

Policy Briefing Summary

City Council



Regarding:	Ordinance on Camping and Storage on City Property (1 of 2 readings)
Staff Contact(s):	
Presenter:	Michael Kochis, Police Chief
Date of Proposed Action:	September 2, 2025

Issue

Consideration of an ordinance addressing camping in public rights-of-way and the storage of personal property in those areas. This proposed ordinance seeks to balance public safety, accessibility, and quality of life concerns with a compassionate and empathetic approach to enforcement.

Over the past several months, the City has seen a marked increase in quality-of-life complaints in and around locations where unhoused community members are residing. These complaints include blocked sidewalks and rights-of-way, accumulation of personal belongings, and impacts on surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. While these concerns must be addressed, the enforcement of this ordinance is intended to be carried out with care and understanding, recognizing the challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness.

A violation of this ordinance would be classified as a Class 4 misdemeanor. This carries no possibility of jail time and is punishable only by a fine, underscoring the City's intent not to criminalize homelessness but to provide a framework for ensuring safe and accessible public spaces. Enforcement will prioritize outreach, voluntary compliance, and connection to services whenever possible before any citation is issued.

Background / Rule

Jurisdictions across Virginia and the nation have adopted ordinances governing camping and storage of personal items in public rights-of-way. These measures are designed to ensure accessibility for pedestrians, maintain public safety, and preserve the use of shared spaces, while also being mindful of the circumstances of those experiencing homelessness.

Charlottesville has experienced a noticeable increase in reports of obstructions, sanitation concerns, and related quality-of-life complaints in and around areas where unhoused community members are living. Similar to practices in other jurisdictions, the proposed ordinance provides a clear legal framework for addressing these issues while ensuring enforcement is approached with dignity and compassion.

Importantly, this ordinance does not impose jail time for violations. Under Virginia law, such offenses are classified as Class 4 misdemeanors, punishable only by a fine. This reflects Council's direction that enforcement should not be punitive but should encourage safe and lawful use of public spaces.

In addition, the City continues to explore and invest in supportive strategies, such as increased outreach efforts, expanded shelter capacity, and potential storage solutions for personal belongings. These initiatives, in coordination with enforcement, aim to provide alternatives that reduce the need for individuals to camp in public rights-of-way.

While the ordinance provides the legal authority to address these issues, the standard operating procedure lays out a framework of compassion, understanding, and robust process designed to ensure our unhorsed neighbors are treated with dignity and respect.

Analysis

Financial Impact

NA

Recommendation

Approve

Recommended Motion (if Applicable)

Attachments

1. Final draft ordinance
2. Encampment protocol