts to show an immediate response to public concerns while ignoring long-term reoccurring impacts to highly effected areas.

**Impact:** Medium—since LNT programming currently does not require additional dedicated full-time staff members, outreach workshops, litter surveys and monitoring efforts could be incorporated into existing staff (rangers and operations staff) with minimal impact to daily routes and duties.

**Risk Mitigation:** Train ranger staff before budget deficits to respond to PEH sites with prioritization scale and LNT materials. Train more Master Educators in LNT principles.

**Cost:** Mitigation cost should be minimal but would require strong leadership and training of staff that does not react impulsively to NIMBY concerns. Rangers who also take evictions into their own hands and not follow procedures should be retrained and each eviction analyzed.
retroactively to ensure standard compliance across work units.

**Implementation:** The risk mitigation technique described above does take time and monitoring by managerial and supervisory staff to document success, failures and potential non-compliance of staff who personally prefer the eviction model over the service model of LNT.

**LNTPEH Communication Plan Goals**

There are several goals to this campaign targeting key stakeholders

1. Introduce and explain LNT with PEH programming to internal stakeholders through LNT workshops, mental health first aid trainings and community workdays at pilot sites.
2. Humanize PEH to internal and external stakeholders creating a conduit for collaboration between internal and external stakeholders (detailed below).

**Key Messages and Themes:**

1. Create empathy and highlight the value of PEH to park land stewardship.
2. Market LNTPEH as a low-cost, low-impact alternative to mass evictions and expensive cleaning contracts.
3. Raise awareness of the environmental impact of homelessness
4. Encourage corporate and NGO sponsorship of pilot locations with donations of recreational equipment and host LNT trainer classes
5. Create support for LNT pilot locations within Parks and Recreation Board and the City of Austin Council, eventually leading to pilot locations at each site. For a list of communications strategies and evaluations methods see appendix.

**Action Plan:**

1. Complete initial draft communication plan and strategic plan Spring 2020
2. Presentation of Strategic Plan to PARD Natural Resources Division Manager
3. Incorporate feedback and questions from executive team

4. LNT workshops with PEH on parkland
References


City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. Revised Strategic Plan 2017-2021


Glossary of Terms with LNTPEH Strategic Plan

COA=City of Austin
LNT=Leave No Trace
LNTPEH or LNT with PEH =Leave No Trace with People Experiencing Homelessness
LRP=Long Range Plan
NIMBY=Not in My Back Yard
NGO=Non-governmental Organizations
PARD=Parks and Recreation Department
PEH=People Experiencing Homelessness
OID=Office of Innovation and Design
SWOT=Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats
Appendix

Parks and Recreation Organizational Chart

(City of Austin, 2019)

This organizational chart taken from the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department internal documents. COA PARD is organized in a hierarchal manner, but the LNTPEH program would foster communication outside of the normal chain of command in order to solicit feedback from internal stakeholders.
The hiring of the now vacant Environmental Conservation Program Manager Position is critical to LNT implementation but each division should still participate in finding systemic solutions to PEH on public land.

(City of Austin, 2019)

City of Austin Parks and Recreation—Natural Resources Division—Proposed staff for LNTPEH program administration.

(City of Austin, 2019)

This chart shows the reporting structure of key staff members who are prosed to work on environmental management and homelessness, the Leave No Trace Program with People
Experiencing Homelessness would be housed within this structure under an Environmental Program Coordinator Position and to report to an Environmental Program Manager for feedback to the executive team and Director.

Table One—This figure shows the SWOT analysis identifying threats and responding strategies
| Key to acronyms: PARD—parks and recreation, PEH—people experiencing homelessness, LNT—leave no trace, NIMBY—Not in my backyard | Opportunities: What trends could help us?  
1. Leveling off of the Austin real estate market  
2. Increased focus on use of public land/municipal aid as a vehicle to help PEH  
3. Increased cost of contractors for cleaning but no effort to mitigate recidivism within unauthorized camps  
4. Differences of eviction policies among land managers and park district managers | Threats: What trends may have a negative impact?  
1. Increased cost of living  
2. City council reintroduction of sit lie ordinance indicating less liberal policies for innovative ideas to PEH.  
3. Over time reduced budget for parks and recreation and an increase in demand rangers or other staff to act as PEH enforcement as opposed to service providers.  
4. Increased NIMBY sentiment in quickly gentrifying neighborhoods.  
5. Inconsistent police response and training to PEH in pilot locations  
6. Public perception that programs designed to decrease homelessness will increase the likelihood of people going homeless to take advantage of programs |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths: What do we do well?</th>
<th>Domination Strategies</th>
<th>Confrontation Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide outreach to PEH by integrating into an existing program.</td>
<td>1. approach district manager and land managers for alternative funding sources to address PEH impacts in their district</td>
<td>1. Partner with the office of innovation and design to document story of participants to share with community members to combat (NIMBY).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Low cost of implementation due to the use of LNT material and resources.</td>
<td>2. concentrate PEH use to a single location (s) instead of spread throughout the district (each district has one or two LNT sites)</td>
<td>2. Partner with REI, Whole foods, Whole Earth Provisions and other local ‘green’ business and NGOs to leverage their reputation, skills and products to reduce cost of LNT supplies and increase profile of program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. work within the Natural Resources division to standardize response to PEH with LNT</td>
<td>3. help advocate for increase budget items for district managers and land mangers around services to PEH during budget cycle</td>
<td>3. Partner with police with district representative or partner with Travis County Constable for a more consistent response</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Weaknesses: What can we improve?</th>
<th>Mitigation Strategies</th>
<th>Minimization Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Connections to services offered to PEH that we interact with on public land.</td>
<td>1. partner with Integral Care to provide long term support for case management</td>
<td>1. apply for LNT hot spot funding for pilot sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stewardship component of LNT with PEH programs</td>
<td>2. partner with Texas Conservation Corps and other land stewardship NGOs to run service projects</td>
<td>2. apply to urban forest grant program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increased community integration of projects, success stories and community events.</td>
<td>3. partner with TNC, Master Naturalist and volunteer NGO groups to teach stewardship and monitoring activities.</td>
<td>3. apply for TPWD Coop grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Work towards acquiring AmeriCorps positions to supplement pay and incentives for participants when working to an exit strategy</td>
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This chart shows the seven S’s of McKinsey’s organizational change model. The Shared Values discussed in the PARD strategic plan is incorporated into the design LNTPEH strategic plan. Using the existing structure, staff and amending skills LNT could fit into the Natural Resources Division with PARD (McKinsey and Company, 2008)
Evaluation Methods for Key Messages in LNTPEH Communications Plan

1. Create documentary project like Humans of New York share with internal and external stakeholders
   a. Monitor views and comments on YouTube or similar platform
   b. Send to key stakeholders such as parks board members for feedback

3. Create presentation and policy memo to City of Austin Parks Board and City of Austin Council members highlighting the human and environmental cost of unmanaged camps
   a. Monitor feedback during council meetings and request or additional meetings, updates or highlights

4. Create presentation and policy memo to City of Austin Parks Board and the City of Austin Council members highlighting the human and environmental cost of unmanaged camps
   a. Give feedback survey to council and internal stakeholders after presentation

YouTube Videos:
The goal of the social media strategy would be to address messages 1-3 through two methods. First a series of documentaries similar to “Humans of New York” to bring empathy and to show lived experience of causes of homelessness and careers and positions held by people who use public land as temporary homes (ex: construction worker in preserve, former architect eviction, a survivor of domestic abuse, children, members of the LGBTQ who left home at an early age). The goal would be to evaluate comments left on video posts categorized as either negative or positive towards stories of PEH.

Schedule of Postings: Posting schedule would depend greatly on the number of stories collected with permission of participants. The goal would be to showcase stories of PEH at pilot sites (locations obscured).
SAMPLE MEMO for LNTPEH
To: City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department Natural Resources Division Manager, City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board, The City of Austin Environmental Commission
Cc: City of Austin Council and Mayor Steve Adler
From: LaJuan Tucker, Supervisor Parks and Recreation Natural Resources Division
Title: Environmental and Social Impact of Homelessness on Public Land: Leave No Trace as a Temporary Alternative to Displacement.

Executive summary:
The City of Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the south. With this unprecedented growth, the challenge of providing affordable housing and gainful employment means that more people are using public land as a temporary home. The impact of homelessness to communities and to the environment shows an increase of illegal camps for individuals without permanent
housing. Current department responses include reactive clean-up efforts that exacerbate environmental degradation and destabilize homeless individuals. While the ‘housing first model’ has many supporters, providing housing has been challenging and takes a long time to establish. Until housing can be established, department staff can use a prioritization scale to focus on the most dangerous camps and use low impact **Leave No Trace** principles to deemphasize safe camps and stabilize people experiencing homelessness. Simultaneously, other services can be directed to improve mental health, employment and eventually placement into permanent housing.

**State of Homelessness in Austin:**
Each year Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) conducts a point-in-time count to maintain current trends in homelessness in Austin and Travis County. According to the latest count, there are a total of 2,147 people who are considered homeless. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services homeless is defined as, “an individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing.” A homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation. Of those who are homeless and without shelter, over a quarter are sleeping in parks, drainage easements or other publicly maintained areas.

**Demographics**

Of the 2,147 estimated homeless over 81% are single-headed households, and 61% are chronically homeless.[3] Homelessness affects every demographic, however while African Africans are only 8% of the population in Travis County, they make up an estimated 42% of Austin’s homeless
Cost of Homelessness
The typical response to homeless camps by the City of Austin Parks and Recreation and Watershed Department is eviction and removal. This response, while some time appropriate in the case of immediate threat to the safety of those in the camp and surrounding community, further destabilizes people experiencing homelessness and makes coordinating services difficult for health care providers. Specifically, the cost of Criminal Trespass notices and resulting arrests from repeated camping violations on public land is estimated to be around $153.00 per day, per individual arrest. Arrest for repeated camping violations rarely ends in permanent housing. In addition to the cost of incarceration, homelessness also increases the cost of healthcare within Travis County. Combining the cost of incarceration, healthcare, and temporary shelters, the average annual cost of homeless individuals using public services is $222,000.00 per person.

Causes of Homelessness
There are many factors contributing to homelessness in Austin. ECCO points to four factors [6]:
- Inadequate support services
- Economic and Environmental Factors
- Lack of Family or Support Network
- Criminal Justice Involvement

Change in Department Response
The typical Department response to homeless individuals is eviction and subsequent clean up. After evictions, many camps returned to the same location, or relocated further into remote areas to avoid future detection. This historical response has strained relationships of trust between municipal workers and homeless individuals, increasing the footprint of large camps. The five contributing factors to homelessness are complex problems and will take time to solve. While council is acting to create more affordable housing, provide support services and address justice inequalities these systematic changes will take time to implement and people experiencing homelessness need stability to avoid worsening human and environmental conditions.

Environmental Impact of Homelessness
The environmental impact to homelessness to public land is difficult to measure. Factors such as location, terrain, material found on site, location of site within a floodplain, location of camp within protected areas such as preserves, and can all drastically change the cost of camp removal. When camps are located near trails or public amenities, although unsightly, service personnel can easily locate and interact with people experiencing homelessness. Evictions and removals, as is the current practice, often exacerbate environmental impact. Camps that were initially located on a relatively small footprint move deeper into park or preserve land to avoid detection. Relocated camps after eviction increases the footprint, pathways and brush removal associated with deeper harder to reach camps.
Managers concerned with habitat connectivity and fragmentation often site homelessness as a threat to protected areas. While camps can interfere with wildlife corridors, relocating camps worsen this effect moving campers deeper into habitat areas. Once deep into protected areas the risks of uncontrolled fires, vegetation removal and the resulting mitigation efforts of first responders all increase the initial footprint. Other opponents of using public land to temporarily
stabilize people experiencing homelessness argue that camps are often located in environmentally sensitive areas such as the 25-year floodplain, drainage and detention areas. While these areas are less than ideal, having designated leave no trace areas where camping evictions are deprioritized allows us to inform campers of potential risks and engage them in services.

Waste associated with camps is a serious environmental concern. Unchecked camping where homeless individuals create fire, dispose of human waste and eliminate food waste all degrade the environmental health of a site.

**Leave No Trace Pilot Project**

In the spring of 2019, the Parks and Recreation (PARD) and Watershed Departments have teamed up to better address homelessness on their respective properties. Instead of calling law enforcement or working to immediately remove homeless individuals for public land the departments have created a prioritization scale and alternative responses to eviction, referred to as The Leave No Trace Pilot Project. Through this pilot, the Watershed and PARD team have implemented a prioritization scale to de-escalate camps that do not pose an immediate threat to human health and safety.

![Prioritization Scale](image)

The Leave No Trace approach provides a more prescriptive and proactive approach than conventional eviction methods. By creating a method for evaluating safety hazards, as opposed to treating every homeless camp as criminal, this reduces the staff cost and burden to taxpayers by serving evictions or arresting homeless individuals. Staff will assess the risk to campers and the public and will work to reduce the risk before moving individuals from their location on public land. Leave No Trace, an outdoor ethic, was created to reduce recreational impacts to parkland that can be modified to teach low impact camping to homeless individuals.

Opponents argue that offering low impact education through the Leave No Trace Program may encourage more homeless to flee to the city or disincentivize current homeless from finding permanent housing. There is no evidence to support this conclusion. Staff has reported that through indiscriminate eviction, people experiencing homelessness report losing contact with caseworkers, in addition to valuables, such as medication, identification, and bus passes. The chaos that ensues after eviction from public land is not linked to quicker access to permanent
housing. While Leave No Trace is a recreational model, this system can use low impact techniques of fire building, cooking and waste disposal that can reduce environmental contaminants to the watershed. By using Leave No Trace methods and monitoring deemphasizes camps, staff can direct resources, encourage low impact techniques and concentrate environmental degradation in places that are easy to access by support services.

Conclusion
The Leave No Trace Pilot Project provides a valuable opportunity for both the Environmental Commission and Parks and Recreation Board to address the impact of homeless on the environment and individuals. This can be achieved by establishing a relationship based on low impact and safe use of public land. While there are complex societal and structural facets to homelessness, public land often houses individuals without a home. By implementing low impact techniques, staff can stabilize individuals, monitor their use of camp sites and establish better relationships with Austin’s homeless.

[1] Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b)
[3] Chronically homeless is defined by the Housing of Urban is either “(1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.” Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of Special Needs and Assistance Programs (2007) Homeless Assistance Programs: Defining Technical Homelessness: A Technical Guide for HUD Programs https://https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/DefiningChronicHomeless.pdf