

ASK REAL ESTATE

My Town Wants to Build a Homeless Camp. What Can I Do?

Knowing a town's motivation can help residents understand how to engage constructively.



By Jill Terreri Ramos

June 19, 2026

Q: We own a house in a small town in Oregon. The town council is considering creating a homeless camp very close to multiple residential communities, including ours, and adjacent to a popular trail used by walkers and cyclists. We've asked the council how various issues will be addressed: the costs to maintain the shelter, rules for residents, etc. The council does not answer any questions and appears to be moving ahead despite community objections. How can we work with the council to have our concerns addressed? Or what, if any, legal action can we take?

When you engage with the town, it's important to understand why this homeless shelter is being built. Is the town trying to replace an unmanaged site somewhere else with a better location, one that's easier to manage? Is it to improve sanitation, or reduce police calls?

If the town isn't answering your questions, find a group of concerned residents and appoint a spokesperson you trust. Make your presence known at town and planning board meetings, and engage with town department heads to learn more about the project.

It's also important to clearly express your specific concerns and to propose solutions without stating opposition to the whole project, which could come off as a not-in-my-backyard attitude.

“General opposition to a proposed city-sanctioned homeless camp, especially when focused only on its location, can be easy for local officials to dismiss,” said Lisel Petis, policy director for criminal justice and civil liberties at R Street Institute, a think tank, and a former City Council member in Steamboat Springs, Colo.

Knowing the town's motivation can help you understand how to propose solutions in a way that addresses your concerns and recognizes the community's goals, Ms. Petis said.

For instance, you could ask for lighting, landscaping, regular maintenance, and trash bins and restrooms, which can promote safety and a sense of order. Signs that say which city departments are responsible for the camp, along with their phone numbers, can also help. And ask about support services: Will there be outreach workers and harm reduction efforts?

If you want to organize a legal challenge, objections should be brought early in the process, said Sunil Raju, who practices real estate law in Clatsop County, Ore.

“Government agencies that follow the right procedures, the right steps, they tend to get a lot of deference from the courts,” Mr. Raju said.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section RE, Page 2 of the New York edition with the headline: How Can Residents Address Concerns About Plans for a Homeless Camp?