

RCW 36.01.290 Hosting the homeless by religious organizations—
When authorized—Requirements—Prohibitions on local actions. (1) A religious organization may host the homeless on property owned or controlled by the religious organization whether within buildings located on the property or elsewhere on the property outside of buildings.

(2) Except as provided in subsection (7) of this section, a county may not enact an ordinance or regulation or take any other action that:

(a) Imposes conditions other than those necessary to protect public health and safety and that do not substantially burden the decisions or actions of a religious organization regarding the location of housing or shelter, such as an outdoor encampment, indoor overnight shelter, temporary small house on-site, or vehicle resident safe parking, for homeless persons on property owned or controlled by the religious organization;

(b) Requires a religious organization to obtain insurance pertaining to the liability of a municipality with respect to homeless persons housed on property owned by a religious organization or otherwise requires the religious organization to indemnify the municipality against such liability;

(c) Imposes permit fees in excess of the actual costs associated with the review and approval of permit applications. A county has discretion to reduce or waive permit fees for a religious organization that is hosting the homeless;

(d) Specifically limits a religious organization's availability to host an outdoor encampment on its property or property controlled by the religious organization to fewer than six months during any calendar year. However, a county may enact an ordinance or regulation that requires a separation of time of no more than three months between subsequent or established outdoor encampments at a particular site;

(e) Specifically limits a religious organization's outdoor encampment hosting term to fewer than four consecutive months;

(f) Limits the number of simultaneous religious organization outdoor encampment hostings within the same municipality during any given period of time. Simultaneous and adjacent hostings of outdoor encampments by religious organizations may be limited if located within one thousand feet of another outdoor encampment concurrently hosted by a religious organization;

(g) Limits a religious organization's availability to host safe parking efforts at its on-site parking lot, including limitations on any other congregationally sponsored uses and the parking available to support such uses during the hosting, except for limitations that are in accord with the following criteria that would govern if enacted by local ordinance or memorandum of understanding between the host religious organization and the jurisdiction:

(i) No less than one space may be devoted to safe parking per ten on-site parking spaces;

(ii) Restroom access must be provided either within the buildings on the property or through use of portable facilities, with the provision for proper disposal of waste if recreational vehicles are hosted; and

(iii) Religious organizations providing spaces for safe parking must continue to abide by any existing on-site parking minimum requirement so that the provision of safe parking spaces does not

reduce the total number of available parking spaces below the minimum number of spaces required by the county, but a county may enter into a memorandum of understanding with a religious organization that reduces the minimum number of on-site parking spaces required;

(h) Limits a religious organization's availability to host an indoor overnight shelter in spaces with at least two accessible exits due to lack of sprinklers or other fire-related concerns, except that:

(i) If a county fire official finds that fire-related concerns associated with an indoor overnight shelter pose an imminent danger to persons within the shelter, the county may take action to limit the religious organization's availability to host the indoor overnight shelter; and

(ii) A county may require a host religious organization to enter into a memorandum of understanding for fire safety that includes local fire district inspections, an outline for appropriate emergency procedures, a determination of the most viable means to evacuate occupants from inside the host site with appropriate illuminated exit signage, panic bar exit doors, and a completed fire watch agreement indicating:

(A) Posted safe means of egress;

(B) Operable smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors as necessary, and fire extinguishers;

(C) A plan for monitors who spend the night awake and are familiar with emergency protocols, who have suitable communication devices, and who know how to contact the local fire department; or

(i) Limits a religious organization's ability to host temporary small houses on land owned or controlled by the religious organization, except for recommendations that are in accord with the following criteria:

(i) A renewable one-year duration agreed to by the host religious organization and local jurisdiction via a memorandum of understanding;

(ii) Maintaining a maximum unit square footage of one hundred twenty square feet, with units set at least six feet apart;

(iii) Electricity and heat, if provided, must be inspected by the local jurisdiction;

(iv) Space heaters, if provided, must be approved by the local fire authority;

(v) Doors and windows must be included and be lockable, with a recommendation that the managing agency and host religious organization also possess keys;

(vi) Each unit must have a fire extinguisher;

(vii) Adequate restrooms must be provided, including restrooms solely for families if present, along with handwashing and potable running water to be available if not provided within the individual units, including accommodating black water;

(viii) A recommendation for the host religious organization to partner with regional homeless service providers to develop pathways to permanent housing.

(3) (a) A county may enact an ordinance or regulation or take any other action that requires a host religious organization and a distinct managing agency using the religious organization's property, owned or controlled by the religious organization, for hostings to include outdoor encampments, temporary small houses on-site, indoor overnight shelters, or vehicle resident safe parking to enter into a memorandum of understanding to protect the public health and safety of both the residents of the particular hosting and the residents of the county.

(b) At a minimum, the agreement must include information regarding: The right of a resident in an outdoor encampment, vehicle resident safe parking, temporary small house on-site, or indoor overnight shelter to seek public health and safety assistance, the resident's ability to access social services on-site, and the resident's ability to directly interact with the host religious organization, including the ability to express any concerns regarding the managing agency to the religious organization; a written code of conduct agreed to by the managing agency, if any, host religious organization, and all volunteers working with residents of the outdoor encampment, temporary small house on-site, indoor overnight shelter, or vehicle resident safe parking; and when a publicly funded managing agency exists, the ability for the host religious organization to interact with residents of the outdoor encampment, indoor overnight shelter, temporary small house on-site, or vehicle resident safe parking using a release of information.

(4) If required to do so by the county, any host religious organization performing any hosting of an outdoor encampment, vehicle resident safe parking, or indoor overnight shelter, or the host religious organization's managing agency, must ensure that the county or local law enforcement agency has completed sex offender checks of all adult residents and guests. The host religious organization retains the authority to allow such offenders to remain on the property. A host religious organization or host religious organization's managing agency performing any hosting of vehicle resident safe parking must inform vehicle residents how to comply with laws regarding the legal status of vehicles and drivers, and provide a written code of conduct consistent with area standards.

(5) Any host religious organization performing any hosting of an outdoor encampment, vehicle resident safe parking, temporary small house on-site, or indoor overnight shelter, with a publicly funded managing agency, must work with the county to utilize Washington's homeless client management information system, as provided for in RCW 43.185C.180. When the religious organization does not partner with a managing agency, the religious organization is encouraged to partner with a local homeless services provider using the Washington homeless client managing information system. Any managing agency receiving any funding from local continuum of care programs must utilize the homeless client management information system. Temporary, overnight, extreme weather shelter provided in religious organization buildings does not need to meet this requirement.

(6) For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Managing agency" means an organization such as a religious organization or other organized entity that has the capacity to organize and manage a homeless outdoor encampment, temporary small houses on-site, indoor overnight shelter, and a vehicle resident safe parking program.

(b) "Outdoor encampment" means any temporary tent or structure encampment, or both.

(c) "Religious organization" means the federally protected practice of a recognized religious assembly, school, or institution that owns or controls real property.

(d) "Temporary" means not affixed to land permanently and not using underground utilities.

(7) (a) Subsection (2) of this section does not affect a county policy, ordinance, memorandum of understanding, or applicable consent decree that regulates religious organizations' hosting of the homeless

if such policies, ordinances, memoranda of understanding, or consent decrees:

(i) Exist prior to June 11, 2020;

(ii) Do not categorically prohibit the hosting of the homeless by religious organizations; and

(iii) Have not been previously ruled by a court to violate the religious land use and institutionalized persons act, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 2000cc.

(b) If such policies, ordinances, memoranda of understanding, and consent decrees are amended after June 11, 2020, those amendments are not affected by subsection (2) of this section if those amendments satisfy (a) (ii) and (iii) of this subsection.

(8) An appointed or elected public official, public employee, or public agency as defined in RCW 4.24.470 is immune from civil liability for (a) damages arising from the permitting decisions for a temporary encampment for the homeless as provided in this section and (b) any conduct or unlawful activity that may occur as a result of the temporary encampment for the homeless as provided in this section.

(9) A religious organization hosting outdoor encampments, vehicle resident safe parking, or indoor overnight shelters for the homeless that receives funds from any government agency may not refuse to host any resident or prospective resident because of age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, national origin, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability, as these terms are defined in RCW 49.60.040.

(10) (a) Prior to the opening of an outdoor encampment, indoor overnight shelter, temporary small house on-site, or vehicle resident safe parking, a religious organization hosting the homeless on property owned or controlled by the religious organization must host a meeting open to the public for the purpose of providing a forum for discussion of related neighborhood concerns, unless the use is in response to a declared emergency. The religious organization must provide written notice of the meeting to the county legislative authority at least one week if possible but no later than ninety-six hours prior to the meeting. The notice must specify the time, place, and purpose of the meeting.

(b) A county must provide community notice of the meeting described in (a) of this subsection by taking at least two of the following actions at any time prior to the time of the meeting:

(i) Delivering to each local newspaper of general circulation and local radio or television station that has on file with the governing body a written request to be notified of special meetings;

(ii) Posting on the county's website. A county is not required to post a special meeting notice on its website if it: (A) Does not have a website; (B) employs fewer than ten full-time equivalent employees; or (C) does not employ personnel whose duty, as defined by a job description or existing contract, is to maintain or update the website;

(iii) Prominently displaying, on signage at least two feet in height and two feet in width, one or more meeting notices that can be placed on or adjacent to the main arterials in proximity to the location of the meeting; or

(iv) Prominently displaying the notice at the meeting site.

[2020 c 223 s 2; 2010 c 175 s 2.]

Findings—Intent—2020 c 223: "(1) The legislature makes the following findings:

(a) Residents in temporary settings hosted by religious organizations are a particularly vulnerable population that do not have access to the same services as citizens with more stable housing.

(b) Residents in these settings, including outdoor uses such as outdoor encampments, indoor overnight shelters, temporary small houses on-site, and homeless-occupied vehicle resident safe parking, can be at increased risk of exploitation, theft, unsanitary living conditions, and physical harm.

(c) Furthermore, the legislature finds and declares that hosted outdoor encampments, indoor overnight shelters, temporary small houses on-site, and homeless-occupied vehicle resident safe parking serve as pathways for individuals experiencing homelessness to receive services and achieve financial stability, health, and permanent housing.

(2) The legislature intends that local municipalities have the discretion to protect the health and safety of both residents in temporary settings that are hosted by religious organizations and the surrounding community. The legislature encourages local jurisdictions and religious organizations to work together collaboratively to protect the health and safety of residents and the surrounding community while allowing religious organizations to fulfill their mission to serve the homeless. The legislature further intends to monitor the implementation of this act and continue to refine it to achieve these goals." [2020 c 223 s 1.]

Findings—2010 c 175: "The legislature finds that there are many homeless persons in our state that are in need of shelter and other services that are not being provided by the state and local governments. The legislature also finds that in many communities, religious organizations play an important role in providing needed services to the homeless, including the provision of shelter upon property owned by the religious organization. By providing such shelter, the religious institutions in our communities perform a valuable public service that, for many, offers a temporary, stopgap solution to the larger social problem of increasing numbers of homeless persons.

This act provides guidance to cities and counties in regulating homeless encampments within the community, but still leaves those entities with broad discretion to protect the health and safety of its citizens. It is the hope of this legislature that local governments and religious organizations can work together and utilize dispute resolution processes without the need for litigation." [2010 c 175 s 1.]

Intent—Construction—2010 c 175: "Nothing in this act is intended to change applicable law or be interpreted to prohibit a county, city, town, or code city from applying zoning and land use regulations allowable under established law to real property owned by a religious organization, regardless of whether the property owned by the religious organization is used to provide shelter or housing to homeless persons." [2010 c 175 s 5.]

Prior consent decrees and negotiated settlements for temporary encampments for the homeless not superseded—2010 c 175: "Nothing in this act supersedes a court ordered consent decree or other negotiated

settlement between a public agency and religious organization entered into prior to July 1, 2010, for the purposes of establishing a temporary encampment for the homeless as provided in this act." [2010 c 175 s 6.]