Perceptions of Homelessness in Seattle's Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park

Carmen Smith

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Urban Planning

University of Washington

2022

Committee:

Rachel Berney

Lynne C. Manzo

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Urban Design and Planning

University of Washington

Abstract

Perceptions of Homelessness in Seattle's Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park

Carmen Smith

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Rachel Berney

Department of Urban Design and Planning

This thesis explores how housed users of Seattle's Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park view and interpret the presence of homelessness in the park, as well as how they have been impacted by it. Interviews with park users revealed a spectrum of responses to the presence of homelessness in the park, from no change to their usual use of the park to no longer going to the park, with some in between who have modified their use of the park. Five major themes also emerged: government frustration, safety concerns, homelessness in the park being one part of a larger problem, feelings towards coexistence of unhoused and housed individuals in the park, and feelings of inner turmoil in response to the presence of homelessness in the park. Based on these findings, this thesis identifies areas for future exploration to develop policy recommendations to address homelessness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm thankful for the interview participants who volunteered their time to speak with me for this project. I was amazed by the community's level of interest to participate. For those I spoke with, thank you for your candor and support. I was humbled by your willingness to share such genuine reflections on this important topic. I could not have completed this project without you. Many thanks.

A special thank you to Paul Kostek, president of the Green Lake Community Council, and Alice Poggi, president of the Phinney Ridge Community Council, for supporting this project and connecting me to the community.

I want to thank my thesis advisors, Bob Mugerauer and Lynne Manzo, for their support and guidance in shaping this work and all the advice and conversations along the way. During the course of this thesis, in May 2022, Bob, who was my committee chair, passed away. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him and learn from him. He made it known that his favorite part of his job was working with students on the projects that they were passionate about. Dr. Bob embraced this project from my very first meeting with him and maintained that enthusiasm the whole time. He was thoughtful, kind, and motivating. I always left our conversations feeling excited about this work and empowered to take on the next step. Dr. Bob was an exceptional teacher and advisor and I am honored to have worked with him.

I want to thank Rachel Berney for graciously stepping in as my committee chair and for her suggestions and support to finalize the thesis document.

INTRODUCTION

The City of Seattle is the 18th largest city in the United States, yet has the third largest unhoused population in the country (Seattle Times staff, 2021). Seattle and King County declared a state of emergency in 2015, because of the homeless crisis -- a declaration uncommon outside of natural disasters. This declaration is a strategy that enables local municipalities, in this case, the City of Seattle and King County, to request aid from the state and federal government. Seattle and King County made requests of aid from Washington State for funds to support the following City and County actions: providing additional resources for mental health and substance abuse treatment, identifying state-owned land to locate authorized encampments, shelters, or vehicle parking sites, addressing unauthorized encampments along I-5, I-90, and SR-99, and increasing the Consolidated Homeless Grant[1] (City of Seattle, 2015b; King County, 2015).

Seattle and King County made requests of aid from the United States government such as increasing funding for affordable housing, including building permanent housing for the unhoused and greater support for rental assistance and voucher programs, as well as increasing funding for supportive services such as employment, mental health, and chemical dependency, and increasing flexibility with Medicaid. This flexibility involves eliminating the regulations imposed by Institutions for Mental Disease limiting Medicaid reimbursement to facilities with more than 16 beds and allowing Medicaid funds to be used to pay for support services administered in permanent supportive housing (City of Seattle, 2015a; King County, 2015).

[1] The Consolidated Homeless Grant is administered by Washington State Department of Commerce. It provides funding to local governments and nonprofits for homelessness response in their communities (Washington State Department of Commerce, 2022).

Despite this declaration of a state of emergency and requests for aid, homelessness in Seattle has continued to rise. The 2020 Point-in-Time Count, an annual count of those experiencing homelessness on a specific date, identified 8,166 unhoused individuals in the City of Seattle (All Home, 2020).[2] Of those, 3,738 were living unsheltered, such as in vehicles, on the streets, in public parks, or other places not meant for human habitation (All Home, 2020). Due to impacts of COVID-19, the 2021 and 2022 counts were not performed, but some argue that the current number of unhoused is likely even greater (Greenstone, 2021a).

Unsheltered homelessness in Seattle was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as shelters closed due to physical distancing requirements and the Centers for Disease Control directed local governments to allow those living unsheltered or in encampments to stay where they are (Centers for Disease Control, 2021). A study by a team of researchers from Seattle Pacific University and the University of Washington reported that the number of tents in some areas of Seattle increased by more than 50% during the pandemic (Greenstone, 2021a). Parks in particular have been a "common source of friction" due to the presence of tents and encampments (Greenstone, 2021a).

This friction has resulted in several City of Seattle park closures in the past year. As housed City of Seattle residents sought respite from quarantine in public parks, unhoused City residents sought places for survival. For example, the spray park at Ballard Commons Park was closed to the public in July 2021 due to health and safety concerns stemming from

[2] The Department of Housing and Urban Development requires cities and counties across the country that receive federal funds for homelessness to count sheltered and unsheltered individuals on an annual and semi-annual basis, respectively. The Point-in-Time Count occurs on the last Friday in January, dating back to 2005 (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022).

the presence of a large encampment (Clarridge, 2021). A large encampment at City Hall Park was cleared in August 2021 after several high-profile crimes in the park tied to the encampment, including a stabbing and an attempted sexual assault in the nearby King County Courthouse, (Greenstone, 2021b). City Hall Park remains fenced off and closed to the public today. Similarly, the city closed Lower Woodland Park for cross-country races in August 2021. This park has a long history hosting popular cross-country races, but the city announced it would not be granting permits for races there due to the presence of encampments (Westneat, 2021). These various park closures across the city, coupled with growing community frustration (Beekman, 2021) reflect a tension over the right to occupy and use public parks.

In addition to the encampment growth and park closures exacerbated by COVID-19, I think it is important to note the anxiety, stress, despair, fear, isolation, and grief that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to so many peoples' lives. Additionally, amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic are the overlapping crises of climate change and racial injustice, which also are sources of stress and despair in peoples' lives. Everyone reacts to and processes these crises in their own way and I raise this to provide context for my study and note the possibility that the heightened emotions people are experiencing may influence their perceptions and feelings related to encampments and unhoused individuals.

I chose to focus on Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park as a case study for this thesis because it has a large, visible presence of homelessness,[3] yet it still gets heavy recreational

[3] Throughout this thesis, I use the phrase "presence of homelessness" to refer to unhoused individuals and their belongings. I use the term "encampments" interchangeably with "presence of homelessness" as both terms capture unhoused individuals, their belongings, tents, RVS, etc. When I am referring to unhoused individuals exclusively, I use the term "unhoused individuals."

use, making it a dynamic environment to study. Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park is located in northcentral Seattle and is one of the city's most popular parks. The park offers a multitude of recreational opportunities and is bustling throughout all seasons of the year. Encampments in the park have been the subject of much local media coverage, an important topic in Seattle's 2021 mayoral race, and they have been a source of community frustration.

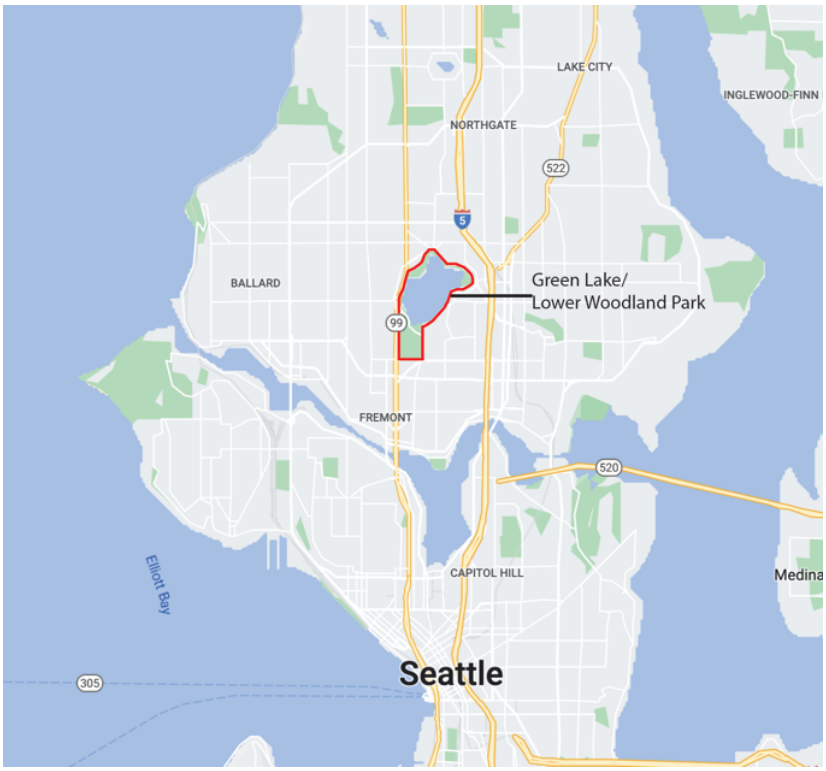

Figure 1 Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Location.

Source: Google Maps.

The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of how housed users of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park view and interpret the presence of homelessness in the park, as well as an understanding of how housed park users feel they have been impacted by the presence of homelessness in the park. While this work will not provide long-term solutions to homelessness in Seattle, it aims to present a clear

description of how housed park users respond to the presence of homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park that can inform future responses to unhoused individuals in the park in the short term.

Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with local resident users of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, this research aims to answer:

- What are housed users of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park perceptions of, and feelings towards, the presence of unhoused individuals, tents, and encampments in the park?
- What impacts has the presence of unhoused individuals, tents, and encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park had on housed park users?

STUDY AREA

Green Lake and Woodland Park are separate parks, as designated by the City of Seattle Parks Department. However, this work treats Green Lake and Lower Woodland Park as one study area because the parks connect at the southwest corner of Green Lake and many visitors use both areas. (See Figure 2). This work does not include Upper Woodland Park as that part of Woodland Park is predominantly occupied by the Woodland Park Zoo and the connection to Green Lake and Lower Woodland Park is severed by Aurora Avenue N (although there are pedestrian bridges that connect the two spaces).

The Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park study area is one of Seattle's most popular parks, drawing thousands of visitors each day (Seattle Parks and Recreation, 2022). The park offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities for users, including trails for walking, running, rolling, and biking, boating and swimming areas, sports fields, tennis courts, a skate park, lawn bowling, pitch and putt golf, a performance theater, grassy lawns, and off-leash dog areas.

Figure 2 Green Lake / Lower Woodland Park Study Area.

Source: Google Earth.

The City of Seattle removed encampments along West Green Lake Way N and in the Green Lake portion of the study area on December 20, 2021 (Greenstone, 2021c). Encampments remained in the Lower Woodland Park portion of the study area as they were not the focus of that removal. This thesis focuses on the encampments in both the Green Lake and Lower Woodland Park portions of the study area as the Green Lake removal occurred only a few weeks before interviews began, so those encampments were still top of mind for interview participants.

Of the approximately 30 residents in the Green Lake encampments, more than half received referrals to Tiny House Villages or shelters from city outreach workers. Thirteen residents moved away on their own, "many of them, according to a camper, up the hill to Woodland Park" (Greenstone, 2021c, np). The encampment at the Lower Woodland Park

portion of the study area, which consists of about 70 tents and up to 100 residents, is on the city's priority list for removal, though a date has not been set (Barnett, 2022). According to Seattle City Councilmember Dan Strauss, whose district includes the park, city outreach workers will go into the encampments, gather the names of all the residents, determine their needs, and assign everyone appropriate housing or shelter when it becomes available (Barnett, 2022).

In May 2022, as I am editing the final draft of this thesis, the Seattle Times broke the news that city crews cleared the encampment at Lower Woodland Park after months of outreach with the residents (Kim, 2022). The encampment, which consisted of more than 40 tents and structures and between 60-80 residents, was the largest remaining encampment in a Seattle park and has been a top priority for removal for Mayor Bruce Harrell. All encampment residents were offered shelter, whether in a tiny house village or a shelter (Kim, 2022). This closure reflects that the situation is constantly evolving.

Study Area Demographic Information

To gather demographic data on the study area's adjacent neighborhoods, I drew from the 2019 American Community Survey. For the analysis, I chose the five census tracts around Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, as shown in Figure 3, as they capture the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the park. Table 1 (below) summarizes the population and housing data for each of the five surrounding census tracts. This demographic information provides context about the surrounding neighborhood in terms of the characteristics of the residents and the homes in the area.

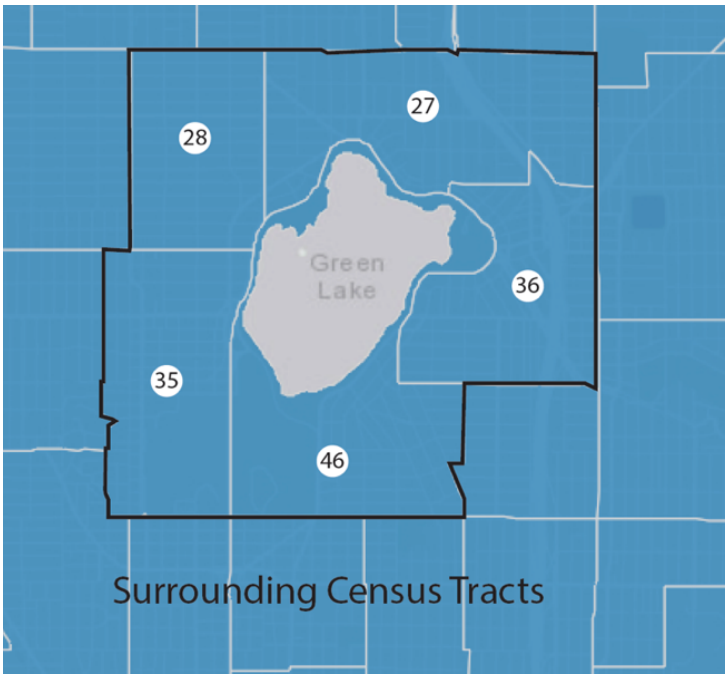

Figure 3 Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Surrounding Census Tracts.

Source: City of Seattle GeoData.

Table 1 Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Study Area Demographic Information.

	Census Tract 27	Census Tract 28	Census Tract 35	Census Tract 36	Census Tract 46	Average
Population Characteristics						
Total Population	6,393	5,144	4,269	7,594	3,627	27,027
Median Age (years)	35.4	36.9	39.5	31.8	37.7	36.3 years
% White	76.3%	78.0%	84.9%	77.0%	89.6%	81.2%
% Black or African American	1.2%	3.5%	0.8%	1.4%	1.4%	1.7%
% American Indian and Alaska Native	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.1%
% Asian	12.2%	7.4%	7.9%	13.1%	6.0%	9.3%
% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.06%
Other Race	3.4%	0.6%	0.2%	2.4%	0.5%	1.4%
Two or more races	6.9%	10.5%	5.7%	6.1%	2.0%	6.2%
% Hispanic or Latinx Origin	4.6%	3.3%	4.7%	3.6%	2.3%	3.7%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (% of population 25+ years)	76.7%	74.0%	80.6%	80.9%	79.4%	78.3%
Median Household Annual Income	$145,000	137,127	$105,625	$83,739	$136,528	$121,603
Housing Characteristics						
Total Housing Units	2,484	2,262	1,922	4,264	1,405	12,337
% Owner-Occupied	70.2%	56.6%	57.8%	30.9%	67.1%	56.5%
% Renter-Occupied	29.8%	43.4%	42.2%	69.1%	32.9%	43.5%
% Single Family Detached Homes	85.0%	61.1%	65.0%	25.8%	80.6%	63.5%
Median Home Value	$812,700	$718,000	$847,800	$729,400	$907,800	$803,140

Source: US Census ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles.[4]

[4] U.S. Census.

The median age in the surrounding neighborhoods is between 31 and 39. The majority of residents are White (between 76.3% and 89.6%) and have at least a bachelor's degree (between 74% and 80.9%). An affluent neighborhood, the median household income ranges from $83,739 to $145,000 across the five census tracks. The majority of homes, except in Census Tract 36, are owner-occupied single-family homes. Median home values range from $718,000 to $907,800.

LITERATURE AND POLICY REVIEW

Overview

Homelessness in the United States has triggered much research, exploring causes, impacts, and strategies for intervention. This literature review will focus specifically on unsheltered homelessness as it is most relevant to the research question and focus. Unsheltered homelessness is defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as people living in "places not meant for human habitation" (HUD, 2004, p.1), such as streets, abandoned buildings, and vehicles. This is opposed to sheltered homelessness, which refers to individuals living in shelters and other residential programs.

This literature review is organized into five general categories. The first focuses on the growth and characteristics of encampments in the United States and how municipalities are responding to encampments and tent cities in their jurisdictions. The second section explores Seattle's responses to unsheltered homelessness. The third section discusses unsheltered homelessness in parks. Building off the third section, the fourth section focuses on interactions between housed and unhoused users of parks and other public spaces. The final section discusses unsheltered homelessness in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding Municipal Responses to Encampments

Three studies (two by research teams from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, NLCHP, and one by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development) document the growth of encampments in the US and municipal responses to those encampments. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development,

(HUD) no one standard definition of encampment exists, but three concepts are commonly used in definitions of encampments: the "presence of structures, the continuity of location, and the permanency of people staying there" (HUD, 2020, p. 19).

All three reports found encampments to be increasing in prevalence and attributed this to either: (a) a severe lack of affordable housing and shelter (HUD, 2020; Hunter et al, 2014; NLCHP, 2017), (b) the persistence of poverty and chronic homelessness (HUD, 2020), (c) limited resources available for preventing and ending homelessness (HUD, 2020) and (d) the economic recession and mortgage foreclosure crisis (Hunter et al, 2014).

There are many reasons why shelters may not meet the needs of unhoused individuals, in addition to them lacking enough beds and/or space. These include a shelters' inability to accommodate couples, families, and animal companions, restrictions on storing belongings, operating hours that may conflict with jobs, inability to ensure more than one night's stay, and feeling unsafe staying in a shelter (HUD, 2020; Hunter et al, 2014; NLCHP, 2017). Additionally, individuals may choose to continue to live in encampments for more autonomy, privacy, and a greater sense of community (HUD, 2020).

In addition to increases in number, both the HUD and NLCHP reports documented other trends in encampments. The NLCHP analyzed news articles from across the country related to encampments between the years 2007-2017. Though documenting every encampment is a difficult task, the NCLHP research team noted the data are useful to "confirm anecdotal reports from across the country" (NLCHP, 2017, p. 7). Findings indicate that encampments are located in every state, many are medium to large in size (between 11-50 residents), they are becoming semi-permanent features of cities (many having been

in existence for more than one year), and many are unsanctioned, and therefore subject to city sweeps (NLCHP, 2017).

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, through interviews with city staff in nine cities[5] and site visits to four[6] of those cities, found encampments in a variety of locations, though city staff noted that they are occurring in more visible locations, such as in public parks and highway rights of way (HUD, 2020). HUD also found that encampments vary in size and that cities do not typically count the number of people who reside in the encampments. It is also common for encampments to contain personal belongings, as well as dining and storage areas and grills, which give an air of permanence. Resident characteristics also vary, but the research team learned that encampment residents are commonly men with barriers to permanent housing, such as a criminal record, illegal substance use, and mental illness (HUD, 2020).

Academic and institutional researchers have analyzed how cities are responding to encampments. They found that cities respond to encampments in a variety of ways – from permitting religious institutions[7] or city governments[8] to host encampments on their property; establishing safe parking options (NLCHP, 2017); creating or expanding low-barrier shelters (HUD, 2020); allowing residents to build more permanent structures (opposed to tents), and granting a 'semi-sanctioned' status (Hunter et al, 2014). However, the predominant response to encampments is what HUD calls "clearance and closure with

[5] Chicago, IL; Fresno, CA; Houston, TX; Las Vegas, NV; Minneapolis, MN; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; San Jose, CA; and Tacoma, WA.
[6] The study team conducted site visits to Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma. These cities were chosen because of their "geographic diversity, varying numbers of unsheltered homeless people, and different approaches to responding to homeless encampments" (HUD, 2020, p. 2).
[7] Olympia, WA and Seattle, WA.
[8] Sarasota, FL allows city governments to host temporary encampments on city property.

support" (HUD 2020, p. 30). That is, clearing and cleaning of the encampment (by the city government) is done after outreach workers go into the encampments and try to connect residents with social services, a shelter bed, or permanent housing, if available (HUD, 2020; Hunter et al, 2014; NLCHP, 2017). Cities may use priority systems based on factors such as visibility and size of the encampment to dictate the timing of the clearing of the encampment (HUD, 2020).

HUD Case Studies

The HUD study team performed a deeper dive into four cities' encampment response, examining Chicago, Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma to understand better the strategies each city uses and how each city prioritizes encampments for removal. Figure 4 shows the counts of people experiencing homelessness in 2017 and 2019 in each of the four cities. Three of the four cities, except Chicago, experienced an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in that time period, with San Jose experiencing both the largest increase and the total number of people experiencing homelessness.

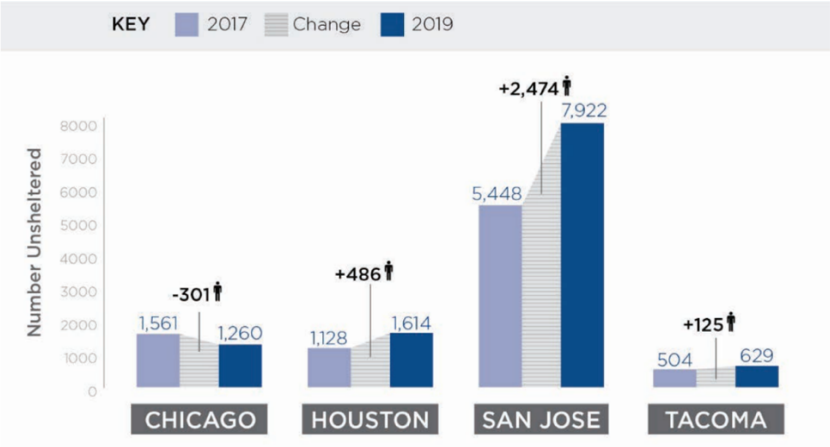

Figure 4 Number of People Experiencing Homelessness in HUD Selected Cities.

Source: HUD.

Houston, San Jose, and Tacoma all follow a consistent approach to encampments, which involves intensive outreach to connect residents to services and housing prior to clearance and closure of the encampment. Chicago's approach is slightly different from the other study cities because Chicago does not close encampments by requiring encampment residents to pack up their belongings and leave. Rather, they rely on outreach efforts to persuade residents to leave voluntarily as, under Illinois state law, it is illegal to prevent people from sleeping on public property (HUD, 2020).

Additionally, the HUD team found the following approaches in at least three of the cities' responses to encampments:

- Prioritizing larger, more visible encampments for removal[9]; though this does not mean that smaller and/or less visible encampments are sanctioned by the city
- Creating low-barrier shelters where residents of cleared encampments can stay until permanent housing can become available (low-barrier shelters have later curfews, do not require sobriety as a condition for entry)[10]
- Connecting encampment residents with permanent housing[11]

Each city has factors that lead to the prioritization of encampments for removal. Houston and San Jose's systems prioritize highly visible encampments, which, for these cities, is defined as "downtown areas, along major thoroughfares, and in public areas

[9] The extent of the health, safety, and environmental hazard that the encampment poses, as well as the level of political pressure are also factors that influence the prioritization of encampments for removal.
[10] San Jose does not create low-barrier shelters as part of their response as the city considers providing permanent housing a priority.
[11] San Jose and Tacoma face greater challenges in connecting encampment residents to permanent housing due to high-cost, tight housing markets.

frequented by residents and tourists" (HUD, 2020, p. 17). The primary factor in Chicago's prioritization system is the number of residents living in the encampment.

The city government takes the lead role in encampment response, which typically involves a diverse team of city departments and homeless service providers. In each of the four cities, the city government is the primary agency responsible for creating the encampment response strategy, executing it, and funding it, partly because HUD does not fund cleaning or policing of encampments. Cities typically organize response teams, which consist of various partners, most commonly homeless service providers, police, and sanitation and public works departments. Homeless service providers' roles in response include outreach, case management, medical and mental health services, substance use services, food assistance, and financial assistance (i.e., bus passes). The role of police varies across cities. For example, in Houston and Tacoma police accompany outreach workers to encampments to provide security, while in Chicago and San Jose police coordinate with outreach workers, but outreach workers visit encampments separately. Additionally, Chicago, Houston, and Tacoma police have outreach teams that are specially trained in crisis intervention. City sanitation and public works departments are the agencies responsible for cleaning encampments, removing trash, solid waste, and other debris in each of the four cities.

Table 2 Encampment Response Summary.

Strategy	Chicago	Houston	Tacoma	San Jose
Prioritization for Removal				
Have explicit prioritization systems	X			X
Highly visible locations		X	X	X
Number of encampment residents	X[12]			
Extent of the health, safety, and environmental hazard posed by encampment		X	X	X
Level of political pressure/public complaints	X	X	X	X
Encampment blocking passageway (sidewalk, street, etc.)				X
Significant amount of trash and debris				X
Outreach & Removal Process				
Clearance and closure with support		X	X	X
Outreach for residents to leave voluntarily	X			
Deep cleaning of encampment site	X	X	X	X
Creation of low-barrier shelters to serve as temporary housing	X	X	X	
Attempt to connect encampment residents to permanent housing	X	X	X	X
Encampment Response Team				
City government with lead role (creating, carrying out, and funding strategy)	X	X	X	X
One city agency or department in charge		X	X	X
Working group in charge	X			
Homeless service providers	X	X	X	X
Police	X	X	X	X
Sanitation/Solid Waste/Environmental Services	X	X	X	
Department of Public Health	X		X	
State Department of Transportation				X
Airport authorities	X			
Other transit agencies	X[13]			
Neighborhood services departments			X	
Parks departments				X
Utilities departments			X	X
Fire departments[14]	X	X	X	X
Other publicly funded organizations[15]		X		

[12] Number of residents living in the encampment is Chicago's primary factor for prioritization, with a goal of eliminating encampments with more than ten residents (HUD, 2020).
[13] Chicago Transit Authority is involved in encampment response on the city's subway (HUD, 2020).
[14] Fire departments usually have an ancillary response in encampment response, primarily responding to calls for service from encampments (HUD, 2020).
[15] These organizations are the Downtown and Midtown Management Districts, which are tax and assessment funded and assist in street cleaning, picking up litter, supplying dumpsters and portable toilets (HUD, 2020).

Related to how municipalities respond to the presence of encampments in their jurisdictions, the NLCHP and HUD studies found cities engage in a variety of responses, though the prominent approach cities take is called "clearance and closure with support", which consists of intensive outreach to connect residents to services and housing prior to clearance and closure of the encampment. To prioritize encampments for removal, cities consider a variety of factors, such as: size of the encampment, visibility of the encampment (i.e., if it is near downtowns, along major thoroughfares, or other well-trafficked places), complaints about the encampment, and the encampments' likelihood to be an environmental hazard (i.e., near water).

City of Seattle Policy

This section covers City of Seattle policy related to people experiencing homelessness, including overviews of city sanctioned housing[16] and the city's response to unsanctioned encampments. In response to the homelessness crisis, the City of Seattle created the Tiny House Village Program in 2017 to provide those living unsheltered with a tiny home as well as connection to services and permanent housing. The city's Tiny House Village Program provides those living unsheltered with a sanctioned housing option and, if available, tiny houses will be offered to those living in unsanctioned encampments prior to encampment removals by the city. There are currently nine tiny house villages across the city, operated by the Low Income Housing Institute (City of Seattle, 2022a). These villages have onsite case management services (which can connect unhoused individuals to permanent housing, mental health services, etc.) internet access, hygiene services, and a

[16] This section is not focused on the city's shelter or other residential systems, which also provide sanctioned housing for those living unsheltered.

shared kitchen space. Tiny house villages generally have a code of conduct for residents and a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), made up of village residents, neighbors, and community supporters, that is responsible for maintaining communications and a relationship with the public.

Unlike the tiny house villages, encampments on public property, such as public parks, are not authorized by the city and therefore are subject to removal. The City of Seattle has official rules for removing encampments, which lay out a standardized approach that seeks to "balance providing services and alternatives to people living in encampments with the health and safety benefits of removing encampments" (City of Seattle, 2022d). The first step in the encampment removal process (following the identification and reporting of the encampment, either by citizens through calls to the Customer Service Bureau, the online Service Request form, the Find It, Fix It app, or by Seattle Police Department and other city staff) is to prioritize the encampment for removal. The prioritization process includes an inspection and assessments on eight criteria (in no particular order): presence of hazards, criminal activity (not including substance abuse), amount of garbage and debris, active health hazards, difficulty for emergency services to access, upcoming work at the site, damage to the environment, and proximity to schools or facilities for the elderly (City of Seattle, 2022d).

After an encampment has been prioritized for removal, notice must be posted no less than 72 hours on or near each tent/structure being removed and given orally to any individuals present (City of Seattle, 2022d). Before removal, the city must offer those in the encampment alternative shelter or housing options, which must be available on the day of the encampment removal. Additionally, outreach workers are to be present during the

removal to provide referrals to available shelter or housing options and other services. Cleanup of the site includes removing obstructions and hazards, as well as collecting, cataloging, and storing the belongings[17] of those living in the encampment. Belongings are stored for at least 70 days at a "location commonly used by the City for storing property" which is accessible by public transit (City of Seattle, 2022d). A post-cleanup notice on the site contains information for how encampment residents may retrieve their belongings.[18]

The city of Seattle may declare particular areas where encampments have "become a consistent problem" an "emphasis area"[19] (City of Seattle, 2022c). This designation occurs after the encampment removal and subjects the site to daily reinspection and removal of encampment materials. In emphasis areas, removal of encampment materials does not require advance notice, though any belongings that are removed are stored in the same manners as those removed in the original clearance.

Homelessness and Parks

Public parks are valued for offering a multitude of recreation, exercise, socialization, and relaxation opportunities to the general public. This can be especially true in dense urban areas where green space may be limited and many people live in multifamily housing units where they do not have access to private green space (such as a yard). Speer and Goldfischer (2020) argue that parks are also "central to the everyday livelihoods of those who are displaced from capital housing markets and driven out of other city spaces"

[17] Belongings that are deemed by city workers as hazardous or expected to become a hazard (i.e., wet bedding) are discarded and not stored.
[18] Belongings may be retrieved by calling the City of Seattle Service Bureau and describing the belongings in detail. No identification is required for retrieval. Belongings may be picked up or shipped to any address within the City of Seattle that the owner requests.
[19] No more than ten emphasis areas may be active at one time (City of Seattle, 2022c).

(p. 25). Through an analysis of 74 memoirs written by unhoused individuals, Speer and Goldfischer found that pubic parks offer privacy, solace, survival, and serve as places to get away from any violence and/or surveillance that unhoused people are experiencing in other parts of cities. For those experiencing homelessness, parks also offer respite from "social and environmental difficulties," such as access to water and cooler/shaded areas during the summer (Rose, 2019, p. 16).

Due to the presence of encampments in public parks, parks and recreation departments are increasingly being tasked with responding to encampments and homelessness (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2017). The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) surveyed its member departments across the country to understand the views and responses of local parks and recreation department staff relating to homelessness. A total of 65 parks and recreation agency directors responded. NRPA noted that parks and recreation agencies have a "complicated relationship" (NRPA, 2017, p. 2) with the unhoused community, on one hand viewing parks as resources for everyone, including those who are unhoused, but on the other hand, acknowledging that unhoused individuals use of park resources can put a strain on the agencies' and parks' finite resources.

The survey results, shown below in Figure 5, highlight this complicated relationship. Sixty percent of urban parks and recreation agencies do not view unhoused individuals as a population that their agency works to better serve and meet their needs. Almost half (49%) of urban parks and recreation agency directors agree that unhoused individuals represent a different type of park user with a different set of needs. Forty-five percent of urban parks and recreation agency directors surveyed view unhoused individuals as a nuisance that

detracts from user experience and only 17% agency directors report their agency is working to provide better programming for the unhoused community (NRPA, 2017).

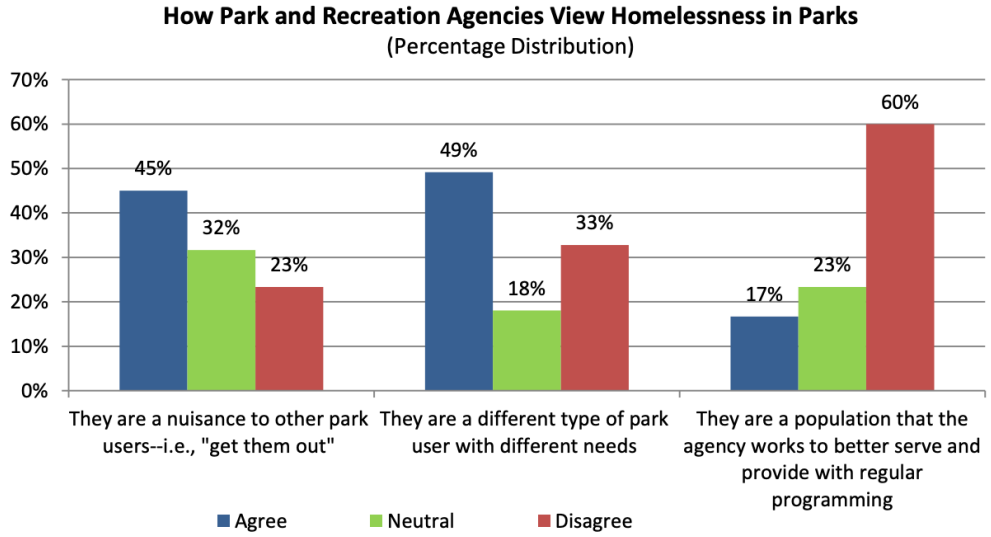

Figure 5 NRPA Survey Results.

Source: NRPA.

The NRPA survey results reveal that local parks and recreation departments are involved roughly 60% of the time. Most parks and recreation departments[20] are allowed to remove unhoused individuals without notice and they rely on the local police department to enforce anti-loitering laws. Seventy-five percent of local parks and recreation departments are using (or have considered using) hostile architecture[21], and over half[22] of the parks and recreation departments provide some services to the unhoused population in parks, such as restrooms, showers, or computers (NRPA, 2017).

[20] Exact percentage not provided in the Homelessness in Parks report.
[21] Hostile architecture is an urban design strategy aimed to discourage behavior often associated with unhoused individuals, for example installing arm rests on benches to prevent lying down and sleeping.
[22] Exact percentage not provided in the Homelessness in Parks report.

User Interactions and Perceptions of Homelessness

The presence of unhoused individuals in public places, such as parks, creates opportunities for interactions between housed and unhoused users of public spaces. These interactions and the ways housed individuals perceive homelessness in public space aids in understanding the homelessness crisis and can inform how homelessness in public space can be addressed. This section of the literature review explores homelessness in public parks and spaces, as well as interactions between housed users of those spaces and unhoused individuals living in the spaces and the ways homelessness in public spaces impacts and is perceived by housed users of public spaces.

In response to increases in the privatization of public space and anti-homeless ordinances, Toolis and Hammack (2015) set out to investigate boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders" (i.e., housed and unhoused individuals respectively) in public spaces and what impact(s) this has on the framing of homelessness. The authors note that public spaces are often governed by “material and symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders, which are negotiated through discourse and institutionalized through public policies” (Toolis and Hammack, 2015, p. 368). These boundaries have implications for who is allowed to occupy a space or has a legal right to the space.

Focusing on downtown Santa Cruz, California, due to its high rate of homelessness per capita, Toolis and Hammack conducted interviews with housed and unhoused community members, performed ethnographic observations, and reviewed text from the Santa Cruz Public Safety Citizen Task Force Report. The researchers found that distinctions between those who are housed and those who are unhoused were constructed by framing homelessness as a threat. Study respondents identified multiple forms of threat. People

perceived homelessness as a threat to public safety due to criminal activity, frightening behavior, and unsanitary/unsightly conditions. Homelessness was also perceived as a threat to economic vitality due to driving visitors away from downtown and draining public resources (Toolis and Hammack, 2015). These perceived threats serve as a basis for interventions such as increased regulation of public space. Interview participants, predominantly those who are unhoused (but not exclusively so), pushed back on this narrative with three main claims: (1) criminalization of homelessness is unjust as it creates barriers to unhoused individuals being able to meet their most basic needs[23]; (2) unhoused individuals have the right to be in the community; and (3) homelessness needs to be reframed as a product of economic inequality (Toolis and Hammack, 2015).

Similar perceptions of unhoused individuals as threats to the community were found in New Zealand, where a media controversy erupted over unhoused men's use of a local public library (Hodgetts et al, 2008). A newspaper article, which quoted a city councillor calling for a full-time security guard at the library to "protect staff and library users from men using the facility as a hangout" (Hodgetts et al, 2008, p. 939), prompted the research team to focus on the library as a case study. As part of a three-year ethnographic study focusing on relationships between housed and unhoused individuals, Hodgetts et al. interviewed the unhoused users of the library, along with library staff, and housed users of the library to understand their perspectives.

Three major findings emerged from the interviews: (1) unhoused men's perspectives can shed light on the positive aspects of their library use; (2) other library users and staff are not threatened or offended by unhoused men's use of the library; and

[23] Including restrictions on sleeping, sitting, and bathing in public spaces.

(3) overall people perceived unhoused individuals as having the right to public space. The library served as a place for recreation, information gathering, socializing, and interacting (with both housed and unhoused individuals) as well as a place to go when shelters closed in the morning. Hodgetts et al. note the power of media attention to broaden the conversation around controversial topics, create space for more inclusion, and provide for a range of perspectives to be heard in discussions of issues that affect them (Hodgetts et al., 2008).

In Seattle, media attention and ideas of homelessness as a threat to community and future of a city, collided in a documentary entitled *Seattle is Dying,* which was released in March of 2019 by KOMO News, a major local television network in Seattle. Thematic content analysis on the documentary transcript revealed that the rhetoric of the documentary "postulates an Other – 'lost souls' creating a sense of danger by living outside societal expectations - as distinct from, and perhaps lesser than, 'us', thus privileging the perspective and urban presence of those who are housed and have families, while the dangers faced by unhoused people go unmentioned" (Manzo and Desanto, 2021, p. 216). Manzo and Desanto (2021) also note that there has been strong criticism of the documentary from homeless service providers for bundling homelessness, criminal activity, and drug use into one.

Turning specifically to user interactions and homelessness in public parks, studies by Neild (2018) and Rose (2019) have aimed to analyze the impacts that the presence of unhoused individuals have on public parks. In a case study of the Jordan River Parkway in Utah, Neild (2018) conducted interviews with parks department staff, social service providers, and park residents. Interviews revealed several environmental and social

impacts of unhoused individuals living in parks: presence of solid and human waste, as well as needles, trampled vegetation, water contamination, park users feeling unsafe, public complaints about park residents' presence and associated waste, and reduced use of the park (Neild, 2018). This study also revealed that the local parks and recreation agency spent much of their time responding to complaints from the public, posting removal notices for encampments, cleaning up encampment sites, and modifying the park to deter future encampments, such as removing vegetation and furniture (Neild, 2018). Neild found that clearing encampments made life increasingly difficult for park residents through the loss of belongings and being pushed further away from downtown services.

In a case study focused on City Creek Canyon in Utah, Rose (2019) notes that while parks often serve as places for survival and stability for those experiencing homelessness, the presence of homelessness in parks can raise health and safety concerns and environmental impact concerns for housed residents and park users. In this study, Rose surveyed park users to understand how the presence of encampments impacted their perceptions of the park and the environmental conditions of the park. In contrast to the Neild study elsewhere in Utah, Rose found the park users are widely aware of homelessness in the park, but it does not make them feel unsafe, nor does it affect their perceptions of environmental damage, such as impacts to water quality or wildlife (Rose, 2019). Rose concluded that these findings support "a right to the city movement" as park users expressed the view that those living unsheltered in the park are "both present and a manageable social and environmental concern" (Rose, 2019, p. 16).

Neild and Rose (2019) noted that conflict between various park user groups is inevitable and, in the case of Jordan River Parkway, resulted in numerous public

complaints to the parks department and requests to remove vegetation, restrooms, and benches. Spier (1994) argues that communities have a tolerance level for the presence of unhoused individuals living in public parks, and once the presence of unhoused people increases past that tolerance level, there is public push-back. Then, parks and recreation departments are forced to respond and create policy responses. To ease these user conflicts and make housed users more tolerant of homelessness in parks, Neild and Rose (2019) called for more public education and awareness of the conditions affecting unhoused individuals living in parks, not as a solution to homelessness, but as a way to "help shift, and eventually transform the evolving dynamics between communities" (p. 54).

Public Education

Given public complaints regarding the presence of homelessness that parks that parks departments receive, park managers view public education as an important first step in "generating community support to address homelessness in parks" (Neild and Rose, 2019, p. 54). Public education can take many forms, such as public statements by the parks department, developing and installing interpretive signage, creating pamphlets, and hosting community meetings and/or online and social media platforms.

Neild and Rose (2019) identify and recommend three main messages to be included as part of a public education program: (1) everyone is welcome to use parks and open spaces; (2) anyone can experience homelessness; and (3) there will be less unsheltered homelessness as the community works together to respond to homelessness. Each of these three main messages includes a number of recommendations. For example, regarding the first message on everyone being welcome in parks, subtopics include highlighting that parks are vital spaces for communities, that parks may be more comfortable places to

reside for those experiencing homelessness (opposed to sidewalks, under freeways, etc.), and that a high number of complaints may strain public resources.

In expounding on the message that anyone can experience homelessness, specific recommendations include information on the fact that those experiencing homelessness may face complex and unique challenges, explaining how securing housing is a long process, and how limited community resources make overcoming homelessness challenging. Lastly, subtopics to the third main message include noting that removals of unhoused individuals living in parks make it more challenging for social service providers to work with unhoused people and makes it more difficult for them to become familiar and involved with organizations in the community that provide services.

Parks managers whom the researchers interviewed were hopeful that public education would help their agencies gain public support to shift from "reactive, costly, short-term responses to proactive, holistic engagements with homelessness in parks" (Neild and Rose, 2019, p. 54). Neild and Rose (2019) label this a "person-first approach" that is "both sympathetic and problem-oriented" (p. 53). The latter approach involves addressing the causes instead of the symptoms of homelessness. Acknowledging that this is outside of the scope of recreational professionals, Neild and Rose (2019) and the park managers they interviewed called for collaboration with social service providers. This includes extensive outreach and engagement with those living unsheltered in parks before encampments are cleared. An important part of this person-first approach is the aforementioned public education as "housing may take hours or months to coordinate, and repeated displacement resulting from short-term solutions would compromise housing efforts" (Neild and Rose, 2019, p. 53-54).

Coexistence

In response to unhoused individuals living in public parks and spaces, and to concerns from housed users over this situation, SPUR, a non-profit public policy organization in San Francisco and the urban design firm Gehl raise the idea of coexistence. They define this as "designing and managing spaces to allow for people of all backgrounds to find joy and belonging within a shared space while feeling safe and secure" (SPUR and Gehl, 2020, p.4-5).

SPUR and Gehl (2020) were involved in a long-term research project focused on Guadalupe River Park in San Jose, California. Their aim was to identify how the park can better serve all residents of the city. Guadalupe River Park, a three-mile linear paved trail that runs through downtown San Jose parallel to the Guadalupe River, is well used by walkers and joggers, but the research team found many users had safety concerns due to the presence of unhoused individuals in the park. SPUR and Gehl claim "as long as our cities do not provide housing for all who need it, our neighborhoods will continue to face the challenge of how housed users and unhoused users can coexist in public space" (2020, p. 1). Recognizing the importance of the Guadalupe River Park, SPUR and Gehl felt the community needed a strategy to discuss homelessness and public space. Consequently, the research team developed the Coexistence Toolkit, which consists of three strategies that city agencies and nonprofits can use in meetings to guide design, policy, and program decisions on public realm projects and their use by both housed and unhoused people.

The first Coexistence Toolkit strategy involves determining your values for public spaces and how they should be prioritized. This activity should not be specific to particular spaces, but rather should remain constant for all public spaces in a jurisdiction or study

area. Once values are agreed upon, acceptable behaviors in public spaces can be determined. This can ensure that the agreed upon values from the first exercise are upheld. The final exercise identifies people, agencies, or systems that are currently (or could be) responsible for furthering coexistence and their roles. The toolkit was designed to be flexible so other cities can adapt it to fit their needs and work towards coexistence in parks in their jurisdictions (Spur and Gehl, 2020).

There are several examples of park designs that aim for coexistence between housed and unhoused people. In her design thesis, Erica Bush sought to design a public space in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle, specifically under the Ballard Bridge, to address the needs of the unhoused population (Bush, 2014). She chose the Ballard site because of its rising land values, increasing population of unhoused individuals in the area, and decreasing open space. Bush argued that the design of our public spaces, in addition to exclusionary laws, only meet the needs of wealthier, housed individuals, therefore creating spaces that are not representative of the diverse urban population, nor do they meet the needs of those most marginalized.

Drawing on William Whyte's concept of "triangulation," Bush's proposed design intended to "address the needs of the homeless in tandem with programming and design features that would draw a diverse group of people to a space" (Bush, 2014, p. 81). She conducted interviews with unhoused and housed members of the community to understand their needs and preferences. Interviews with unhoused individuals revealed that they needed a place to feel safe, connect with community resources, eat, store belongings, use the restroom, and get out of inclement weather. Conversations with housed community members revealed their preferences for increased green space, recreational

opportunities, public restrooms, sense of safety, and improved aesthetics. Bush's proposed design intended for each portion of the site to be used by different groups at different times of the day. Bush argued against the claim that if a space is used by unhoused individuals, then it will no longer be used by members outside of that population.

Another example of a park designed to accommodate all users, both housed and unhoused, is the restoration of Lafayette Square Park in downtown Oakland, California, designed by landscape architect Walter Hood. The park, located in a neighborhood of Oakland that houses many missions and social services for the unhoused, has a long history of unhoused individuals gathering there. In the makeover of the park, Hood, delivered a space where everyone is welcome. The design treats the park as if it were a "set of rooms" where "disparate activities can go on side-by-side without crowding or threatening one another" (DelVecchio, 1998, n.p.). Off the design, Hood says, "I wanted an environment that wouldn't be bleak. Just because many of the people are homeless, it doesn't have to feel like an encampment" (Bishop, 2009, n.p.).

Figure 6 Lafayette Square Park in Oakland, CA.

Source: Hood Design Studio.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on Homelessness

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a spike in homelessness nationwide. Shelters closed or drastically reduced capacity in order to meet physical distancing requirements. While this improved quality of shelter conditions, it reduced the number of beds available to those living unsheltered in encampments. For example, by the end of 2020, Seattle's shelter system had lost 223 beds due to the COVID-19 pandemic, out of roughly 2,000 beds (Lewis, 2021). This resulted in a "dramatic increase of displacement and correlat[ed] to more people using public camping as their primary form of shelter" (Lewis, 2021, p. 1). This increase was documented in a study by researchers at Seattle Pacific University and the University of Washington that reported that the number of tents in some areas of Seattle increased by more than 50% during the pandemic (Greenstone, 2021a).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published interim guidance for local governments, homeless service providers, and healthcare facilities on how to respond to and support those living unsheltered (Centers for Disease Control, 2021). This guidance has specific considerations for encampments, such as allowing those living unsheltered or in an encampment to remain where they are if individual housing is not available to them. Clearing an encampment can result not only in increased spread of COVID-19 throughout the community, but in people losing connections with any service provider with whom they have been working. While outdoor settings provide greater opportunity for encampment residents to physically distance, these settings do not always provide protection from the weather or adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities. Therefore, the CDC recommended outreach workers and other homeless

responders consider the risks for each unhoused individual and connect those who are at increased risk for severe illness with individual housing if/when available.

As shelters closed or operated with limited capacity due to physical distancing requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19, Seattle and King County had to look for other ways to provide housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. These strategies included purchasing hotels and apartment buildings to house people in individual rooms, creating more tiny house villages, providing financial assistance to help those in shelters move to permanent housing, building housing for chronically unhoused individuals, as well as simply increasing the number of shelter beds (Patrick, 2022).

Though some strategies have been successful, Seattle and King County have faced challenges in bringing people into housing. King County purchased seven hotels and two apartment buildings, yet only two hotels are currently providing shelter to unhoused individuals. This translates to a total of 180 more units being used, out of the 859 total beds available in these purchased properties (Patrick, 2022). The City of Seattle also earmarked $60 million from the voter approved Seattle Housing Levy to build six new buildings to provide 588 more units of housing for chronically unhoused people – with 496 units to be available by the end of 2021. However, by the end of that year, no one had moved into any of these buildings (Patrick, 2022).[24] Seattle and King County officials note COVID-19 related staffing shortages and supply chain delays as challenges to opening and operating the apartments and hotels according to the original timeline. Pandemic related impacts, including increased building costs, supply chain delays, and staffing shortages, are also

[24] Three of Seattle's six proposed buildings are still under construction, with one expected to be ready in early 2022, and three buildings remain in the permitting process and have yet to begin construction.

noted as causes of the delay in these new projects. Two new tiny house villages were added in 2021, expanding the capacity in Seattle from 335 houses to 441 houses. Seattle did lease two hotels within the city to house unhoused individuals for a year, beginning in March 2021 (Patrick, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the need for hygiene facilities because before the pandemic, many unhoused individuals relied on libraries, businesses, and other public buildings for access to hygiene facilities and these buildings were closed to the public at the height of the pandemic. A total of nine City of Seattle-operated facilities are open and currently operating in the Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park study area, which are shown below in Table 3 (City of Seattle, 2022b).

Table 3 Hygiene Services Available at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Study Area.

Location	**Facility(ies) Available**	**Operating Department**
Green Lake Wading Pool	Restroom Building Sink	Parks & Recreation
Green Lake Community Center	Restroom Building Sink Shower	Parks & Recreation
E Green Lake Way N / N 65th St	Restroom Building Sink	Parks & Recreation
Green Lake Shellhouse	Restroom Building Portable Restroom	Parks & Recreation
Green Lake Bath House	Restroom Building	Parks & Recreation
Woodland Park Bowling Green	Restroom Building Portable Restroom	Parks & Recreation
Woodland Park Pink Palace	Restroom Building Sink	Parks & Recreation
Woodland Park Clover Leaf	Restroom Building Portable Restroom	Parks & Recreation
N 50th St / Woodland Ave N	Restroom Building Sink	Parks & Recreation

Source: City of Seattle.

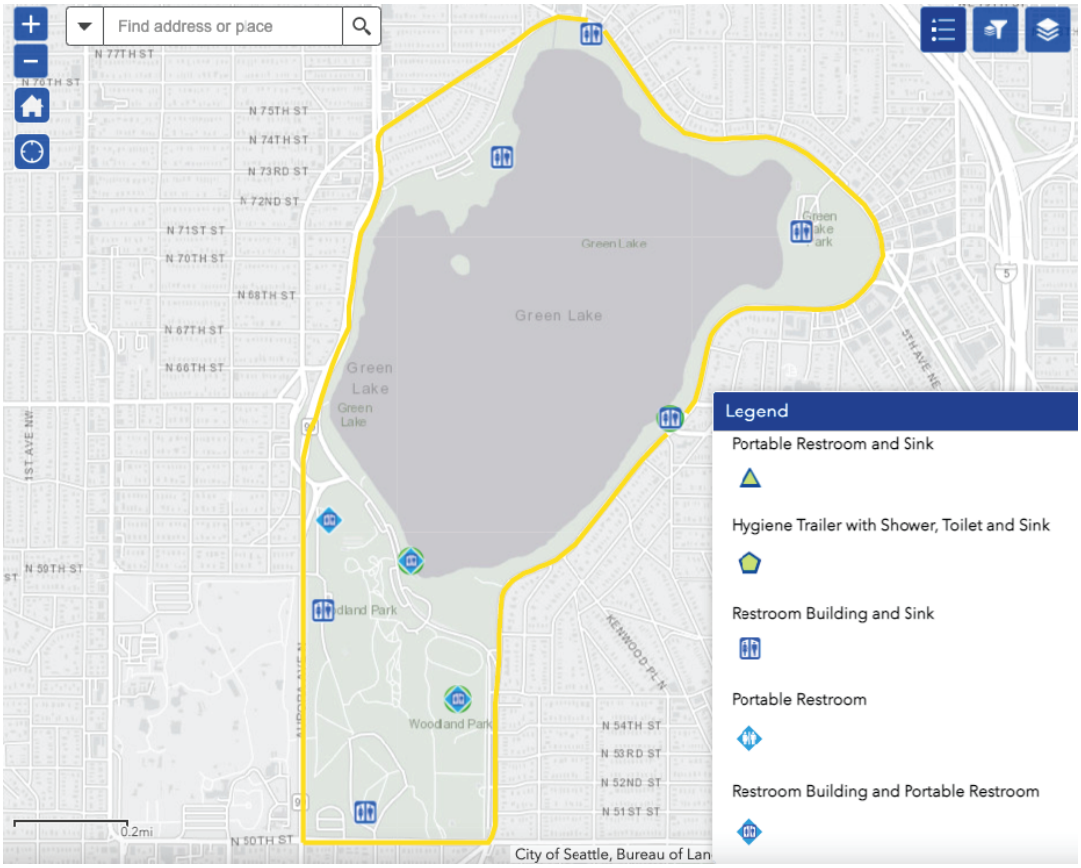

Figure 7 Hygiene Services Available at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Study Area.

Source: City of Seattle.[25]

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant challenges into the homelessness response in Seattle and King County. Shelters either drastically reduced capacity or closed all together to comply with physical distancing requirements and the Centers for Disease Control directed local governments to allow those living unsheltered to remain in place if individual housing was not available. Seattle and King County pursed innovative responses, such as purchasing vacant hotels and apartment buildings to be used as housing, though these strategies have faced challenges in bringing the unhoused inside.

[25] "Portable restroom and sink" and "Hygiene Trailer with Shower, Toilet and Sink" are not located in the study area.

Literature Reflections

This review of the literature reveals that encampments and tent cities are prevalent in the United States and they are increasingly located in public spaces, including public parks. Cities respond with a variety of approaches, though clearing the encampment while offering its residents a shelter bed or other housing available is the predominant approach. The COVID-19 pandemic added challenges as shelter capacity was greatly reduced due to the need for physical distancing and the CDC recommended allowing those living in encampments to remain where they were to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Previous research has found that there are environmental and social impacts from unhoused individuals living in public parks, as well as tensions between housed and unhoused users. Research also shows that communities on the whole have a certain tolerance level for the number of unhoused individuals living in public parks, although this will vary with in different contexts. Strategies to reduce tension between housed and unhoused people include public education and strategies that support coexistence. No previous research has addressed the impacts of homelessness in public parks in Seattle, Washington. In this thesis, I aim to extend the current discourse on homelessness in public parks by exploring how users of Seattle's Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park view and perceive homelessness in the park, as well as how they have been impacted by homelessness in the park.

METHODS

Overview and Rationale

For this research, I chose to utilize a qualitative case study approach because the nature of the work is exploratory and does not seek to test or validate a hypothesis. Specifically, my research aim is to understand if and how users of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park have been impacted by the presence of unhoused individuals, tents, and encampments in the park and to understand their feelings towards the presence of homelessness in the park. As mentioned earlier, I selected Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park as a case study because while there is a large presence of homelessness in the park, it still receives much recreational use and remains one of Seattle's most popular parks. This makes for a more dynamic environment to study and for more nuance to explore. Case studies are a common strategy in planning, as well as other social sciences that allows a researcher to focus on "situations, events, or the behaviors of interest" in great detail (Farthing, 2016, p.116).

Given that my research aims to understand how housed users of the Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park interpret homelessness in the park and how they have been impacted by homelessness in the park, it was necessary to talk to those who use the park. I chose in-depth interviews as my main source of data as it yields rich, detailed information and allows for nuanced interpretations and place meanings. The approach of conducting interviews, as well as utilizing a case study strategy, is consistent with previous research on impacts of homelessness in public parks (Neild, 2018; Rose, 2019; Neild and Rose, 2019). Lastly, generating an in-depth description of users' experiences and opinions is a goal of

this work to better understand housed users' experience of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park and their perceptions and reactions to the presence of unhoused people in the park.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Participant Recruitment

To identify interview participants, I chose to reach out to leadership of community groups in the neighborhood as I felt they would be able to assist in advertising my project to the larger community through their email lists and/or websites. Members of both the Green Lake Community Council (GLCC) and the Phinney Ridge Community Council (PRCC) were extremely helpful in advertising my study. A description of my project and a call for interview participants was included on the website and in the communication channels of the GLCC and the PRCC. I also attended meetings of both councils to provide an overview of my project, its purpose, and to see if anyone was interested or knew of anyone that may be interested in being interviewed. This yielded 15 interviews. From there, I utilized the snowball sampling technique for participant recruitment, where I asked each interview participant if they knew of anyone else who may be interested in being interviewed (Farthing, 2016).

I conducted a total of 33 semi-structured [26] interviews. All interviews took place between January and February 2022. I used a data saturation approach to help determine my sample size and conducted interviews until they no longer revealed new perspectives. In qualitative research, data saturation is a predominant measure in determining sample size and is often described as "the point in data collection and analysis when new incoming

[26] In semi-structured interviews, "the major questions which are of interest are asked in the same way in each interview but the order in which the questions are asked may vary, and the interviewer is prompt and to probe for further details (Farthing, 2016, p. 129). Semi-structured interviews are useful for research intended to explore peoples' feelings and experiences.

data produces little or no new information to address the research question" (Guest et al, 2020, p. 2). A limitation that should be noted is the possibility that the snowball approach can cause the interview process to reach data saturation faster than other sampling approaches. This is because participants may suggest people who have similar opinions to them.

Table 4 Engagement Summary.

Engagement Method	**Date**
Post on Green Lake Community Council Website	December 2021
Appearance at Green Lake Community Council Board Meeting	December 2021
Appearance at Green Lake Community Council Meeting	January 2022
Post included in Phinney Ridge Community Council Newsletter	January 2022
Appearance at Phinney Ridge Community Council Meeting	February 2022
Snowball Identification	January – February 2022

Semi-Structured Interviews: Interview Instrument

The interview instrument I developed consisted of 11 questions[27], (*see Appendix A for interview instrument)*. The interview instrument asks questions about three major topics: feelings towards and impacts from homelessness in the park, comparing those feelings and impacts experienced in the park to other locations throughout the city, and attitudes towards coexistence between housed and unhoused users of the park. I crafted questions to be open-ended enough for participants to fully express themselves, but also focused enough to keep the discussion on topic. A few example questions are:

- Does the presence of tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals impact your use of the park? How so?

[27] During the course of conducting interviews, one question was added and one question was modified. One question was modified in order to enhance clarity for interview participants and to better address the research questions. A question on coexistence was added based on previous interview participants to explore views on sharing the park between housed and unhoused individuals.

- How does the presence of tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals in the park make you feel?

A limitation that should be noted is that I did not capture demographic information of interview participants, such as age or gender.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Interview Process

I conducted interviews over the phone, on Zoom, or in person at a local coffee shop, with the majority of the interviews taking place over Zoom. I started each interview by asking for consent to audio record the interview,[28] explaining to the participant that all of their responses would be confidential, that they could choose not to answer any question, and that they could end the interview at any point they chose. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes in length. No one terminated the interview before I was able to ask all the interview questions.

Data Analysis

I recorded interviews using the recording and transcription software Otter.ai. From the audio recording, Otter.ai automatically generates a transcript of the recording. I exported the raw transcript from each interview from the app onto my computer. Since the automatically generated raw transcripts contained some errors – e.g. incorrectly captured words - I manually cleaned each raw transcript by correcting these errors. To do this, I played the audio recording of each interview and read along on the transcript, editing any errors as I went along.

[28] Interviews were recorded using the application Otter.ai.

Once I had a set of all 33 transcripts cleaned, I analyzed their content. To do so, I uploaded all the cleaned transcripts into the qualitative data analysis software program ATLAS.ti. Using the code feature of ATLAS.ti, I performed thematic content analysis by way of open coding each of the 33 interviews. Open coding is the process of "naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of the data" (Strauss and Corbin, 2008, p. 62). This is the "first basic analytical step" of qualitative data analysis without which no further analysis or communication could occur (Strauss and Corbin, 2008, p. 62).

During this coding process, I identified unique concepts or phenomena, assigned them a code – or conceptual label - and iteratively compared each code with other existing codes to see if similar codes could be grouped together into one refined code. I also maintained a code dictionary that includes each code, its definition, and how many times the codes appeared (*see Appendix B for code dictionary).*

After I completed the open coding, I then used axial coding to put the data back together in meaningful ways. This is done through "making connections between a category and its subcategories" (Strauss and Corbin, 2008, p. 97). I grouped codes of similar topics into code families, which are the larger categories. Code families are a useful way to identify larger themes and look for variation or nuance in how interview participants describe a particular issue. For example, during the interview I asked respondents about the possibility of coexistence, or sharing the space, between housed and unhoused users of the park. People's responses fell into three open code categories: 'coexistence, pro', 'coexistence, reluctance', and 'coexistence, anti'. I grouped these three codes into the code family 'coexistence', which allowed me to look across the full depth of the topic of coexistence.

FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter is comprised of three main sections: one that describes interview participants' park usage, one that provides composite profiles of participants, and one describing the key cross-cutting themes that emerged when analyzing the data across all interviews. The park usage section provides an overview of how interview participants use Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. The composite profiles section presents results in the form of three profiles of park users that emerged from the data analysis, while the cross-cutting themes sections delves into the themes that were amongst all interview participants.

Park Usage

The frequency of park usage varied amongst interview participants from visiting the park multiple times a week to once every couple of weeks to not visiting the park at all[29], as shown in Figure 8. The majority of interview participants visit the park multiple times a week.

[29] Several participants expressed that while in the past they have been frequent users, they no longer visit the Green Lake/Lower Woodland due to the presence of homelessness.

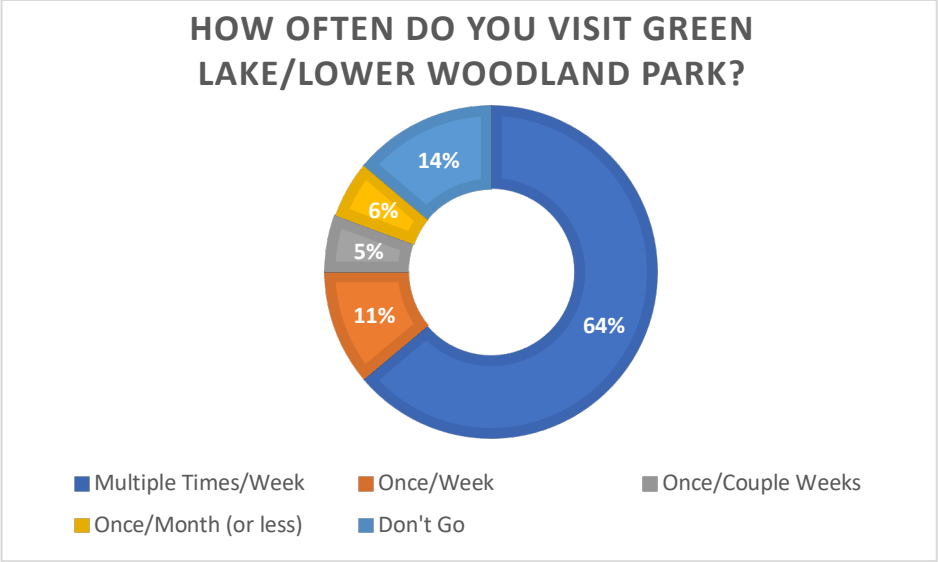

Figure 8 Frequency of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Usage Results.[30]

Many interview participants visit the park in a fairly even mix between going alone or with friends and family (43%). Three participants explicitly expressed they do not visit the park alone, predominantly due to safety concerns.

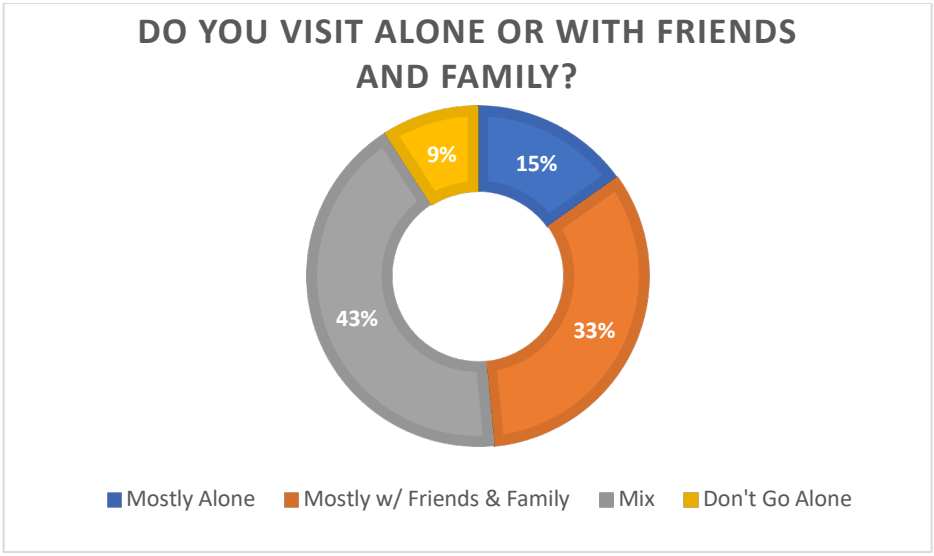

Figure 9 Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park Visitation Results.

[30] Five participants indicated that the frequency of their visits to the park depends on factors such as weather, season, and exercise needs. Therefore, their responses fell into two frequency categories. For example, visiting the park daily in the summer but only once a week in the winter.

Interview participants described a variety of activities they engage in at the park, with the most popular activity being walking. The top six activities are shown in Figure 10.[31] Interview participants' favorite places in the park varied from sunny lawns in the north side of the park to the loop trail that goes around Green Lake to anywhere you can see wildlife. The main areas that participants said they avoided in the park were the wooded areas of Lower Woodland and the portion along West Green Lake Way N (southwestern side of the lake) and they explained that this was due to the presence of homelessness.

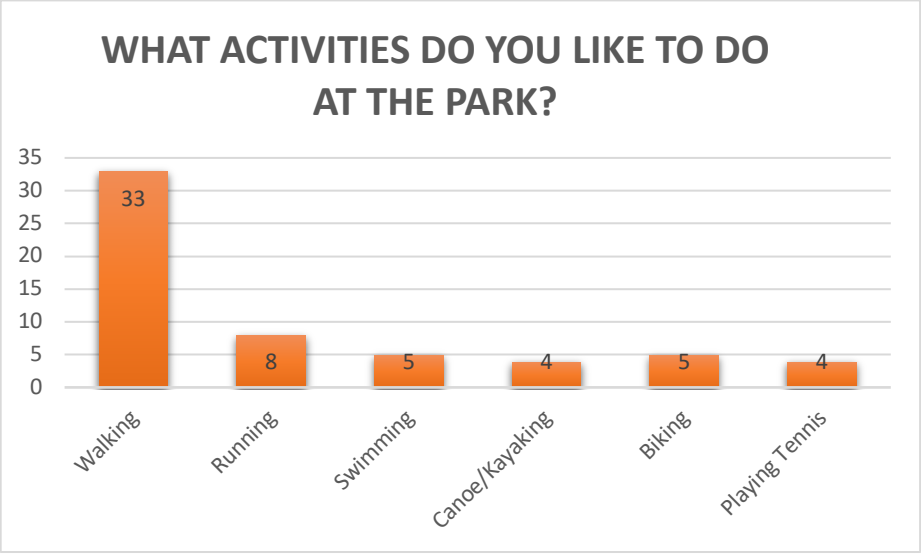

Figure 10 Top Activities Engaged in at Park Results.

Composite Profiles

Based on interview data, I created three composite profiles of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park users: (1) those who have been largely unaffected by homelessness in the

[31] The figures illustrate the top six activities because the other activities were mentioned by only had one or two participants each.

park; (2) those who have modified their use of the park as a result of homelessness in the park; and (3) those who no longer frequent the park due to the presence of homelessness, as shown in Table 5 below.[32] While people may see themselves reflected largely in one profile, they may also self-identify with multiple profiles.

Table 5 Profiles of Park Users Based on Level of Impact Experienced.

Profile	Level of Impact	Park Usage
Profile 1	Low	Continues usual use (activities, frequency, hours) of the park, though perhaps has noted some impacts from the presence of homelessness in the park that they deem secondary (i.e., aesthetic impacts)
Profile 2	Moderate	Modified usual use (activities, frequency, hours) of the park due to the presence of homelessness in the park
Profile 3	High	Stopped using the park entirely due to the presence of homelessness, frequents other parks or uses their neighborhood for exercise/recreation

I created these three categories based on how park users have been impacted by the presence of homelessness in the park and whether and how they changed their use of the park due to the presence of homelessness. These profiles are composites because I took into account the data from each individual interview participant who fit that particular category. This strategy was central to my thesis and is a direct answer to one of my major research questions, which asks how users of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park have been impacted by the presence of homelessness in the park. This section presents the stories of each profile, tracing their responses through the remaining interview questions, and pulling out themes central to, and characteristic of, each group.

[32] 18 respondents fit into Profile 2 (55%), 11 respondents fit into Profile 1 (33%), and four respondents fit into Profile 3 (12%)

Table 6 below presents a summary of the key characteristics of each profile. Profile 1 presents one end of the spectrum in that users in this profile have not changed their use of the park in response to the presence of homelessness in the park. Profile 3 represents the other end of the spectrum in that users in this profile no longer go to the park. Profile 2 is in the middle; users in this profile have modified their use of the park in some way, but this profile shares characteristics fairly evenly between Profiles 1 and 3. For example, Profiles 1 and 2 share feeling shocked or ashamed of their feelings or recognizing homelessness at the park to be a reflective of a larger problem. Profiles 2 and 3 share safety concerns and concerns over impacts to the neighborhood stemming from the presence of homelessness in the park. There is one major characteristic showing up in all three profiles - frustration towards local political leaders and city agencies. Table 6 shows characteristics unique to Profile 1 shaded in blue, characteristics unique to Profile 2 shaded in green, characteristics unique to Profile 3 shaded in orange, and characteristics common amongst all three profiles shaded in yellow.

Table 6 Summary of Key Characteristics of Three Composite Profiles.

Characteristic	Profile 1 (Low Impact)	Profile 2 (Moderate Impact)	Profile 3 (High Impact)
No changes to use of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park	X		
Do not have fear of unhoused individuals living in the park	X		
Concerns over aesthetic impacts	X	X	
Feelings of sadness, anger, and/or sense of loss associated with going to park	X	X	
Feelings of shock or surprise by their own response to homelessness in park; primarily their feelings of empathy being tested	X	X	
Strong frustrations toward government	X	X	X
Places an emphasis on collective responsibility and taking ownership of solution	X		
Recognizes homelessness at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park is reflective of a larger problem	X	X	
Feels encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park less impactful than encampments at other public parks/spaces in Seattle	X	X	
Mixed feelings about unhoused individuals living in parks (could be temporary solution, not a satisfactory solution)	X		
Modifications to usual use of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park		X	
Feels unhoused individuals should not be living in parks; restricting others' use of parks		X	X
Concerns over safety, health, and hygiene (driving modified use/avoidance)		X	X
Concerns over impacts to neighborhood from unhoused individuals living in park		X	X
Draws distinction between groups of unhoused population, views them differently		X	X
Feels sadness, sense of loss over degradation of Seattle in general		X	
Complete avoidance of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park			X

Profile 1: Low Impact Park User

Those who fall into the low impact profile have not changed their usual use of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park in response to the presence of unhoused individuals in the park. Usual use includes engaging in activities such as walking the loop trail around Green Lake, and visiting the park with the same frequency and at the same time(s) of day. Users in this profile value Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park as an oasis in the middle of the city, a place to see wildlife, and for its diversity of users and activities. Respondents in this profile express not having fear over the unhoused individuals living in the park and do not feel unsafe using the park. One respondent shared the following perspective:

> *"What I mean is I'm not afraid of being around people who are homeless as a lot of people are afraid of that and they want to stay as far away as possible."*

The respondent is acknowledging that others may feel fear being around unhoused individuals, but they are not afraid and have continued to feel comfortable using the park.

Though respondents in this profile have not changed how they use the park, they still do note some impacts from the presence of homelessness in the park, primarily aesthetic impacts from the sight of tents, garbage, and debris in the park. Additionally, those in this profile express feeling surprised or guilty by their own feelings and reactions towards the situation, as exemplified in this quote below:

> *"And so, I used to have this real open heart towards homelessness. And it's really changed in the last year and a half or so because what I'm seeing right now is I'm seeing lots of mental illness, and then seeing lots of drug abuse, and I'm seeing really abusive homeless people that are not good citizens, and so I've done a complete switch and I can't believe I'm the same person."*

This respondent is expressing a significant switch in how they perceive homelessness due to actions of unhoused individuals they are seeing. This switch is so drastic to how they previously perceived homelessness that they don't recognize themselves.

Frustration towards city agencies and local political leaders is strong among people in this profile and this frustration centers around the city failing to effectively provide the resources, services, care, and housing necessary to support the unhoused population. They feel that the problem is solvable, though that involves some potentially significant changes to city policy and approach, such as eliminating single-family zoning. They note that the solution to homelessness takes individuals and neighborhoods coming together, residents taking a collective responsibility for a role in the solution, and doing their part. People in this profile take active ownership of the solution, such as volunteering with an organization that provides services for the unhoused, handing out goods or supplies when possible, or contributing financially to service organizations that help unhoused people – and encouraging others to do the same. One respondent expressed this idea of taking responsibility in this way:

> *"You know, I think it's something we all have to work towards together. We all have to kind of roll up our sleeves and do some part of making sure that something good happens to the homeless situation here."*

Users in the low impact profile view homelessness as a larger problem that is not specific to Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park or the City of Seattle. Rather, they view it as a reflection of larger social issues. This group specifically calls out an unjust and inequitable society where affordable housing and mental health services are inaccessible to so many and express considerable sadness over the fact that so many people are unhoused. This

group assigns at least some of the responsibility on society and not on the unhoused individuals themselves. Though this group has not changed their use of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, they are saddened by seeing unhoused individuals living in the park.

In this group's view, encampments in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park are less impactful compared to encampments in other parks and public spaces in Seattle, because many perceive there to be less garbage and drug use at the study site compared to other parks. Additionally, people in this profile view the encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park to be better located than encampments in other public parks and spaces in Seattle because encampments are not blocking sidewalks or ballfields.

Those in the low impact group have mixed feelings about the coexistence of housed and unhoused people in the park. Most feel that unhoused individuals living in parks is not the answer to homelessness, while some people feel that it could be a possible interim solution until permanent solutions, such as housing, are available. People in this profile are not supportive of unhoused individuals living in the park because they do not feel that the park is for residential use and they believe that there are other places and ways to provide more appropriate forms of housing. Respondents in this group recognize that the presence of homelessness in the park does not necessarily limit everyone's use of the park, but they do acknowledge that it certainly might impact some, especially families with young children, as illustrated in the following quote:

> *"And so, if we could offer housing possibilities in every arena, then having to have tents in the park wouldn't be necessary. Now, having said that, there are some people who like living in a tent in the park. That's when I think we need to make limitations, because that's not what Green Lake Park is for in my opinion. And I think people*

pitching their tents there does limit it for other people. It doesn't limit it for me because what I do is pretty simple. I don't have children."

The respondent is drawing a clear line that unhoused individuals living in parks is not compatible with recreational use of the park, which they believe to be the intended use.

The other view expressed by people in Profile 1 is that while unhoused individuals living in parks is not a satisfactory long-term solution to homelessness, it may serve as a temporary solution until more housing options are available. This group on the whole felt that there is value in placing conditions on the encampments in the park in order to make sure everyone is comfortable, protected, and has their needs met. These conditions include designating certain areas for tents and providing services to the unhoused, such as garbage collection and shower and restroom facilities. The emphasis on park encampments being a short-term, temporary solution is expressed by one respondent:

"Well, they're always temporary solutions. So maybe on a temporary basis - on a permanent basis, no. And I think we need to find a permanent solution where people can bring pets, progeny, and property and all that kind of stuff, to, to housing, to public housing. We just, you know, I see all kinds of stuff being built and it's not low income. So, we can do it, but we're not doing it. Yeah, I think we need to look at the long term. I do not want to see people living in parks. But yes, on the short term, I guess that's the solution. The only solution we have."

While we see the respondent clearly calling for permanent housing options that meet the needs of unhoused individuals as a long-term solution, they are at a loss for what could be done in the intermediate besides having unhoused individuals living in parks.

Profile 2: Moderately Impacted Park User

Those interviewees who fit the moderate impact profile are those who still visit Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, but have modified their use of the park due to the presence of homelessness in the park. Modifications to use include visiting the park less frequently than normal, as well as behaviors that are not related to visiting the park less frequently, such as avoiding certain areas of the park and changing the hours of the day that they visit the park. Respondents in this profile primarily avoided areas where there were tents and other clear indicators of unhoused people, such as West Green Lake Way, the area along the southwest side of Green Lake (prior to the city clearing the area in December 2021) and the forested area of Lower Woodland (which the city has not cleared). Additional modifications to respondents' use of the park include no longer bringing company or out of town guests to Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park out of embarrassment over the state of the park and/or safety concerns.

Respondents in this profile cite two main drivers of their modified use of the park: safety concerns and health and hygiene concerns. Safety concerns are the primary driver of modified use and stem from experiencing or witnessing harassment from an unhoused individual, hearing stories from friends or neighbors about encounters with aggressive individuals, or feeling that those who are using drugs or have mental illness may be unpredictable in their behavior, as shown in the following quote:

> *"I also feel sometimes if people have mental problems they can act strangely or even violently in occasions, and that makes me feel uncomfortable and threatened."*

Health and hygiene concerns include water quality of Green Lake and the presence of discarded needles and human excrement. On avoiding areas of Woodland Park due to the

presence of homelessness, one respondent noted this health concern: *"I mean, just walking my dog you don't know where you're gonna find a needle, she might step on one."*

Despite continuing to use the park, people in this profile report feeling sad or angry when visiting the park, as well as a sense of loss of the calmness, serenity, and enjoyment they used to get from going to the park. Some people in this profile even chose not to visit the park on certain days because they do not want to have to see homelessness in the park and be reminded of the larger homelessness problem in society. The following quote describes one respondent's feelings of a loss of place due to the presence of homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park:

> *"We've lived here near the park since 1976. So, you can imagine all the years we had where we'd enjoy the, you know, wide open park and were able to play up there with our kids, and subsequently our grandchildren, and to see that taken away from us – this is a substantial loss."*

The respondent is describing a significant loss of a place that they have had a long connection to, and, more so, that this place has been taken away from them by the unhoused individuals.

Respondents in this profile also express feelings of sadness due to the presence of homelessness in the park restricting others' recreational use of the park as well as their own use. They value Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park for its diverse recreational opportunities, beautiful scenery, and community gathering spaces, so knowing that others do not feel comfortable utilizing the park is upsetting to them.

Respondents in this profile also reflect outside of the Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park and express sadness associated with the deterioration of the city in general. They note

increased crime, garbage, and homelessness throughout the city. On their experience living in Seattle, one respondent noted having to make decisions about where they can go based on comfort and safety, as illustrated in their quote: *"It feels weird to negotiate the city around places where you don't feel comfortable."*

Respondents who fit this moderately impacted profile tend to express considerable frustration with the local decision makers about the city letting the homelessness problem get to the level it is, not providing affordable housing or sufficient and resources to the unhoused, allowing residents of the city to live in inhumane conditions, and allowing public parks to be used as residential sites. These frustrations are exacerbated for respondents when they also consider the amount of taxes city residents pay to be put towards this issue and the amount of money spent on homelessness in general each year. As one respondent noted:

> *"And then finally, is this again, frustration with the city, you know, if the solution to the city's homelessness problem is going to be camping, then the city needs to get into the campground business and actually, you know, do it in a way that is rational, instead of just this kind of, well, you know, we can't do anything. We're unwilling to provide housing; we're unwilling to provide campgrounds we're unwilling to do all these things. So just the parks become the default. That's just not really fair to anybody. This is probably a debatable point, but I actually don't think it is even in the best interests of the people who are camping there to be allowed to camp there. I mean, again, you could debate that and it sort of depends a little bit on what their alternatives are, but certainly in the long run, I think that simply allowing unlimited*

camping is in effect, kind of enabling a kind of squalor that cannot be healthy in the long run."

In this comment, we see the respondent certainly expressing frustration towards the city, but also struggling with what is the best way for the city to move forward with the homelessness problem.

Like those in Profile 1, respondents in this profile also struggle with feelings of shame associated with their emotions towards homelessness present in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park or have ambivalence around the presence of homelessness in the park. They express a great deal of empathy for the unhoused, but find that their empathy is getting tested or lost for a variety of reasons. These reasons include unhoused individuals restricting others' use of the park, changing the way people feel about the park, impacting the environmental quality of the park (trash, water quality, destruction of vegetation), engaging in drug use, and engaging in theft in the neighborhood. Additionally, knowing that some of the unhoused refuse shelter or housing further contributes to a loss of empathy. Not wanting unhoused individuals to be living in the park and not wanting taxpayer money to be put towards allowing it, but also feeling unsure of what the right thing to do is leads to them feeling as if it is a no-win situation. This ambivalence is illustrated in the following quote:

"And I'm going around and around because I just don't know. I mean, I wish we could coexist, but I do understand people's fear or people's anger. As you know, propane is just taken out of people's backyard and you know, down at the campsite, people have watched it happen. My neighbors were there as people took their waste from RV and just dumped it in Green Lake and it has changed the way a lot of people interact with

the park so I don't know ... I'm sorry. I'm like going on and on. But I struggle with this all the time. I don't know what the right thing to do is and it makes me sad that people are living that way and yet then I need to realize some people that's what they want to do. "

In this quote, we see the respondent attempting to reconcile mixed feelings and struggling with if unhoused and housed people can coexist in parks.

Participants in the moderate impact profile have concerns over aesthetic impacts due to the presence of homelessness in the park. These aesthetic impacts include the sight of trash, debris, and tents, especially juxtaposed to the natural environment of the park. An additional concern people in this profile raise are impacts to the surrounding neighborhood due to the presence of homelessness in the park. These neighborhood impacts include theft from homes, hearing gunshots, and concerns over decreases in property values.

Members of this profile draw a distinction between those they perceive to be unhoused because they lost their apartment or job and those they perceive to be unhoused by choice because they refuse shelter or housing and do not want to follow societal rules. They view the latter group as at least partially responsible for being unhoused due to the aforementioned reasons and find it difficult to have empathy for this group. People in this profile express frustrations over actions in the park by unhoused individuals, such as pitching their tent wherever they want to, taking over the picnic shelters at Lower Woodland and turning them into permanent or semi-permanent residences, breaking the locks on the gate to get into Lower Woodland, driving cars in the woods where there are no roads, and bringing in generators, stoves, and power cords.

Respondents in this profile acknowledge that homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park is not unique to this specific park, but is a city-wide and national problem that reflects other related issues, such as a lack of mental health care affordable housing. They view encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, as having less of an impact aesthetically and they had fewer feelings of fear or discomfort associated with the encampments, compared to those in other public parks and spaces.

Respondents in the moderately impacted group do not see coexistence with unhoused individuals living in the park (either short or long term) as possible. This is for several reasons, including their view that Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park is meant to be a day use park for recreational purposes, their wish not to have the presence of unhoused individuals intimidate or restrict other users of the park, and their belief that there are other places that could be used for housing. On what they believe public parks are intended for, one respondent said the following:

> *"Our understanding of what a park should be is a place where you know, people have a daytime use for this park, they can take their children or grandchildren there, they can have picnics there, you know, play badminton or whatever, walk the dogs, that sort of thing. That's what the parks were designed for. Not for overnight living and long-term camping."*

Here we see the respondent emphasizing that daytime and recreational uses are what they feel are the intended uses of public parks.

Profile 3: Highly Impacted Park User

Those who fit into the highly impacted profile no longer visit Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park due to the presence of homelessness. This group values Green Lake/Lower

Woodland Park for its scenery, wildlife, and its role as a sanctuary in the middle of the city. Respondents in this group once were frequent users of the park. However, in the past few years, due to the presence of homelessness, respondents who fit this profile longer go to the park. The main reasons for this group's avoidance of the park are health, hygiene, and safety concerns. In particular, respondents express concerns about stepping on a discarded needle or human excrement in the park. Regarding safety concerns, this group feels uncomfortable due to the possibility of unreliable and unpredictable behavior of unhoused individuals due to drug use or mental illness. Some in this profile describe their personal experiences of being robbed, heckled, or harassed by unhoused individuals in the park. One respondent shared the following encounter:

> *"We noticed day by day that there were more and more RVs in there until it got to the point that the picnic shelters, all of the common areas were taken over by RVs and tents and we were heckled when we tried to walk through there and we never went back there again. I still have not been back there. It did not feel safe."*

Another respondent in this highly impacted group noted:

> *"Oh, walking through tents, debris, needles, junk. Through there, it felt like I was walking through a third world country. I got better things to do with my life and redirected my walks in the neighborhood."*

These quotes illustrate respondents' significant experiences in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park that led to them to choose to no longer go to the park.

Respondents in this profile express sadness and frustration over unhoused individuals living in the park. Specifically, this group was considerably upset over the state of the park (such as the trash and environmental damage caused by the unhoused

individuals living in the park) and that the presence of homelessness has made people not feel comfortable using the park. On their frustrations, one respondent noted:

> *"Angry at the ... condition of the park which has been degraded and the ability to enjoy the park has been reduced. That's it. That's it. I don't know where to direct my anger on that. I'm just angry at the fact."*

In this comment, we see the respondent is at a loss about how to handle their anger and they do not know where to direct their frustrations.

Respondents in this profile raise concerns regarding impacts of unhoused individuals living in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park on the surrounding neighborhood. For example, they perceive theft from homes in the neighborhood as tied to the unhoused individuals living in the park. Of their neighborhood's experience with theft, one respondent noted:

> *"And I think we, in our neighborhood, have been burglarized and terrorized quite a bit. And the people who were doing it lived in the forest, had Facebook accounts, and were selling our things on Offer Up and it was just bold and right out there."*

Those who fit into the highly impacted profile also have concerns over seeing an increase in drug paraphernalia in their neighborhood that they believe to be stemming from the unhoused individuals in the park. One respondent shared:

> *"The overflow of the people living in the park, who are evidently trying to support a habit ... We have a large uptick of, you know, drug paraphernalia in alleys and stuff."*

Lastly, like respondents in Profile 2 (moderately impacted), respondents in this profile are also saddened that they have had people in their neighborhood move away because of the aforementioned impacts to the neighborhood. One respondent shared the following:

"Unfortunately, I've had neighbors that moved away, some of the ones that were most passionate have left. So, which is also sad our community is losing people. You know?"

Similar to the other two profiles previously discussed, respondents in the highly impacted profile express considerable frustration with city agencies and local political leaders. Their frustrations are focused on the city letting the homelessness problem get to the point it is currently at, the lack of affordable housing and services for the unhoused in the city, the closure of W Green Lake Way early in the COVID-19 pandemic[33], and not responding to the community's concerns and frustrations. Respondents in this profile view the closure of W Green Lake Way as enabling the increase in encampments on and alongside that road, and thereby deterring housed people from using that area of the park for recreational purposes. Of their experience with the closure and trying to get it reopened and the encampments cleared, one respondent noted:

"It was dramatic. It started when they closed W Green Lake Way as a safe street. From the day they closed W Green Lake Way, the tents and RVs moved in ... It really felt like nothing was done until about December. Nothing despite agitating and agitating."

Here we see the respondent pointing clear responsibility for the increase in tents and RVs along that road on the street closure decision. They also express frustration over the lack of response to community complaints about the road closure and petitions to reopen it. The mention of December refers to the city's clearing of the encampments along W Green Lake Way in December of 2021.

[33] The city closed West Green Lake Way as part of its 'Stay Healthy Streets' initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was intended to encourage safe and healthy outdoor recreation.

Respondents who fit the highly impacted profile do not view coexistence with unhoused individuals living in the park as possible. Their reasons for this are that they do not feel parks are meant for residential use, they have concerns over the side effects that go along with unhoused individuals living in parks (such as crime, needles, and debris), and they do not want those that are using drugs harassing or threatening other people in the park.

Those in this profile make a clear distinction between those who are unhoused due to no fault of their own (such as suffering a job loss in the COVID-19 pandemic), whom they feel would gladly accept housing or shelter if it was offered to them, and those who are unhoused because they refuse housing or shelter and are engaging in criminal activities. Respondents in this highly impacted profile view this as an important distinction to make because they do not feel that the two groups should be viewed together or treated similarly. Respondents in this profile expressed considerable empathy for members of the unhoused population that have fallen on hard times. However, they do not have empathy for the group of the unhoused population whom they perceive to be at least partially responsible for being unhoused due to engaging in criminal behavior and refusing shelter. On this distinction of who deserves empathy or compassion, one respondent shared:

> *"My heart goes out to people that are one paycheck away from the streets, one medical bill. Their company closes down due to COVID. Where do you go? And [my] heart goes out to these people. Somebody who comes out and breaks into my house to steal stuff to buy heroin, I don't really feel sorry for. That's, I think that's probably a fairly universal statement."*

In this quote, we see the respondent drawing a clear line and expressing empathy for those who are unhoused because they have fallen on hard times. They are also struggling to have empathy for those who are unhoused and engaging in criminal behavior.

The composite profiles described in this section of the findings presented a spectrum of responses local housed residents have to unhoused individuals living in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. Responses across profiles range from their use of the park not being impacted at all to no longer going to the park, with a profile in the middle of people who have modified their use and shares attributes of the other two profiles. These profiles are helpful to understand the range of responses that park users have had, as well what feelings are shared between respondents in different profiles.

Cross-Cutting Themes

This section aims to provide a closer look into the major themes that emerged across all interviews regardless of profile. This analysis serves as a complement to the composite profiles as it provides more nuance and depth into the different facets of each of the major themes. These themes include: government frustration, safety concerns, homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park being one part of a larger problem, feelings towards coexistence between unhoused and housed individuals in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, and feelings of inner turmoil. Each theme will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Government Frustration

Frustrations towards city agencies and local political leaders for allowing the homelessness problem to get to the level it is was the most common theme across all

interviews. This suggests that respondents' frustrations were not automatically directed at the unhoused individuals themselves. Interview participants expressed frustration at the lack of affordable housing available in the city. Particularly, respondents expressed they feel the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) policy does not contribute to the development of affordable housing as developers pay into the fund opposed to developing affordable housing as part of their projects. Participants criticized MHA for being developer friendly and identified a need for the city to raise the amount developers need to contribute to the affordable housing fund. On this topic, one respondent provided the following criticism of how the city carries out MHA:

> *"Our city is in this, you know, [in] the pocket of the developers, and they're not asking for enough, which is why we're in the mess we're in. It needs to be upped the amount of money that the developers have to pay with every square footage of housing that they build, they need a higher percentage that goes for low-income housing. And the city is unwilling to do this because the developers run this city. That is my take."*

This respondent is making a connection between the homelessness problem in the city and what they view to be an ineffective city policy that is not addressing the affordable housing problem it was intended to address.

In addition to the city not supplying enough affordable housing, interview participants also expressed frustration that the city is not providing sufficient resources and services to the unhoused, such as mental health care and addiction. They also expressed frustration that the city is unwilling or unable to solve the homelessness problem. This inefficacy was viewed as stemming from not having a consistent policy and

approach to responding to homelessness, city departments perceived as not taking responsibility for the problem, political fighting, and general inaction.

Amplifying these frustrations is the amount of money that interview participants pay in taxes and the total amount of money that the city spends on homelessness each year.[34] Respondents expressed frustration over seeing the homelessness problem continue to worsen, despite the money spent to address it each year. Respondents were especially frustrated over seeing parks, such as Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park have large encampments that deter many people from fully utilizing the park. On this frustration of paying taxes and expecting to see them go towards solutions, one respondent noted:

> *"You know, it was kind of like, it seemed like it waited until the very, very end right before Harrell took over that the city was addressing the issue. So, I think that was kind of a bad feeling that you know, you were paying taxes, but they weren't helping people or helping your parks stay beautiful."*

In this quote, the respondent is expressing frustration towards the city's handling of the encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, particularly with what they perceive to be inaction.

Another source of frustration from respondents was the closure of W Green Lake Way. The city closed this street early in the pandemic as part of their 'Stay Healthy Streets' initiative that aimed to get people outside to recreate and exercise. However, respondents viewed this closure as enabling tents and RVs to move in on the road and alongside it, which discouraged many park users from frequenting that area of the park. Additionally,

[34] The City of Seattle's budget allocated towards addressing homelessness has grown considerably in recent years, with $50 million in 2015 to a planned $156 million in 2022 (Greenstone, 2021d).

respondents expressed frustration over the city not responding to residents' voicing concerns over this closure and calling for it to be reopened.

Interview participants expressed considerable frustration towards the government of a city perceived as wealthy, such as Seattle, for allowing its unhoused residents to live in inhumane conditions. On this note, participant shared the following frustration:

> *"It makes me angry, that in a country as rich as the US and in a city as rich as Seattle, that people are living in this degree of squalor."*

Additionally, the city passing off allowing unhoused individuals to live in parks, such as Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, as kindness or compassion is a source of frustration as many interview participants felt it is inhumane for people to live outside in a tent and that no one should have to.

Safety Concerns

Safety concerns stemming from unhoused individuals living in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park was another major theme that appeared across the interviews. These safety concerns can be divided broadly into two categories: those with direct experience being threatened or have witnessing others being threatened by unhoused individuals in the park and those who feel a sense of potential threat, but have not directly experienced or witnessed it at the park. Participants described having been yelled at or harassed when walking in, near, or through an encampment in the park, having witnessed others being yelled at or harassed by unhoused individuals, or having heard stories from neighbors, friends, or on social media.

On directly experiencing being yelled at, another respondent shared:

"The outer loop, you couldn't go through that with the RVs and tents there ... the homeless people would get angry if you walked through there ... [they would yell] get out of here or what are you doing here? That kind of stuff."

Of their experience witnessing harassment, one respondent recalled:

"To be blunt, I have experienced, I had a situation ... where [an] extremely aggressive, vulgar, angry, sort of sexually predatory person [was] yelling at two young women that were walking and I kind of took a protective situation and helped them get out of there ... I mean that man was obviously deranged and saying things that should never be said. And those women were scared and they had a right to be scared."

In addition to experiencing, witnessing, or otherwise hearing about verbal harassment, respondents also described having physical encounters with unhoused individuals. No participant expressed being physically harmed or assaulted by an unhoused individual, but a participant shared the following encounter they experienced:

"One was a wholly negative interaction where someone was basically close to assaulting me. You know, they didn't actually touch me, but they like grabbed some of my stuff and threw it, so that was unpleasant."

Respondents noted these experiences contributed to feeling threatened or intimidated and often led to them either avoiding certain areas of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park or the park all together.

The second category of safety concerns are perceived and based on a sense of danger from potential threats. Here the sense of feeling unsafe and/or threatened was more conceptual than experienced. Respondents described discomfort based on not knowing how an unhoused individual would act. They expressed that those who have

mental illness or use drugs can act erratically, even violently, and in general are less reliable in terms of their behavior. On this topic, one respondent shared:

> *"I'm a nurse and I've been a nurse for a long time and [I] realize that people who are either on drugs or mentally ill or otherwise stressed out can behave in weird ways. And so, I don't want that to, you know, somebody come up to me and have to interact with them because they aren't necessarily reliable in terms of their behavior, [they're] out of their mind, so I just don't want to get into any altercation or anything."*

In this quote, the respondent is not necessarily suggesting that an unhoused individual may act violently, but this respondent still wants to avoid interactions because they just don't know what kind of interaction it might be.

In response to perceived threats, respondents deployed behavioral strategies as to not elicit a potential response from an unhoused individual. These strategies include avoiding certain areas where there is a large presence of unhoused individuals or avoiding the park all together at night or dusk. One respondent described how their strategy:

> *"So, I've established a route. And I pretty much stick to it. And here I've identified it as being safe both in terms of my ability to socially distance because of the pandemic but also in terms of you know, not walking through, you know, the densest areas of encampments not that I would provoke, but I don't want to provoke a response. I mean, my very presence can be evocative for some of these people who have mental illness ... avoidance is certainly part of what I do."*

In this quote, we see the respondent modifying their use of the park based on their assumption that their presence may evoke a response from an unhoused individual with mental illness living in the park.

Additionally, respondents expressed safety concerns in the form of spillover effects into the surrounding neighborhood. Respondents shared stories of having items stolen from their own homes, as well as the homes of neighbors or friends in the area. This theft was perceived to be stemming from the encampments present at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park.

Bigger Picture

The bigger picture theme acknowledges that homelessness is a problem that stretches beyond Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. This theme is based on comparisons that respondents made between encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park and other parks and public spaces in Seattle. Interview participants recognized that homelessness is not a problem unique to Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park or even parks in general or the City of Seattle broadly, but rather it is a national problem. As one respondent noted:

"It's a national problem. You know, it's really a huge, huge problem on just so many different levels. So my despair is just sort of a general despair ... it's not just a Seattle problem." This acknowledgement that homelessness is beyond just Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park engendered compassion for the unhoused and also made respondents reflect on encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park compared to encampments in other public parks and spaces in Seattle.

Respondents viewed homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park as a visible reflection and reminder of larger unresolved societal problems such as the lack of affordable housing and lack of mental health treatment and services available for those in need. Interview participants also expressed frustrations about the impacts of capitalism

and the injustices rampant in society that have left so many people unable to afford housing or get the treatment and services they need. One participant expressed the following criticisms of capitalistic society:

> *"You know, it's looking at the systemic issues that produce homelessness. Looking at capitalism and how we have a class society that doesn't take care of ... people. And blames people ... as an individual blaming process for why people are in that situation rather than looking at the systemic issues that have produced what we have to how people have to live."*

On the encampments' reflection of society, another respondent noted:

> *"I haven't gone up to the encampments, but it has bothered me, you know, the fact they are [there], what they represent, the commentary on our society, that that is what has to happen, you know, the price of homes, the inaccessibility of, you know, affordable housing for so many people."*

The above two quotes illustrate respondents thinking beyond unhoused individuals and identifying what they perceive to be flaws in society, and placing the responsibility for the homelessness problem on these flaws, and not on the individuals that are unhoused.

Many interview participants felt the presence of homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park was less impactful to them, compared to other parks and public spaces in Seattle. For example, some respondents compared Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park to encampments at Ballard Commons Park, and felt the encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park had less of an aesthetic impact because they felt there was less trash and debris. Additionally, compared to other parks in Ballard or public spaces downtown, interview participants felt encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park were better

located as they were not necessarily blocking sidewalks or blocking the use of park space, such as sports fields.

Coexistence

Feelings towards coexistence between those living in and those recreating in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park can be divided into three categories: those who are not supportive of unhoused individuals living in parks (the largest of the three categories), those who see unhoused individuals living in parks as an interim solution (though this group does not see this solution as ideal), and those who are supportive of unhoused individuals living in parks. Reasons against coexistence include the belief that public parks are for day-use recreation, socialization, exercise, relaxation, and restoration, not housing or shelter. To this point, the side effects of unhoused individuals living in the park, such as, trash and debris, discarded needles, human excrement, and crime in the neighborhood (though not necessarily tied to those living in the park) are barriers to coexistence.

The presence of unhoused individuals in the park, as discussed earlier, presents safety concerns and has caused many interview participants to alter their use of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. Interview participants felt the city needs to develop other options to get unhoused individuals inside into more permanent housing. On why they do not feel unhoused individuals should be living in public parks, one respondent shared:

> *"If I had a solution, the city would pay me a million but I don't ... think city parks are the places for homeless encampments. City parks are for everybody's recreation ... they're not residential sites. I don't have a solution for how to get it otherwise, but I just believe that the park using having the parks being turned into residence, you know, you know, tent cities, Hoovervilles, it's just not appropriate."*

Here, the respondent presents a clear stance that parks are for recreation and not to be used as residential sites, implying they feel recreational and residential uses are not compatible.

The second category was a reluctant coexistence. Interview participants in this group did not view coexistence as an ideal or long-term solution as they want to see permanent housing and a spectrum of affordable housing options available to unhoused individuals, but they could see coexistence working as an interim or temporary solution. In order for the coexistence to work, interview participants expressed a need for regulations or oversight. These regulations include designating a space in the park for encampments, preferably away from the trees due to the tree damage that has occurred from unhoused individuals. In addition to a designated space, interview participants felt that the city should provide services to the encampments, such as garbage/recycling collection and hygiene facilities. On these services, one respondent expressed:

> *"I don't know if the city is doing garbage pickup at encampments ... I think there needs to be garbage services available. And I noticed at one point Green Lake had showers available, so a coordination of some of these sanitation and personal health kinds of things I think are important."*

Lastly, participants felt that there would need to be more communication to the public about the encampment and rules against drug/alcohol use and criminal activity that would be need to be enforced.

The final group acknowledged the presence of homelessness in the park is not as much of a threat as other people may think it is and that a park may be one of the better locations for those that are unhoused, especially compared to being near a freeway or in

the doorway building. They felt that Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park may provide more shelter from the weather, especially in the picnic shelter area of Lower Woodland Park and may provide a sense of community amongst those living in the encampments. Similar to the second category, interview participants in this group would like to see the city provide garbage/recycling collection and hygiene facilities. On how unhoused individuals could possibly live in parks and coexist with housed users of the park, one respondent shared:

"And so, barring a solution where there is more, there are more options to those who are without [housing]. I think that a park is potentially among the better options for so long as they are not blocking access specifically to your purpose-built structures. If you had maybe a tent across the bike and walkway path, okay, that would be a different conversation because you're blocking the use but if you're hanging out in the field, that seems like a less bad option than a lot of other ones."

In this quote, we see the respondent placing a clear emphasis on where the encampments are located in the park to ensure that they are not interfering with or blocking others' use of the park.

Inner Turmoil

In this section I wish to examine more closely the ambivalent feelings that respondents across profiles expressed when it came to their reaction to unhoused people. It was common for respondents to express shock or shame about their feelings towards unhoused people in the park. Some also expressed mixed or conflicting feelings towards the situation. For example, interview participants remarked that they know what they are saying sounds selfish or insensitive or they directly stated that they are struggling with

their feelings about the situation. On feeling their reaction is selfish, one respondent shared:

> *"I mean, I go back to the signs that say there shouldn't be camping in our parks, too. And I kind of feel that way. I just I don't know what the solution is so I'm very eager for all the work being done on this issue. But I'm also I mean, it's gonna sound a little selfish. I'm also just not happy with it. I mean, because honestly, I go with my neighbors. I instigate cleanups regularly and it's scary what we find."*

In this quote, we see the inherent contradictions and struggles that the ambivalent feelings and views contain.

Interview participants expressed deep empathy for those who are unhoused and a desire to see people housed, but also expressed feelings that run counter to their empathy. For example, many respondents felt that unhoused individuals do not have the right to usurp other people's use of the park. Additionally, respondents felt frustrated over environmental damage in the park that has been caused by unhoused individuals. This environmental damage includes cutting down trees, lighting trees on fire, interfering with wildlife, and putting human waste into the lake. Also, again, despite having empathy for the unhoused, respondents struggled with not wanting to see unhoused individuals in the park as they did not want to be reminded of larger societal issues while they are recreating or relaxing in the park.

One key theme that emerged was a feeling that there is a portion of the unhoused population that is unhoused by choice. On unhoused individuals refusing shelter, one respondent noted:

"Yeah, I mean there is increasingly more housing available to them, but a lot of them choose not to take it. They prefer the privacy and whatnot of living in a tent. And it's not compatible with today's society really."

Another respondent remarked:

"Many people will turn down offers of shelter ... Because, again, we come back to the same three issues right, they want drug use. They're not going to be allowed in these shelters if they want to be criminals. They're not going to be allowed, you know, their mental illness may be tolerated up to a point."

In these quotes, respondents indicate that they believe many unhoused people are making conscious choices about being unhoused. Respondents felt these choices – of wanting to continue to use drugs or engage in criminal behavior or wanting privacy – are essential to the lifestyles that they feel this group of unhoused individuals wants to retain and thus caused them to feel less empathetic.

Similarly, respondents noted that unhoused individuals engaging in criminal activity, such as breaking into homes in the neighborhood and using drugs, made it difficult for them to retain their empathy. One respondent shared:

"But it's hard to see that and know that these people are breaking into the homes, my friends and neighbors. They're dealing and peddling drugs in front of one of my friends' houses over there. It's been going on forever. The city can't do anything and won't do anything about it. You know, all of these things are frustrations that feed into my emotional response. And I'm not proud of my emotional response at times. But it is what it is. And I'm trying to be as candid about it as I can."

Here, we see the respondent struggling with their response because of seeing this criminal activity and seeing a lack of action from city agencies and local political leaders. There is also a degree of blame being attributed to the unhoused people themselves.

The cross-cutting themes discussed in this section were those that emerged across participants in all three provides. Diving into themes highlighted the nuance and the different angles that respondents were viewing and discussing a particular theme.

DISCUSSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, unsheltered homelessness in Seattle was exacerbated for two main reasons: (1) shelters closed or drastically reduced capacity either to meet physical distancing requirements or because of a reduction in staff; and (2) the Centers for Disease Control directed local governments to allow those living unsheltered to remain where they are. Many of Seattle's parks such as Ballard Commons Park, City Hall Park, and Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park saw an increase in homelessness during the pandemic. Using a case study approach of Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, this thesis aims to contribute to the discourse around homelessness in public parks in two major ways: to explore how users of Seattle's Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park perceive and respond to homelessness in the park, and how these park users have been impacted by the presence of homelessness in the park.

A review of previous studies on homelessness in public parks revealed a range of environmental and social impacts and mixed responses by housed residents who use the parks. These include responses to the presence of solid and human waste, needles, trampled vegetation, water contamination, park users feeling unsafe, public complaints about park residents' presence and associated waste, and reduced use of the park (Neild, 2018). However, some research found housed park users were widely aware of homelessness in the park, but it did not make them feel unsafe, nor did it affect their perceptions of environmental damage, such as impacts to water quality or wildlife (Rose, 2019).

The findings of this research support the findings in the literature. For example, the perspectives of respondents who fit into the low impact group of this study have

experiences and perceptions that align closely with the findings from Rose's (2019) research, while respondents who fit into the moderate and high impact group more closely align with the findings from Neild's interviews. The findings of this study therefore suggest that among the general population there is a range of levels of acceptance of the presence of unhoused people and it likely varies with people's choices to continue using a park or not. This research also demonstrates that this topic affects everyone differently and that a spectrum of reactions is likely in any given community. Further, this range of reactions suggests consensus on a response may be difficult to achieve, especially in the short term. While nearly everyone I spoke with wants to see unhoused individuals provided with housing, there were certainly differences in how respondents perceived short term solutions. This is particularly true regarding whether to not respondents felt that unhoused individuals should be allowed to live in public parks until long term housing is available.

The Introduction chapter of this thesis discusses two major themes specific to Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park that were reinforced in the findings of this project: (1) community frustration and (2) tensions over the use of public space.[35] This frustration was certainly validated in interviews for this project and was clearly directed at the city government. Participants were frustrated with local decision-makers for a multitude of reasons: not providing sufficient housing and services to the unhoused population (despite the amount of money spent on homelessness response each year), letting unhoused residents of the city live in inhumane conditions, not communicating with the public or being responsive to the public's concerns, and using parks as residential areas.

[35] These were also themes that were discussed in the Literature Review chapter, specifically the homelessness in public parks subsection, though not specifically discussing Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park.

This frustration towards the government is significant both for its frequency and the fact that the frustration is specifically directed towards local political leaders and city agencies rather than the unhoused people themselves. This topic came up in virtually every interview, demonstrating that this is a common sentiment. Regardless of whether and how their use of the park was impacted, all respondents feel that the city government has not done a good enough job addressing this important topic. This indicates that the community is placing the responsibility of this problem on the city agencies and political leaders and that respondents believe it is the role of these agencies and politicians to provide or ensure that there is sufficient affordable housing and mental health and addiction services for those who need it. Therefore, to have such a large unhoused population reflects a failing on our government, and to some extent larger society. This frustration towards the government leaves room for empathy and compassion for those that are unhoused.

Tensions over the use of public space also emerged in the interviews for this project. Many participants expressed or wrestled with concerns towards the unhoused individuals themselves, which led them, in some cases, to modify their use of or completely avoid the park. Whether or not respondents themselves felt threatened or uncomfortable enough to modify their use of the park, many also speculated that other park users may feel that their use of the park is restricted as well.

As discussed in the findings section, unhoused individuals were perceived to be a threat due to the possibility of erratic or unreliable behavior stemming from mental illness and/or substance use. This perception could be based on loaded assumptions that unhoused individuals are more likely to act in an erratic or threatening manner than housed individuals due to perceived higher rates of mental illness and/or substance use,

though these fears may not necessarily be unfounded. Though difficult to quantify, research conducted by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration indicates roughly 30% of unhoused individuals have mental health conditions and roughly 50% of unhoused individuals have co-occurring substance use problems (SAMHSA, 2011). This is not to say that these figures are representative of the unhoused population at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park nor imply that there is a causal relationship between mental illness/substance use and homelessness, but rather to provide general context. That being said, regardless of the actual rates of mental illness and substance use in the unhoused population at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park, respondents' perceptions of unhoused individuals as a threat still influences the way they use the park.

Implications and Recommendations

Responses to the coexistence question revealed that while some saw unhoused individuals living in parks as a temporary solution, many did not view this as a satisfactory solution to homelessness under any circumstances. While this work did not focus on solutions to homelessness, and interview participants were not asked for their ideas for solutions, responses to the coexistence question reveal that most participants would like to see investments in a variety of housing options for a long-term solution. That said, some interview participants brought up Tent City 3[36] and the Tiny House Village Program as models that they liked for a temporary solution.

[36] Tent City 3 began operating in 2000 and is a self-managed encampment that houses up to 100 people and moves between host locations every 90 days. It is hosted primarily by churches in Seattle, but institutions such as University of Washington and Seattle Pacific University have hosted Tent City 3 on their campuses a handful of times (SHARE/WHEEL, 2022).

Respondents appreciated the following characteristics of these models: clear management and organization, security present, rules for residents, provision of hygiene facilities, connection to services, and communication with the surrounding community as to what the facility is and what its goals are. Respondents expressed that these models felt more humane than the encampments at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. For those who saw unhoused individuals living in parks as a viable temporary solution, many of the previously mentioned operating characteristics of Tent City 3 and tiny house villages were mentioned as to what they would like to see in order for the solution to work for both the unhoused and housed.

These characteristics get at many, if not all, of the concerns and frustrations that respondents expressed in interviews over the presence of homelessness at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. Therefore, tiny house villages in particular, are a model that could have community support as an intermediate solution until unhoused individuals are able to get permanent housing. More investments in tiny house villages would bridge the gap between unhoused individuals living in parks (and other public spaces) and permanent housing. If the supply of tiny house villages throughout the city was increased, it would relieve some of the pressure on public parks to serve as residential sites

While the intent of this work is not to provide policy recommendations, my findings pointed to several possible areas for further exploration to develop concrete policy recommendations to address homelessness. The tiny house villages discussed above are a possible semi-permanent solution to the homeless crisis and should be considered alongside a suite of other strategies to address homelessness. Namely, continued investment in developing permanent housing options for the unhoused, as well as

expanding mental health treatment, substance use/addiction services, and hygiene stations and services available in the city for those in need. Lastly, my literature review emphasized the importance of public education for making the public aware of the conditions affecting unhoused individuals, building empathy, and garnering support for solutions. The city should give greater consideration to how a public education program could help in the response to homelessness.

Opportunities for Further Research

As discussed in the methods discussion, demographic information of interview participants was not captured as part of this work. Future case studies on homelessness in parks, either Green Lake/Woodland Park or other parks, should record demographic information of interview participants. In particular, age, gender, length of time living near/frequenting the park of interest, and owner/renter status would be important to capture to explore how perceptions of homelessness and impacts experienced vary across these characteristics.

A significant finding of this research was respondents' having mixed or conflicting feelings about unhoused people living in parks or a sense of shame or shock by their own reactions towards the presence of homelessness at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. It would be useful for future work to seek to further understand this reaction, either at Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park or other locations. Of particular interest would be whether there are specific events or tipping points that lead people to switch their views or if their views switched gradually and they become aware of this later on. Further work should also attempt to unpack the feelings of shame and/or and try to understand what is feeding into those reactions.

Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park was a selected as this case study for this research because, despite the large encampments present, the park still receives heavy recreational use. This is likely due to its large size and diversity of recreational offerings. As mentioned, many of Seattle's other parks have also seen encampments. Future work should interview users of these other Seattle parks, such as Ballard Commons Park, on how they view homelessness in the park and how they have been impacted by it. This would provide insight into how park users' perceptions of, reactions to the presence of homelessness might, vary amongst parks of different sizes and contexts.

Lastly, a theme that emerged in the interviews was a perceived safety threat of unhoused individuals based on potential for erratic behavior stemming from mental illness and/or substance use. Future work should explore what, if any, role that neighbor-to-neighbor communication, social networks, and online social media platforms (i.e., Nextdoor or Facebook) play in influencing people's perceptions of homelessness.

REFERENCES

All Home. (2020, July 29). Count Us In: Seattle/King County Point-in-Time Count of Individuals

Experiencing Homelessness 2020. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from https://regionalhomelesssystem.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Count-Us-In-2020-Final_7.29.2020.pdf

Barnett, E. (2022, January 13). Woodland Park, Site of Seattle's Largest Encampment, Now "Highest-Priority Site in the City". PubliCola. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from https://publicola.com/2022/01/13/woodland-park-site-of-seattles-largest-encampment-now-highest-priority-site-in-the-city/

Beekman, D. (2021, September 2). Bruce Harrell vows action on homelessness in parks, M. Lorena Gonzalez responds as Seattle's Mayoral Race Restarts. The Seattle Times. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/bruce-harrell-vows-action-on-homelessness-in-parks-m-lorena-gonzalez-responds-as-seattles-mayoral-race-restarts/

Bishop, D. (2009, February 29). The People's Park. Dwell. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from https://www.dwell.com/article/the-peoples-park-d2ae1066

Bush, E., & Hou, Jeffrey. (2014). Ballard Bridge Park : Preserving place for transient populations in urban spaces. Seattle]: University of Washington.

Centers for Disease Control. (2021, November 4). *Considerations for encampments*. Interim Guidance on People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness. Retrieved January 22, 2022, from https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html#facility-encampments

City of Seattle. (2015a, November 2). *Civil Emergency Order Requesting Federal Assistance.* Retrieved February 27, 2022, from http://legistar2.granicus.com/seattle/attachments/07dbe416-259d-4f02-9f56-55c08001ee75.pdf

City of Seattle. (2015b, November 2). *Civil Emergency Order Requesting State Assistance.* Retrieved February 27, 2022, from http://legistar2.granicus.com/seattle/attachments/3ae19432-1d96-4c84-9b80-co

City of Seattle. (2022a). *City-Permitted Villages.* Homelessness Response. Retrieved January 29, 2022, from https://www.seattle.gov/homelessness/city-permitted-villages

City of Seattle. (2022b). *City-Funded Hygiene Services Available During COVID-19*. Addressing Homelessness. Retrieved January 22, 2022, from https://www.seattle.gov/humanservices/services-and-programs/addressing-homelessness

City of Seattle. (2022c). *Emphasis Map.* Homelessness Response. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from https://www.seattle.gov/homelessness/unauthorized-encampments/emphasis-map

City of Seattle. (2022d). *Unauthorized Encampments*. Homelessness Response. Retrieved January 23, 2022, from https://www.seattle.gov/homelessness/unauthorized-encampments

Clarridge, C. (2021, July 26). A homeless encampment led Seattle to close a spray park. What does that say about how the city views public spaces? The Seattle Times . Retrieved October 10, 2021, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-

news/politics/a-homeless-encampment-led-seattle-to-close-a-spray-park-what-does-that-say-about-how-the-city-views-public-spaces/

DelVecchio, R. (1998, September 21). Lafayette Square's New Look Preserves Neighborhood Oasis/Everyone welcome at 'Old Mans Park'. SF Gate. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Lafayette-Square-s-New-Look-Preserves-2989760.php

Farthing, S. (2016). *Research Design in Urban Planning: A Student's Guide*. SAGE.

Greenstone, S. (2021a, April 3). Tents in Seattle increased by more than 50% after COVID pandemic, survey says. The Seattle Times. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/tents-in-seattle-increased-by-more-than-50-after-covid-pandemic-began-survey-says/

Greenstone, S. (2021b, August 12). Encampment at Seattle's City Hall Park gone after scores go to hotels, shelters and tiny houses. The Seattle Times. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/encampment-at-seattles-city-hall-park-gone-after-scores-go-to-hotels-shelters-and-tiny-houses/

Greenstone, S. (2021c, December 20). Green Lake homeless encampment removed after months of political pressure. The Seattle Times. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/green-lake-camp-removed-days-before-christmas-after-months-of-political-pressure/

Greenstone, S. (2021d, December 3). Seattle's final budget shows tough road ahead for new Regional Homelessness Authority. The Seattle Times. Retrieved June 5, 2022, from

https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/seattles-final-budget-shows-tough-road-ahead-for-new-regional-homelessness-authority/

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in Qualitative Research. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(5). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076

Hodgetts, D., Stolte, O., Chamberlain, K., Radley, A., Nikora, L., Nabalarua, E., & Groot, S. (2008). A trip to the library: Homelessness and social inclusion. Social & Cultural Geography, 9(8), 933-953.

Hunter, J., Linden-Retek, P., Shebaya, S., & Halpert, S. (2014). Welcome Home: The Rise of Tent Cities in the United States. National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Retrieved November 2, 2021 from https://homelesslaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WelcomeHome_TentCities.pdf

Kim, G. (2022, May 10). *Seattle clears Woodland Park homeless encampment after months of trying to place people into shelter.* The Seattle Times. Retrieved May 13, 2022, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/seattle-clears-woodland-park-homeless-encampment-after-months-of-trying-to-place-people-into-shelter/

King County (2015, November 2). *Local Proclamation of Emergency.* Retrieved February 27, 2022, from https://kingcounty.gov/~/media/elected/executive/constantine/news/documents/Homeless_Emergency_King_County.ashx?la=en

Lewis, A. (2021). Seattle's Homelessness System: Constraints and Reforms During the Pandemic: Shelter, Outreach & Housing and Why Visible Homelessness Has Worsened During COVID-19. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from

https://coscouncilconn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Lewis-Report-on-Homelessness-and-Housing.pdf

Manzo, L. C., & Desanto, R. (2021). Uncovering competing senses of place in a context of rapid urban change. *Changing Senses of Place*, 209–220. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108769471.019

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. (2017). Tent City, USA: The Growth of America's Homeless Encampments and How Communities are Responding. Retrieved November 2, 2021 from https://homelesslaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Tent_City_USA_2017.pdf

National Recreation and Park Association. (2017). Homelessness in Parks: A Summary of Results from an NRPA Membership Survey. Retrieved November 2, 2021 from https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/homelessness-in-parks-survey-report.pdf

Neild, M. (2018). Finding a Home for Equity in Public Parks: An Examination of Park and Recreation Agency Mitigations of Homelessness Along the Jordan River Parkway.

Neild, M., & Rose, J. (2019, January 7). Addressing Homelessness in Public Parks. National Recreation and Park Association. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/january/addressing-homelessness-in-public-parks/

Patrick, A. (2022, January 30). Seattle, King County officials made lots of homelessness promises: See how they did. The Seattle Times. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from https://projects.seattletimes.com/2022/seattle-king-county-homeless-promises-

outcomes/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=projects_articl
e

Rose, J. (2019). Unsheltered Homelessness in Urban Parks: Perspectives on Environment, Health, and Justice in Salt Lake City, Utah. Environmental Justice, 12(1), 12-16.

Seattle Times staff. (2021, June 27). See how Seattle's homelessness crisis stacks up across the country and region. The Seattle Times. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from https://projects.seattletimes.com/2021/project-homeless-data-page/

Seattle Parks and Recreation. (2022). *Green Lake Park.* Retrieved May 12, 2022, from https://www.seattle.gov/parks/find/parks/green-lake-park

SHARE/WHEEL. (2022). *Tent City 3.* Retrieved April 26, 2022, from http://www.sharewheel.org/tent-city-3

Speer, J., & Goldfischer, E. (2020). The City Is not Innocent: Homelessness and the Value of Urban Parks. Capitalism, Nature, Socialism, 31(3), 24-41.

Spier, J. G. (1994). Municipal park usage by the homeless: A policy investigation (Order No. 1358230). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304172348). Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/municipal-park-usage-homeless-policy/docview/304172348/se-2?accountid=14784

Spur & Gehl. (2021, January 25). Coexistence in Public Spaces: Engagement tools for creating shared spaces in places with homelessness. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from https://www.spur.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/spur_gehl_coexistence_in_public_space.pdf

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (July 2011). *Current Statistics on the Prevalence and Characteristics of People Experiencing Homelessness in the United States.* Retrieved June 5, 2022, from https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/homelessness_programs_resources/hrc-factsheet-current-statistics-prevalence-characteristics-homelessness.pdf

Toolis, E., & Hammack, P. (2015). "This is My Community": Reproducing and Resisting Boundaries of Exclusion in Contested Public Spaces. American Journal of Community Psychology, 56(3-4), 368-382.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2004). HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs: A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People. Retrieved January 29 2022, from https://www.hudexchange.info/sites/onecpd/assets/File/Guide-for-Counting-Unsheltered-Homeless-Persons.pdf

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2020). Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Cost: City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Exploring-Homelessness-Among-People.pdf

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2022). *Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count.* Retrieved April 19, 2022, from https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pit-hic/

Washington State Department of Commerce. (2022). *Consolidated Homeless Grant.* Retrieved April 19,2022, from https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/consolidated-homeless-grant/

Westneat, D. (2021, August 21). A Seattle mecca for running goes dark as the city continues to fall short on homelessness. The Seattle Times. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/a-seattle-mecca-for-running-goes-dark-as-the-city-continues-to-fall-short-on-homelessness/

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Instrument

Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me and volunteering to share your thoughts. I am a graduate student studying urban planning at the University of Washington and am doing my thesis research on homelessness in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park. I am especially interested in understanding if and how users of the park have been impacted by the presence of tents, encampments, and unhoused individuals in the park, as well as their feelings towards the situation. The purpose of this interview is to hear from you on how you use the park, what impacts you may have experienced, and how you feel about it.

This interview is entirely confidential and your name will not be associated with any of your responses. You may choose not to answer any of the questions and we can end the interview at any point. I am happy to provide you with a copy of the final report once it is completed in June. Do you have any questions for me before begin?

Park Usage

1. How often do you visit Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park?
2. What activities do you like to do while at the park?
3. Do you visit the park alone? With friends or family?
4. Do you have favorite places to spend time in the park? *(can highlight on map)*
5. Do you have places in the park that you avoid or dislike? *(can highlight on map)*

Impacts and Feelings

6. Have you noticed tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals in the park?
   a. Have you noticed any change in the presence of tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals in the past couple years? (*Increase/decrease? Noise? Media or community attention?*
7. Does the presence of tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals impact your use of the park?
   a. How so?
8. How does the presence of tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals in the park make you feel?
   a. How does it make you feel about the park and your connection to it?
   b. Has it changed your feelings on the park and your connection to it?

Location Comparison

9. Do you encounter tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals elsewhere in your daily life on a regular basis?
   a. Where?
10. Is it more, less, or equally impactful seeing tents, encampments, and/or unhoused individuals in Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park than in other locations that you frequent as often as you visit the park?

a. How so?

Coexistence

11. I want to close on this topic of coexistence. Given that we are in a situation in which there are not enough housing options available for those experiencing homelessness, do you see coexistence, housed park users and unhoused park residents sharing the park, as a possibility?
    a. Under what parameters or in what scenario would you feel comfortable with this?
    b. What would it look like?

Appendix B: Code Dictionary

Code Name	Definition	N, Total	N, Int
Impacted Use			
Use unaffected	No change to use due to the presence of homelessness	20	12
Respectful presence	Avoiding certain areas in the study area out of respect to the unhoused living there	3	3
Mental health impacts	Presence of homelessness interfering with use of park for mental health, relaxation, recreation, don't want to see it when I'm at the park, needing to be in the right mood to go	10	9
Modified use	Changing use of the park due to presence of homelessness – modified route, activities, hours, go less, avoid certain areas, etc.	40	19
Non-use	Not being able to use the park in a normal and preferred way – complete avoidance, going to another park	10	4
Factors in Impacts			
Impact, barrier	Obstruction of trail by belongings of the unhoused has an impact on park users	3	3
Impact, size	Size and density of encampment has an impact on how its perceived	10	5
Impact, distance	Encampment proximity to home/daily life has an impact on how much it impacts park users	5	5
Impact, aesthetic	Debris, trash associated with encampments has an impact on how it is perceived	18	14
Individual Response			
Sadness	Saddened by presence of homelessness restraining use of the park, sense of loss, some frustration	17	9
Sadness, Seattle	Saddened by deterioration to Seattle over time, largely due to the presence of unhoused individuals, needing to negotiate the city	8	7
Environmental degradation	Concerns over impacts to environmental quality of the park (vegetation, water quality) due to presence of unhoused, presence of garbage/debris, pollution	10	6
Health and hygiene	Health and hygiene concerns stemming from presence of encampments, i.e., stepping on a needle, spreading disease	13	9
Safety	Feeling unsafe due to possibility of erratic behavior, stemming from mental illness/drug use, harassment	44	20
Neighborhood concerns	Concerns over impacts of homeless extending into the surrounding neighborhood due to homelessness in the park (crime, property values)	16	9
Government frustration	Anger and frustration towards the government for mismanaging/not solving the problem, letting the problem get this bad, no excuse for it, no one should be living in a tent	64	22
Empathy	Concern and empathy for the unhoused, their living situation, weather, etc.	7	7
Better location	Feeling that park is a better location for the unhoused than others (some shelter from weather, restrooms, some services, etc.)	3	3
Role in solution	Wanting to do something to help the unhoused and be part of the solution, not knowing what to do or how to do it, problem feels too big; Individuals, communities,	24	13

	neighborhoods need to do something to be part of the solution		
Inner turmoil	Having feelings and reactions that are at odds, feelings of guilt/shame/surprise associated with feelings and reactions	15	10
Bigger picture	Acknowledging homelessness as a visible reflection and representation of unresolved societal problems, i.e., affordable housing, services for unhoused, drug use, Green Lake/Lower Woodland is just one piece of it	30	17
Human connection	Treating and viewing the unhoused as people, not as others, wanting to understand their stories	8	3
Acceptance	Coming to accept homelessness in the park	2	1
Problem visibility	Feeling homelessness is not better hidden, if we see homelessness, we are more likely to work to solve it	5	3
Coexistence			
Coexistence, anti	Parks are not meant for camping, they should be day use for recreation, camping should not usurp others' right to the park	28	18
Coexistence, pro	Park is for everyone, don't have problems sharing the space with the unhoused, though there should be some oversight and regulations	9	3
Coexistence, reluctance	Parks are not best solution for homelessness, though could work as a temporary solution as we work to provide housing, needs oversight and rules	14	9
Rules and Regulations			
Bad apples	Acknowledging different groups of unhoused (bad apples vs. those that are down on their luck), impacts their perception of the unhoused, bad apples want to live without rules, outside of the norms of society	17	10
Rules	Have to follow rules in order to live in society, need rules, regulations, and consequences for not following the rules, i.e., you have to teach your kid to clean their room	11	6
Safe haven	Unhoused individuals perceived as feeling and being treated as above the law, breaking the law without consequences, attracting people from outside of Seattle	5	3
Sense of ownership, unhoused	Unhoused individuals letting themselves in and setting up permanent/semi-permanent encampments, taking over an area w/out respect to damage they may be causing in that area	14	10
Oversight	Lack of communication, rules, oversight of the presence of homelessness – leads to frustration and discomfort and not meeting the needs of the unhoused that are there	2	1
Future Response			
Lack of resources	Need more funding, housing, mental health services, social workers, addiction services to address homelessness	5	4
Patrol presence	Having park ranger to patrol the park would alleviate some anxiety	1	1
Problem Description			
Encampment growth	Increase in the presence of homelessness in the park, especially visible	39	31
Problem signaling	Prior to COVID, never would have seen tents at Green Lake, indicative of a worsening problem	6	6
Community change	Homelessness being a new presence in an area resulting in an outcry	3	2

Misc.			
Usage impacts	Park wide usage impacts due to presence of homelessness in park	1	1
Focusing	Feeling more concerned and connected to the park due to the presence of homelessness in the park	1	1
Grains of sand	Little impacts from homelessness in the park, not necessarily a big event	1	1
Government action	Feeling that the city would eventually do something, it's just temporary	1	1
Community asset	Expressed appreciation for Green Lake/Lower Woodland Park is a vibrant community center full of connections and activities, beauty, wildlife	23	15
Problem discourse	Hard to talk about and explain homelessness, particularly with children	2	2
Scapegoat	Unhoused individuals assumed to be responsible for problems in the area, might not be true	2	2
Tent city	Tent city as a successful model	4	4
Vignette	Conversation between park user and unhoused on their experiences	1	1
Loss of place, COVID	Not being able to use the park in a normal and preferred way due to concerns related to COVID	4	3