

# Temporary Homeless Camps



Perimeter fence

Garbage Containers



Boardwalk in living area

Waste water pipe

## PURPOSE

State law authorizes religious organizations to host temporary homeless camps (RCW 35.21.915) and enables cities to impose conditions that protect the public health and safety when locating and operating the camps. In recognition of the need for temporary housing for homeless persons, the City of Tacoma has developed this permit to allow sponsoring religious organizations to use property owned or controlled by them for temporary homeless camps, while preventing harmful effects associated with such uses.

## COORDINATION

Because of the temporary timeframe a camp can locate at one site, coordination between multiple religious organizations is strongly encouraged so as to prevent a time gap between permitted sites. A rotation of 6-8 sites (depending on camp surfacing) is likely needed to sustain a camp in Tacoma. Only two camps may be located in Tacoma at any one time.

## LOGISTICS

Providing a safe and healthy outdoor camping environment for up to 100 people requires a robust logistical capability. The following is a partial list of items/capabilities needed for a camp.

- Truck transportation to move the camps
- Volunteers to assist camp administration

- Parking area for volunteers and residents
- Latrines, showers, handwashing stations
- Utilities: temporary service for power, water, waste water disposal, garbage collection
- Shelter: tarps, large tents for common area tents (ie: admin/security, dining, recreation, donations, etc), small sleeping tents for individuals or couples
- Donations: money, food, plates/eating utensils, clothes, toiletries, tables, chairs, camp construction supplies (plywood, lumber, wood pallets, waterproof tarps, poles and stakes).

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

There are a number of requirements to ensure safety and security at the camps.

- Secure perimeter fence and a controlled access point with admin/security staff 24-hours per day with the capability to call police/emergency response
- Fire safety measures: tent separation and provision of fire extinguishers
- Residents must be adults and pass a warrant and background check
- No drugs, alcohol or weapons



*Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.*

*The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.*

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

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## CAMP LOCATION

Not all church properties are suitable for accommodating a temporary homeless camp. The minimum requirements for a camp location are:

- Located on religious organization property
- Minimum site size: 7,500 square feet of camp area for first 50 residents; the camp area must be increased by 150 square feet for each additional resident
- Maximum number of people: 100
- Site must be within ¼ mile of public transit
- Must have temporary water, power and waste water disposal available at the site
- Each location can be returned to after a two year break in time
- Duration: 93 days. Sites zoned commercial or industrial and having gravel or paved surface may extend to a maximum of 123 days.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Contact: John Harrington, Principal Planner
- Planning and Development Services Department
- [jharring@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:jharring@cityoftacoma.org)
- 253-279-8950



## PERMIT PROCESS

A temporary use permit is required from the City of Tacoma Planning and Development Services (PDS) Department to start and run a camp.

Requirements:

- Complete application to PDS which includes:
  - Current application fee: \$1,963.68 (as of Apr 4, 2016) includes processing and site inspection fees by City Departments
  - Proposed timeframe, location, maximum number of residents
  - Name of managing agency and sponsor
  - Site/operational plan showing property lines, camp perimeter fence, internal layout, and how security, sanitation, utilities, emergency services and other logistical issues will be addressed
  - Carry liability insurance for the use
- Separate fee for Health Department inspections



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