



# Seattle University

## Seattle Vehicular Residency Research Project 2012 Advisory Report



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Research Fellow  
September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Department of Communication  
Seattle Vehicular Residency Research Project  
2012 Advisory Report



## Acknowledgements

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This work grew out of the University of Washington Honors Thesis work by our Research Fellow **Graham Pruss**, who presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology's annual conference and was granted the UW Weinker Award for Best Anthropology Thesis in 2011. His initial research included participant observation in which he lived within a recreational vehicle on the streets of the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle for a week at a time over a five month period, numerous interviews with members of the local business, residential and vehicle resident community, in addition to extensive mapping which became the blueprint for our data collection during this project. This research has been the subject of articles in the **Seattle Times**, **Ballard News Tribune**, **Crosscut.com**, as well as programs on Seattle's **KUOW** and **National Public Radio's** syndicated afternoon show, *All Things Considered*. Mr. Pruss has served as Chair of the Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness and Hunger since 2011 and is the founder of the Stone Soup Group, a local donation collection and food sharing program in the Ballard neighborhood which provides weekly hot meals, resources (clothing, bedding and hygiene supplies), and service information to unsheltered people and vehicle residents.

Finally, we would like to thank all of our research participants - Seattle University students, University of Washington volunteers, and people experienced in vehicle residency - all of whom gave a piece of their lives to tell this story. These people dedicated many hours documenting the state of vehicle residence in this area because they care about the lives of people struggling to survive and succeed, mostly unseen, on our public streets. Most of our researchers are intimately experienced with homelessness and/or vehicle residency; their informed contributions were essential to performing this research ethically, compassionately, and candidly. Thank you to **Taylor Sheehan-Farley**, **Sofia Locklear**, **Sy Bean**, **Giana Lampreda**, **Sue Mooney**, **Russel Palumbo**, **Emery**, **Ember**, **Mia**, **Junior** and **Star**.



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## I. Project Summary

In Seattle, **hundreds of people** – including the elderly and families with children – are believed to be living in their cars, campers or trucks. In 2012, Seattle/King County’s One Night Count reported that **30% of our local unsheltered population lives in vehicles** – they represent the largest subset of our unsheltered homeless population, at least 30% consistently for the last 10 years. The Seattle Vehicular Residency Research Project (SVRRP) is the **first scholarly attempt in this area** to learn more about this unique aspect of unsheltered living, document behaviors and recommend policy and procedures to better serve this population and help connect them to the services they need. Created by Seattle University’s Center for Strategic Communications and funded by a gift from alumna Donna Franklin, the project was led by Research Fellow and sociocultural anthropologist Graham Pruss.

**Purpose:** Our primary goal is **to build positive attention toward the lives of vehicle residents within our communities by offering information, tools and solutions.** To accomplish this we 1) created a template to help other organizations and communities gather population size data on this unique community; 2) collected research data using this template; 3) used this data and experience gained from this research to suggest policy changes through this report; and 4) identified research opportunities to provide useful and federally mandated information.

**Methodology:** Our mapped population data was collected by Seattle University undergraduates alongside University of Washington students and community volunteers, who began by developing a “Variable Identification Schema” to document vehicles used as residences. We determined areas most commonly used for vehicle residency throughout North Seattle with Parking Enforcement personnel and focused on the Ballard neighborhood. The teams then drove throughout their assigned regions bi-weekly, in afternoons and early mornings, using the Schema to map vehicle residencies by location and vehicle type. Finally, our researchers analyzed how vehicle residences occupy space within select our study areas, comparing this with restrictive parking ordinances, zoning, and signage as well as the locations of services and resources utilized by vehicle residents.

**Conclusions:** The research team identified the need for local policy changes, resources for helping vehicle residents and a program to improve public understanding of the lives of this hidden community. Primary findings include:

1. Public perception of vehicle resident population size and spatial/resource use is often different from reality.
2. The use of public parking space for vehicle residency in North Seattle demonstrates patterns of densities within highly constricted legal space.
3. Current ordinances within Seattle place vehicles residents at personal risk and position them in direct conflict with the communities where they reside.
4. Vehicle residents have specific needs which are unaddressed by general services designed for unsheltered people.

**Recommendations:** Our Advisory Report offers several policy and procedural recommendations, including 1) a **city-wide panel focusing on vehicle residency as the largest group** of our unsheltered homeless population; 2) **the development of programs which provide vehicle residents a safe location**; and 3) **use of a system like our “Vehicle Identification Schema”** by police officers, homeless advocates/social workers, and continuum of care providers to better identify vehicle residents and connect them to services.

**Distribution:** Our Advisory Report was published August 1, 2012, and is scheduled for presentation to the City of Seattle Human Services Committee, the Office of the Mayor, City Council, Police Department Parking Enforcement Division, Department of Transportation, and Department of Neighborhoods. In addition, we will provide this report to community and advocate organizations such as the Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness & Hunger, the Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless and Committee to End Homelessness in King County.

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## Introduction

### **II. The Vehicle in Your Mirror May Be Closer Than It Appears**

“In total, there were 649,917 people [in the United States] who were homeless on the night of the 2010 PIT (Point-In-Time) count. Roughly two-thirds (62 percent) of homeless people were sheltered, sleeping either in an emergency shelter or a transitional housing program. The other one-third (38 percent) were unsheltered: sleeping on the streets, in their cars, in abandoned buildings, or in another location not meant for human habitation.”

- Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, 2010

“‘Cars are the new homeless shelters,’ says Joel John Roberts, CEO of PATH (People Assisting the Homeless) Partners, the largest provider of services for the homeless in Los Angeles County, which had nearly 50,000 people homeless in 2009.”

- Kevin O’Leary. “Last Refuge for the homeless: Living in the car” Time magazine, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010

There are almost as many reasons for homelessness as there are people living without a “home.” For many, even the definition of “home” is at question. The old adage, “Home is Where the Heart is,” rings true for people clinging on to a small place in our world where they can live and hold the necessities for their lives. Although living in a vehicle may be included with “sleeping on the streets ... in abandoned buildings, or in another location not meant for human habitation” in our National definitions (Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, 2010), this unique subset of unsheltered homelessness has specific resource needs, including parking space. Unfortunately, necessary survival strategies such as distancing oneself from a vehicle used as residence by day, self-enforced invisibility at night, and a general camouflaging of the vehicle as a residence impedes assistance as well as accurate population size and demographics statistics. Locally, although vehicle residents are the largest subgroup of unsheltered homelessness, there are few programs which address their specific needs.

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Described as “car campers,” the “mobile homeless” or “vehicle residents,” people who live in their vehicles are a living reminder of prolonged unemployment, high home foreclosures and deficient social safety nets. Today, they can be found in warehouse districts, under highways and viaducts, and increasingly on residential streets. Because this population uses publicly shared space, some members come in conflict with businesses and residences using community parking and easements. For these reasons, vehicle residents present special challenges to governmental, advocacy, faith communities and social service agencies eager to find ways to help.

To improve public support and accurately direct appropriate resources, we require a deeper understanding of unsheltered homelessness. We need ways to gather information on specific unsheltered communities such as vehicle residents, including their population size, demographics and necessities. The Seattle University Vehicular Residency Research Project and this Advisory Report were designed to offer techniques and suggestions, adding to the existing body of knowledge of community, advocacy and government organizations working to assist this difficult to reach group. Until now, most of the information we’ve had is based on interviews from news stories. While these stories help create a face of vehicle residency, there is a lack of empirical demographic data to support the anecdotes. One such story, about Dan and Karen Grier (Cydney Gillis. “Motor home owners say they’re being driven from Ballard” Real Change. Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010), had a large influence on the creation of anthropologic honors thesis work at University of Washington (Graham Pruss. “Invisible moburbia: Identity, spatial use, perceptions and realities of vehicle residency in Seattle” June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011). Our research grew out of this thesis work and carries further its intention to build positive awareness and policy change which assists this widely unknown population.

In October of 2009, Dan and Karen Grier spoke with Real Change newspaper in Seattle. The couple had been living in their Dodge American Clipper recreational vehicle (RV) on the streets of Seattle, in the Ballard neighborhood for the past 18 months with few problems - until recently. The Griers didn't think of this as just their vehicle; they called it home. As Dan said, "It's quiet, you know. It serves its purpose. It keeps us out of the weather." But, recent community complaints regarding people living in vehicles had prompted the increased enforcement of a 1979 parking ordinance. This law required vehicles over 80" wide to park within industrial or manufacturing zones during midnight and 6am; most RVs, including Dan's, are over 80" wide. Additionally, there was an apparent proliferation of "No Parking from 2am-5am" signs throughout the industrial zone where the Griers lived.

“They keep putting up No Parking 2-5 everywhere,” [Dan] Grier said. “They're basically corralling us ... and now that they've got us corralled, they're telling us to move, but they're basically eliminating every place that we can move to.” The Griers had received two tickets in that month alone for parking over 72 hours in one place, and Dan may have seen that things were getting harder or felt a pattern of harassment. Ultimately, his assumption that “they’re basically eliminating every place that we can move to” was correct: in 2009, Real Change reported, community complaints led to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) banning overnight parking on 82 new city blocks. Of these, 31 were in the Ballard neighborhood where the Griers were struggling to survive.

The couple explained to Real Change that Dan had built a career repairing boats while Karen worked as a lead inspector at the Boeing Company in Seattle until she was laid off in the 1990s. It was then that Karen developed glaucoma, the medical bills increased beyond their ability to pay, they lost their apartment in Seattle, and they moved into a motel south of Seattle, in the town of SeaTac. But this was too far from Dan's work in Ballard, now the sole source of income, and too far from Karen's doctor appointments. It was the eight eye surgeries plus the need for a safe place to park near where Dan could work that made the idea to move into their vehicle in Ballard the best decision for the Griers. But now,

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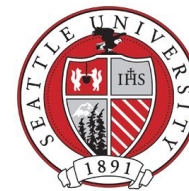
in light of an apparent pattern of law enforcement compelling people like them to "roll along," Dan was afraid to move his RV because, "it was old and [he] was afraid it would break down. If that happened, [he said], he and Karen would really be homeless." On that October night in 2009, Dan and Karen "kept themselves out of the weather" in their vehicle home, unsure of what the future would hold.

Ultimately, that cold, rainy, dark and consistently damp Seattle weather would endanger their future and end their story. Karen Grier became ill less than two months after their interview and, on December 9, 2009, died of pneumonia at age 53. Dan became increasingly despondent and depressed, and started giving his possessions away - even signing over the title of the Dodge to a friend. In late February as Dan was sleeping in the RV, trying to stay warm through the winter, one of his cats knocked over a space heater and started a fire which consumed their home. *Real Change* reported that, a few days after the fire, 57 year-old Dan Grier died of his injuries in Seattle's Harborview Medical Center.

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### III. Vehicle Residency in King County

“I think the biggest awareness needed is, when people are down on their luck, it doesn’t mean they’re bad people, just like when people have wealth it doesn’t automatically make them good people. And, I don’t come from a background of homelessness. I’m not an inner city youth. I didn’t fit the stereotype. I grew up in the eighties so, it was, ‘if you’re a black man between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five to thirty, you’re expected to either join the military or go to jail or be dead.’ So, I went the military route.

I think everyone should be treated as humans. I protected the country, I went to college. But yet, people look at you ... people saw me climbing out of my vehicle early in the morning and automatically they assumed I was trash. I have a beautiful home now, but that didn’t mean anything when I was sleeping outside. It’s already a bad, bad, bad feeling and you don’t need to have your nose rubbed in it.

That’s what I want people to come away with. You’re a bad investment, or losing your job or a bad break-up away from being homeless. People don’t understand that, it could be gone in a heartbeat. And then ... I hope they come to realize it before that happens. That’s what I want people to understand.”

- **“Emery, former vehicle resident” Personal Interview.** May 5th, 2011

To better understand how community, advocate and governmental organizations may assist the wide variety of people living in vehicles, we can start by examining how we gather information through our official counts. Results from these methods are vital to the statistics, positive publicity, community support and funding needed to assist vehicle residents.

The Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless (SKCCH) was founded in 1979 and is one of the oldest coalitions for the homeless in the USA – SKCCH’s One Night Count (ONC) was first performed in 1980, is “one of the nation’s most best-established point-in-time counts” and “remains the

largest community-organized count in the United States” (SKCCH 2012). The ONC is performed on the last Thursday/Friday in January, between the hours of 2am and 5am in pre-arranged areas throughout King County. Roughly 900 volunteers led by 125 trained guides are divided into teams and sent to document “unsheltered homeless” individuals. Team leaders are trained before the night of the count and pass along their knowledge to their volunteer teams. Teams then walk throughout pre-arranged areas, counting all persons easily visible. For the safety of all involved, volunteers are instructed to avoid any contact with individuals, counting from afar. A local count, such as the ONC, is mandated for national funding; results of the ONC are published in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHARC) and are used to determine local, state and national statistics and funding.

Summary of the 2012 Unsheltered Homeless Count in Selected Areas of King County

	SEATTLE	KENT	NORTH END	EAST SIDE	WHITE CTR	FEDERAL WAY	RENTON	NIGHT OWL BUSES	AUBURN	TOTAL
Men	571	71	12	62	2	8	15	137	4	<b>882</b>
Women	117	0	2	14	3	2	2	34	0	<b>174</b>
Gender Unknown	1207	32	17	62	50	67	56	0	40	<b>1,531</b>
Minor (under 18)	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	<b>7</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,898</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>2,594</b>
Benches	20	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	<b>23</b>
Parking Garages	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
Cars/Trucks	519	36	18	52	29	48	55	0	34	<b>791</b>
Structures	289	13	0	6	21	16	3	0	0	<b>348</b>
Under Roadways	132	19	0	4	0	2	4	0	2	<b>163</b>
Doorways	143	2	3	0	1	0	3	0	2	<b>154</b>
City Parks	25	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	<b>30</b>
Bushes/ Undergrowth	50	16	0	4	0	3	2	0	2	<b>77</b>
Bus Stops	22	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>24</b>
Alleys	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>14</b>
Walking Around	272	8	4	3	3	6	3	0	1	<b>300</b>
Other	408	9	2	67	1	2	1	174	1	<b>665</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,898</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>2,594</b>

<b>3%</b>	increase when comparing similar count areas
2012	2,514 (without new areas)
2011	2,442
<b>6%</b>	increase when comparing 2012 count total to 2011 count total
2012	2,594 (includes new areas)
2011	2,442

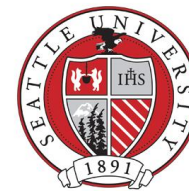
Fig. 5: 2012 SKCCH One Night Count Summary



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It is often difficult to determine if a vehicle is being used as a home without seeing the person inside. The ONC advises their team leaders, “if it looks like someone is living in a vehicle (fogged windows, curtains, etc.), we assume 2 people per vehicle,” and advises their volunteers to avoid “waking people up, startling them or invading their limited privacy” (SKCCH 2011). These practices are appropriate, pragmatic, and based on a long, effective history of successful counts.

Confounding the work of the ONC, many vehicle residents use survival tactics such as self-enforced invisibility to protect themselves and their vehicle. Whether it is a car with tinted windows, a cargo van near a park, or a box truck in an industrial area, people living in vehicles use various techniques of hiding to protect their safety, privacy and warmth. This is especially important when we consider the nationally mandated time period of the ONC. An early morning count in the dead of winter is virtually ensured to miss people living in vehicles who are covered with clothing, blankets or belongings.

Despite the difficulties in identifying this group for counting, people living in “Cars/Trucks” currently represent the largest single category of unsheltered homelessness within our area. Recently, the ONC documented “Cars/Trucks” as 30% of the 2012 unsheltered count in King County and 27% within the City of Seattle (Fig. 6). Furthermore, this has been the consistently largest category of unsheltered homelessness within King County over the last eleven years, often two to three times the next largest defined group. While this number rose dramatically since 2001, comparing the “Car/Trucks” category with all others through these years shows a vehicle resident population which has maintained a range of 30-33% to the total unsheltered homeless since 2003 (Fig. 7). This shows that, although the category of “Cars/Trucks” has more than doubled over the last decade, vehicle residence has remained proportionate with the rise and fall of the total unsheltered homeless population, reflecting larger trends.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2008	2010	2011	2012
Cars/Trucks	118	157	217	320	469	589	665	646	654	881	891	767	791
Other	227	275	271	276	326	152	288	255	396	497	546	617	665
Walking Around	0	0	163	247	306	285	399	312	397	430	331	261	300
Structures	0	0	0	0	265	247	244	137	189	266	316	249	348
Under Roadways	157	147	119	218	184	133	244	255	161	185	191	196	163
Doorways	102	138	141	160	163	209	111	178	178	145	136	131	154
Bushes/Undergrowth	24	49	22	44	163	76	66	59	57	79	129	89	77
Bus Stops	24	20	54	29	41	38	22	41	29	57	114	42	24
City Parks	71	88	33	73	61	19	66	21	39	32	42	25	30
Parking Garages	8	10	0	15	20	190	22	12	16	32	28	23	5
Benches	31	39	22	29	41	190	44	11	14	15	19	21	23
Alleys	39	49	33	87	41	114	44	19	29	12	16	21	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>983</b>	<b>1085</b>	<b>1454</b>	<b>2040</b>	<b>1899</b>	<b>2216</b>	<b>1946</b>	<b>2159</b>	<b>2631</b>	<b>2759</b>	<b>2442</b>	<b>2594</b>

Fig. 6: Summaries of ONC Seattle/King County Data, 1998-2011

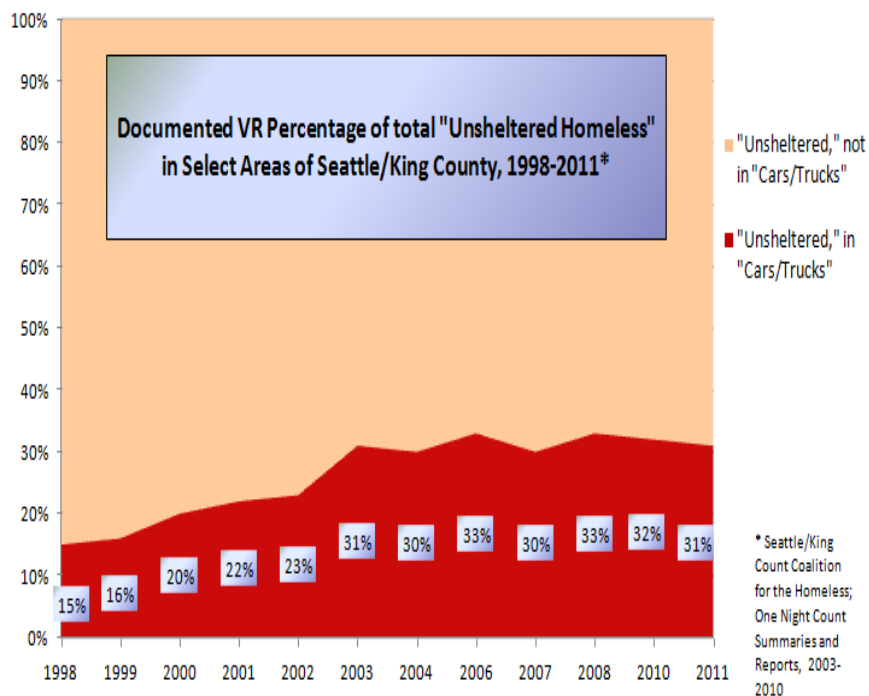


Fig. 7: The vehicle residency percentage of the ONC, 1998-2011

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While vehicle residency has been the largest defining living condition of people who are unsheltered in this area for over a decade, the needs of vehicle residents have largely gone unnoticed. The Committee to End Homelessness in King County's (CEHKC) Ten Year Plan does not reference vehicle residency, nor does it address any needs specific to this dominant population. This is echoed by a lack of Seattle City programs specifically addressing the needs of people living in vehicles prior to 2012. Recently, collaborations between faith based groups, homeless advocates, community organizations and local government have helped create the Seattle Safe Parking Pilot Program, a Safe Parking Outreach Coordinator position, and a Vehicle Resident Action Coalition spearheaded by the Seattle Office of the Mayor. These efforts are necessary first steps, but currently have a limited effect – the only safe parking specifically designated for vehicle residence in Seattle currently consists of two sites and provides parking for up to seven vehicles. Unfortunately, many of Seattle's vehicle residents have already faced significant loss of their available living space and continue to live in fear of losing their homes. As it stands, a series of restrictions on parking have created the densities of vehicle residencies observed in Seattle which often lead to neighborhood complaints. To reduce harm to all our community members, we need to untangle these restrictions and create safe places where we can work together to address the needs of vehicle residents.

Negative neighborhood reactions to an increasingly visible community of vehicle residencies on their streets can be seen on community internet websites such [www.MyBallard.com](http://www.MyBallard.com). For example, frequent community forum contributors like “*Old Norveegan*” enthusiastically express their concerns:

“Folks have a right to build, buy or rent a domicile in the neighborhood. In doing so, they are contributing to the common good through taxes. Unless they move to an appropriate lawful venue, say an RV park, they remain a marginalized minority of their own choice.

They thumb their noses at the community they are invading. They are happy to have responsible tax payers provide infrastructure for a comfortable stay here in Ballard.

Push back, folks. Report, report and report.”

- Old Norveegan. [MyBallard.com](http://MyBallard.com): “No Parking 2-5 AM on 14th NW.” 2010

Premises that unsheltered people are a “marginalized minority of their own choice”, that “they thumb their noses at the community they are invading” and “they are happy to have responsible tax payers provide infrastructure for a comfortable stay here in Ballard” ignore factors which are out of control of many vehicle residents. The lack of knowledge of the reasons why people choose to live in their vehicle, as well as the parking and zoning laws which compel people to reside in certain areas may lead to erroneous conclusions and response.

As concerned citizens “report, report and report”, the Seattle Police Department Parking Enforcement Division has received a torrent of complaints. Effective action was needed to demonstrate that government was addressing community concerns; however, the methods used to curb extensive vehicle residency in Ballard may have resulted in unintended consequences. One response was the creation of a nighttime parking enforcement unit in 2009 to ensure overnight parking compliance (*Real Change*. Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010), particularly affecting “oversized” vehicle residencies. The documented vehicle resident population in Seattle/King County shows an overall rising trend from 320 in 2001 to 791 in 2012; however, it has remained proportionately stable at roughly 30% to the total unsheltered population. This indicates that targeted enforcement without outreach has not significantly reduced the total number of vehicle residencies. Instead, the criminalization of a survival tactic by an at-risk group (living in a vehicle) has focused the affects of their need and use of public living space on an increasingly smaller number of streets. Ultimately, this places vehicle residents in direct conflict with neighborhood business or home owners and generates additional community outcry.

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Complaints from vocal community members have resulted in the increased enforcement of several ordinances and signs which particularly affect vehicle residents. This report will show that the culminating effects of these ordinances and signs create a limited legal space within which vehicle residents (particularly, RV owners) are allowed to live. The final outcome has not been to curb vehicle residence on public streets, but to create pockets of densely populated public parking within un-resourced and environmentally polluted areas. These densities lead to further business and home owner complaints and position people attempting to live within their only legal space in direct conflict with their communities.

1. Ordinance which restricts overnight parking of “oversized” vehicles (over 80” wide) to industrial and manufacturing zones. (SMC Sec. 11.72.070)
2. Disproportionate posting of “No Parking 2-5am” signs within areas of high vehicle residency.
3. A law restricting all public street parking to a 72-hour maximum. (SMC 11.72.440)
4. The “Scofflaw Law” enables immobilization of vehicles with multiple unpaid tickets. (SMC 11.35)

Four Seattle parking ordinances/signs which affect vehicle residents

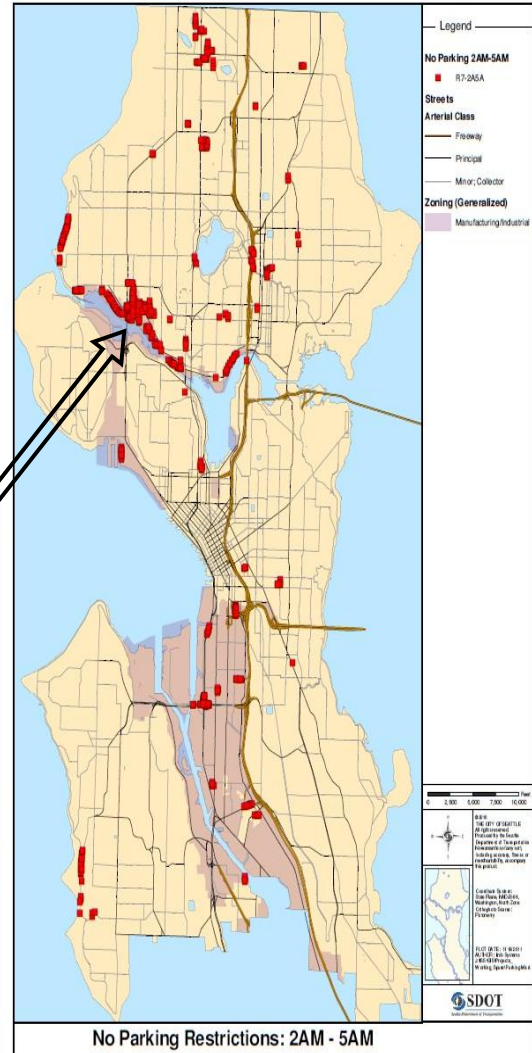


Fig. 9: No Parking Restrictions: 2AM - 5AM; City of Seattle

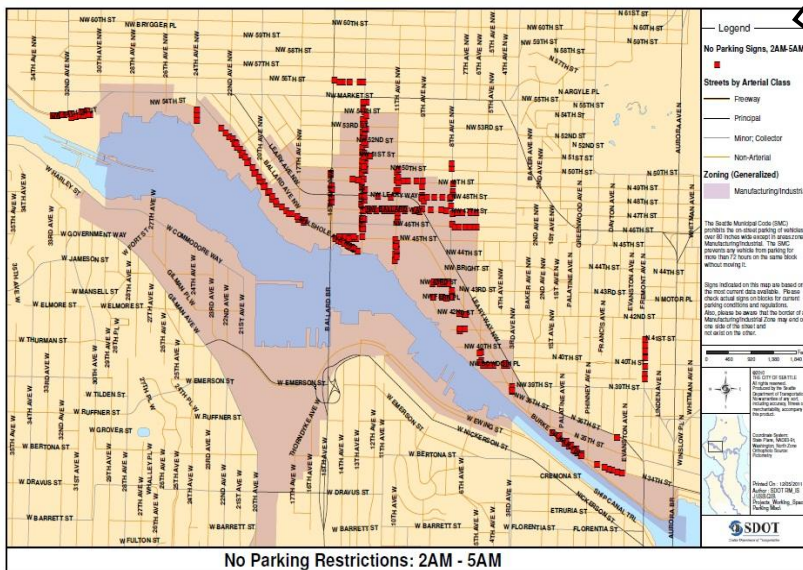


Fig. 8: No Parking Restrictions: 2AM - 5AM; Ballard Neighborhood

1. A 1979 ordinance (SMC Sec. 11.72.070) limiting overnight parking of “oversized” vehicles (over 80” wide) to industrial and manufacturing zones saw increased enforcement with the creation of the nighttime parking enforcement unit in 2009. This is important because many vehicle residents occupy automobiles over 80” wide including large RVs, cargo trucks, and busses - using them as functional cars. On the SDOT maps entitled “No Parking Restrictions: 2-5 AM”, we can see the location of these industrial and manufacturing zones throughout Seattle, shown in brown (Figs. 8 & 9).

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2. On these same maps (Figs. 8 & 9); the placement of “No Parking 2-5am” signs, shown as red squares, is predominantly within industrial zones and other areas of high vehicle residency. Specifically, **Approximately 1/3 of all “No Parking 2-5am” signs posted in Seattle are along the Ballard industrial waterfront which constitutes less than 1% of Seattle’s total area.** Furthermore, the remainder of these signs have been installed throughout Seattle in areas known for high vehicle residency including streets near North Aurora Avenue, Golden Gardens Park, 65<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Interstate Highway 5, Ravenna Park, Gasworks Park, Interbay, Westlake Avenue, South of Downtown (SODO), Georgetown, and the West Seattle Bridge.
3. When these densely populated, yet extremely limited areas are viewed alongside the city-wide 72 hour parking restriction (SMC11.72.440), it becomes clear why many vehicle residents may attempt to avoid ticketing by simply moving between a small group of nearby blocks. This results in the vehicle receiving multiple parking tickets or complaints within localized areas, generating a history of officer interaction with the vehicle in these areas known as “work flow.” When a complaint is received regarding a densely populated block of “oversized” vehicle residences, officers can have difficulties determining the source of the reported crime. “Work flow” is often the only information available to help guide an officer’s response to a complaint. An extensive “work flow” on a vehicle within a small area can be seen as evidence of repeated non-compliance with parking laws and can become the basis to cite the vehicle with a ticket including an impound notice. Once this notice is posted, local tow companies are notified and the vehicle home becomes immediately subject to impound. For vehicle residents who are working or otherwise separated from the vehicle, this action can result in a devastating loss of home, property and livelihood.
4. The fourth local ordinance which may negatively affect the lives of vehicle residents, a recent ordinance known as the “scofflaw law” (SMC 11.35), allows the immediate immobilization by way of a mechanical “boot” for any vehicle with four or more tickets in collection. The “boot” is applied by parking enforcement officers and can only be removed by entering an authorized code. Once “booted,” the vehicle’s owner has 48 hours to “pay all parking tickets, default penalties, interest, collections agency fees, and a boot fee” (Scofflaw Ordinance, 2011). The vehicle may then be impounded and, if a complete payment or arrangement is not made with 15 days, the vehicle is auctioned to pay for the tickets and total cost. A person living in a vehicle is rarely able to afford the compounding penalties, nor have the resources to navigate court systems – especially, considering the recent total loss of their property.

“Oversized” parking ordinance and “No Parking 2-5am” signs work together to produce an extremely limited space where large vehicle residences can legally park. An awareness of the disproportionate use of “No Parking 2-5am” signs prompted an unofficial moratorium by the Seattle Department of Transportation on their placement. Far from being a solution to curb public vehicle residence, these ordinances have combined to create situations where the few remaining unrestricted streets have found themselves supporting a population which had previously occupied a much larger space. The end result can be seen along the Ballard industrial waterfront, where certain streets show continuous occupation by “oversized” vehicle residences and are separated by wide areas of streets with overnight restriction. The streets in this area without overnight parking restrictions now house a dense population of people struggling to live within a constricted legal space. Negative neighborhood response is understandable; however, this research concludes that complaints stem from the lack of outreach, services and legal space provided for this unsheltered community, and the effects that this under-resourcing has on neighborhoods where people are compelled to sleep overnight in vehicles.

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## Methodology

### IV. SVRRP Academic Framework

“In general, what really affected me the most, at least relative to myself, was the feeling of isolation. You know?”

Take a step back and look the big picture of the world, like you paint a picture of the daily life in Ballard: the hustle and the bustle, and the groceries, and the dogs, and the baby strollers, and all this stuff, the joggers, and the cars, the crosswalks, and you have this picture of life that’s constantly moving. And you’re not moving, you’re in a vehicle. And you don’t see yourself as belonging to that. And that might actually come a lot from the fact that you know that they know... that you believe that anybody who knew, would see you as apart from them, not a part of them. Like you’re not a part of the world at that point, you’re apart from it.

So, the psychological impact that that can have on anyone – I mean, not a child, not a man, not a woman – but, anyone. Feeling like you are apart from the world creates a sense of isolation. And isolation breeds hopelessness. And I think that that creates the perpetual behavior that could cause someone to fall into a life that they don’t know how to get out of, that they’re too ashamed to get out of, because they’ve actually lost the ability.

It’s not like riding a bike. Living a normal life is not like riding a bike. You can’t just wake up one day and say, “All right! I’m done with this, I’m going to get a job and be normal.” You know?

That feeling of hopelessness, I think that it breeds anxiety. People don’t feel like they can trust anyone, they feel like they’re being judged and it creates isolation. And I think that’s a really, really huge factor.

- **“Ember, former vehicle resident” Personal Interview. 24 May 2011**

Seattle University began the first research program dedicated to vehicle residency within Seattle in early 2012: the Seattle Vehicular Residency Research Project (SVRRP). This project currently represents one of the only in-depth studies regarding this substantial and unique subset of our unsheltered population within the United States. The SVRRP was designed to provide methods of data collection and suggestions of potential policy change for local advocate, social services, educational, and governmental organizations. We set out to provide participating students a comprehensive understanding of vehicle residency, offering them the opportunity to participate in field research and outreach. Finally, this Advisory Report serves as the sum of our collected wisdom regarding our methods, findings, conclusions and suggestions.

In February of 2012, we recruited students to participate in our research by soliciting several departments at SU, offering up to five independent study credits. Faculty advisors provided additional mentoring and final grades to students as part of their independent study contracts. Our students came primarily from the School of Sociology and became our research team leads, directing mapping within select locations of North Seattle (sites are discussed further in part V: Study Design). We were fortunate to develop an interscholastic partnership with the University of Washington, involving several students from their Schools of Social Work and Nursing as volunteer research assistants.

Seattle University students met weekly to develop and discuss our research methods and the history of vehicle residency in the western world, starting from a broad view of the subject in the 1800s. Meetings revolved around lessons on anthropologic and ethnoarchaeologic concepts, ethnographic texts and documentary films on homelessness, poverty, and vehicle residency. Additionally, students participated in direct outreach activities such as food sharing with members of the vehicle resident community so that they might come to know our unsheltered research participants and learn from their experiences. For their final contribution to our study, students authored a paper sharing their personal understanding of the subject, the research and suggestions for policy change. This deep understanding of the subject helped our team leads better comprehend the lifestyle, needs and activities of many vehicle residents.

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As one students expressed in their final presentation,

“One of the main lessons I got out of this course was those who are unsheltered use every means they are capable of in order to provide security for themselves. They do this through the means of strategies (a plan of action with a long-term objective) and tactics (the maneuvers or procedures to achieve a goal). Everyone, whether homeless or not, uses survival strategies and tactics, but individuals that find themselves without shelter may make choices the rest of society does not understand and usually places harsh criticisms on. This is one of the first things we need to understand about this population as a person who wants to assist in reducing homelessness. Without a place that removes a person from feeling unsafe, addressing any other factors causing their current state may be impossible.

This class has broadened my thinking. To go from homeless to housing is not always a direct answer. There are many steps in-between that might have to be taken in order to achieve successful placement of an unsheltered individual into housing. Understanding this, I now see in order to create a stable transition from unsheltered to housing there needs to be social services and advocacy programs for people of all sorts. For vehicle residence there needs to be places for people to safely park their vehicles, for unsheltered people they need access to washrooms, restroom and laundry services that do not discriminate.”

- Taylor, SU Student: Final Paper. June, 2012

Our study is based in cultural anthropology (the study of human culture) and ethnoarchaeology (the study of a culture through its material remains); in other words, we looked at vehicle residency in this area by examining the relationship between people and their belongings (i.e. “material remains” or artifacts). Further, we investigated vehicle residency by looking at their possessions as evidence of a community (ethnographic analysis) and considering how they are regarded publicly (critical discourse analysis). Exploring this widely unknown, unrecognized and marginalized world through a scientific methodology provides concrete and empirical evidence of how this community is positioned within our culture.

Archaeologist William Rathje (1945-2012) was the founder and long time director of the University of Arizona’s “Garbage Project.” His work was groundbreaking and fundamental; his text, Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage (Rathje and Murphy, 2001), helped popularize the term “garbologist” and is a textbook for many students’ introduction to the science of ethnoarchaeology. While he focuses on “garbage” - he uses this term as a catchall of “refuse” consisting of dry (such as newspapers, boxes, and cans) and wet (such as food remains, yard waste and offal) (Rathje and Murphy, 9) - our study specifically involves human habitation on city streets. In no way do we identify these vehicle-homes as garbage; in fact, this research is designed to offer ways to officially distinguish between a vehicle residence and a “junk” vehicle. However, our projects share an underlying basis in archaeology by studying of the evidence of a culture in the physical record. Rathje explains how the analysis of a culture’s product and remains can show the relationship between mental and material realities:

“It is not entirely fanciful to define archaeology as the discipline that tries to understand old garbage, and to learn from that garbage something about ancient societies and ancient behaviors.”

Garbage, then, represents physical fact, not mythology. It underscores a point that can not [sic] be too greatly emphasized: Our private worlds consist essentially of two realities – mental reality, which encompasses beliefs, attitudes, and ideas, and material reality, which is the picture embodied in the physical record. The study of garbage reminds us that it is a rare person in whom mental and material realities completely coincide. Indeed, for the most part, the pair exist in a state of tension, if not open conflict.”

~ Rathje and Murphy, Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage. 2001

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The Spring 2012 Seattle Vehicular Residency Research Project sought to bring these “private worlds” of mental and material realities into harmony. To do this, we first determined characteristics specific to vehicles being used as homes; the ownership of which is fundamental to the identity of a vehicle resident. “Taxonomy” is extremely important to anthropology and archaeology since it provides the scientific framework and terminology with which we perform our research:

“Taxonomy, based on its [Oxford English Dictionary] definition “Classification, especially in relation to its general laws and principles ...,” is the term here employed to refer to the class of procedures that includes classification, typology, and other forms of categorization. Archaeologists are experts in the development of typologies for analytical purposes. Typologies can be evaluated according to a number of criteria of which the most important is how they succeed at their intended task.”

- David and Kramer, Ethnoarchaeology in Action. 2006

Our set of characteristics (the *Vehicle Identification Schema*) is one of the first attempts at creating an anthropological taxonomy of vehicle residences. After refining this schema to ensure that it would “succeed at [its] intended task,” (David & Kramer) we developed techniques of collecting data on the placement of vehicles matching these characteristics on city streets. We designed methods to document the use of space for habitation and employed them to create a series of maps over time; these maps provided a point-over-time data set, as opposed to the point-in-time counts required for federal McKinney-Vento social services funding. These maps, in turn, showed evidence a community of people who use vehicles as homes on specific public streets in recognizable patterns. Upon further analysis of this data, we discovered a correlation between ordinance that limits available parking for certain forms of vehicle residency and the occupation of specific public space which provides access to necessary services. Finally, we used our information to express several conclusions regarding the causes for the observed spatial use of vehicle-homes within specific locations, as well as suggestions for policies, programs and changes to assist vehicle residents and the communities in which they reside.

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## V. SVRRP Study Design

### Goals

This project was developed to provide previously unknown information that may be helpful for organizations working to aid vehicle residents living on public streets. Specifically, we hoped to document how vehicle residents live within select locations in Seattle, how they move throughout public streets over time and how their parking may correlate with ordinance and public services. Recognizing that many vehicle residents use hiding as a survival tactic, our research had an additional goal of expanding upon current effective techniques used for locating this population while preserving their confidentiality. Finally, we intended to use the information we gathered to suggest policy changes specific to the Seattle area. To achieve these goals, we established a basic study design in three parts:

1. Determine study locations of high vehicle residence throughout North Seattle.
2. Design a system to identify vehicles actively used by vehicle residents.
3. Use research teams to document vehicle residences by type and location in our study areas.

### Study Locations

Our first chosen study location was based upon our Project Lead's thesis work at the University of Washington regarding vehicle residency within the Ballard neighborhood of North Seattle (Fig. 10). Ballard was chosen because it had a visibly large population of vehicle residents, several of whom the Mr. Pruss had come to know by previously working in the area. Compelled to action by his research, Mr. Pruss began coordinating community food and resource donation drives, designed to provide direct outreach to unsheltered people in the Ballard area - particularly vehicle residents. This direct outreach was core to creating the rapport necessary when developing contacts within the vehicle resident community. These contacts became essential in helping us vet future study areas and techniques, in addition to participating in interviews and educating our researchers.

The Ballard industrial waterfront (roughly four blocks north and south of Leary Avenue between NW Market Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW) represents one of the only industrial areas in North Seattle and has many streets which border industrial, manufacturing, residential and commercial zoning. When presented the opportunity to perform this research, our team reconfirmed the Ballard neighborhood as one of our study zones; we did so because the area appeared to have unique factors which provided a space for vehicle residency and because repeating research here allowed us to compare our findings with previous data.

The inclusion of Seattle University, University Washington students and volunteers allowed us to create a more robust study, documenting an additional seven locations throughout the North Seattle area. These additional areas were identified by project team members and community advocates then vetted by Seattle Police Department North Precinct Parking Enforcement Director William Edwards, Supervisors George Murray and Laura Fox. This collaboration identified additional locations, which were in turn vetted by members of community advocate and service groups such as the Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness & Hunger, the Ballard Food Bank, Compass Housing Alliance, in addition to several local vehicle residents. These numerous discussions culminated in a list of sites which we then divided into two study areas. This final list includes the first area, including the Ballard industrial waterfront (Fig. 10), and the second area, consisting of seven locations throughout North Seattle (Fig. 11).



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- A. North Aurora 1  
(N 125<sup>th</sup> St – N 145<sup>th</sup> St)
- B. North Aurora 2  
(N 98<sup>th</sup> St – N 125<sup>th</sup> St)
- C. Crown Hill Neighborhood  
(NW 85<sup>th</sup> St & 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NW)
- D. I-5 Overpass  
(NE 65<sup>th</sup> St & 8<sup>th</sup> Ave NE)
- E. Greenwood Neighborhood  
(N 85<sup>th</sup> St & Greenwood Ave N)
- F. Ravenna Neighborhood  
(15<sup>th</sup> Ave NE & NE Ravenna BLVD)
- G. Gasworks  
(Burke Ave N & N Northlake Way)

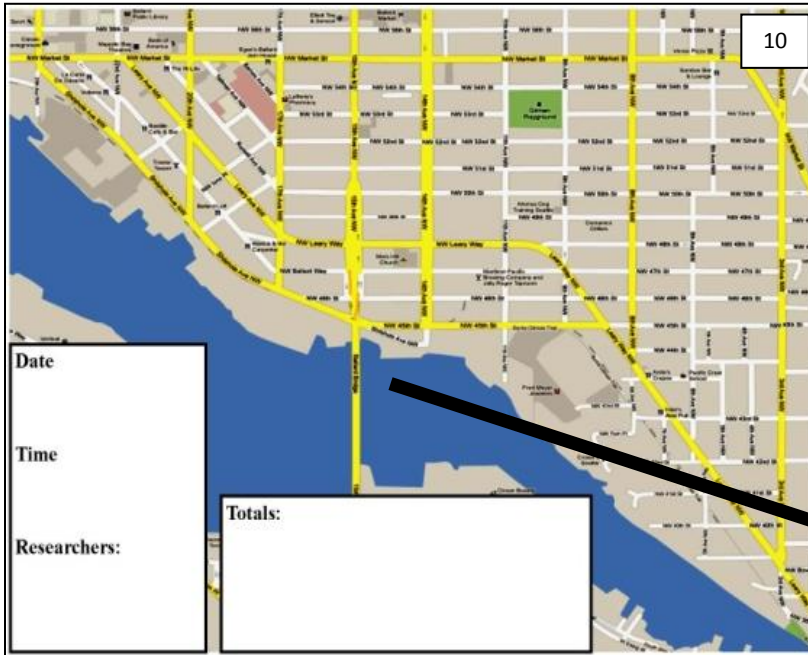
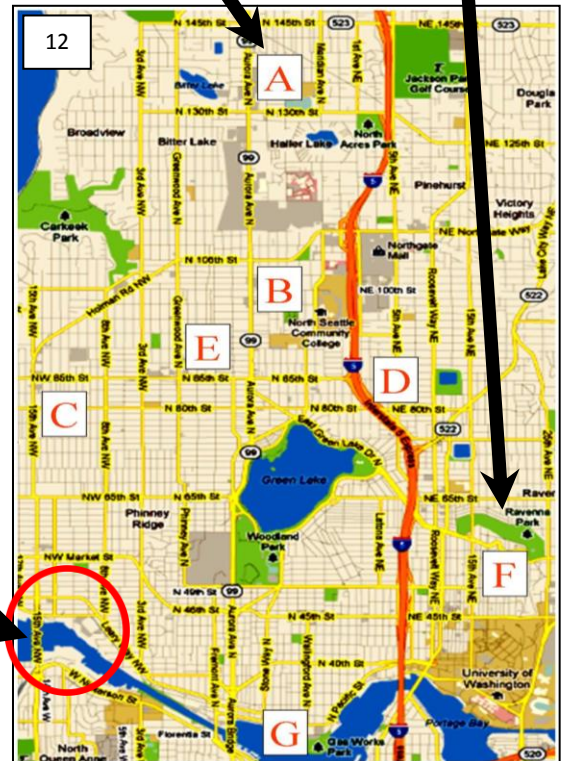
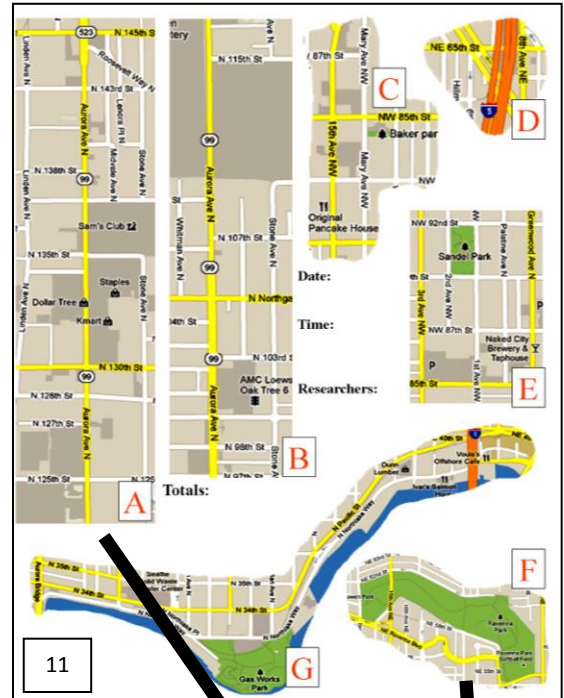


Fig. 10, 11 & 13: SVRRP Study Areas  
(Ballard Industrial Waterfront, Greater North Seattle & Combined, respectively)

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## VI. Vehicle Identification Schema

“They make themselves invisible. They do. They make themselves invisible so that - they’re living in a vehicle and they don’t want to be reported. They want to be, you know, kind of blend in.

And they do. They make an attempt to do that, and I’ve always seen them do that. I’ve lived here for thirteen years and, for those thirteen years that I’ve lived here, I’ve seen my dogs befriended by homeless guys that we walk by almost every day. And they’re just fine. They’re nice guys, who just, for whatever reason, they can’t hold a job. It doesn’t mean that they’re not supposed to be a part of society. And it doesn’t mean that we should not count them.”

- *“Mia, Ballard homeowner” Personal Interview.* May 5th, 2011

Recently, the increased awareness of vehicle residents as an at-risk group has encouraged compassionate response by personnel in closest contact with them - parking enforcement officers. North Seattle Precinct Parking Enforcement Supervisors joined Ballard’s homeless taskforce in 2011 and become essential to improving advocate understanding of the situation from a legal and enforcement perspective. As a response to the 2011 “Scofflaw Law”, community groups such as the Scofflaw Mitigation Fund, the Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness & Hunger and the Interfaith Taskforce on Homelessness began working directly with the Seattle Police Department and Seattle Municipal Courts to help lessen harm to vehicle residents caused by impounding. This collaboration has helped build a better understanding of vehicle residency for all involved and has led to the desire for further outreach and support. Seattle Police Department Parking Enforcement Division (SPD PED) has agreed to work with vehicle residents and communities to find a solution, providing information on available services and outreach as well as connecting people directly with assistance. As part of a recently created Vehicle Resident Action Coalition coordinated through the Seattle Office of the Mayor, SPD PED has agreed to follow a protocol warning of potential citation followed by outreach after the identification of a vehicle residence. However, identifying a vehicle residence is not always easy for an untrained eye and people whom we wish to help fall through the cracks.

As discussed previously, people living in their vehicles on public streets use survival tactics including hiding themselves, camouflaging their vehicle to not appear as a residence, and disassociating themselves from their vehicle during the day. These actions are done to ensure comfort and avoid drawing attention, in addition to protecting privacy, personal security, and property. While these practices are sensible, they can often result in significant problems for outreach and continuum of care providers, such as the Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless (SKCCH). We encountered the same challenge in our research and found that we were unable to create a census of vehicle residents based upon counting people; however, we could document this population by identifying their vehicle as a home and extrapolating a total from this figure. This is the method currently employed by SKCCH during the Seattle One Night Count (ONC), using a two person-to-one vehicle ratio. Prior to the evening of the One Night Count, community advocate volunteers are educated in correct and appropriate methods through training sessions coordinated by SKCCH to work as ONC team leaders. On the night of the count, volunteers gather at a central location, meet their team leaders, regroup at their predetermined study area, and are trained by team leaders to perform the count before beginning their work. What is taught to volunteers is largely subject to team leaders and may not always include training necessary to identify very specific aspects of homelessness which are used to hide individuals, leading to under-documentation. Although we cannot expect a full review of every aspect of unsheltered living to be provided by team leaders, because vehicle residency has been the largest category of unsheltered living for over a decade, it may deserve additional training materials such as a chart or list of typical characteristics identifying vehicle-homes.

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During participation in the ONC for the Ballard area, our researcher received instructions to identify vehicles-homes by a single characteristic: condensation in windows. One should note that late January mornings, around 3 AM, most vehicles in Seattle contain condensation in windows, often in a frosted or frozen state. A strict adherence to the instructions would have provided an over-count. Additionally, the researcher was instructed to not count vehicles containing an excessive amount of items or bags because they were to be considered “junk cars.” Through working with many vehicle residents, our researchers noted that a visibly excessive amount of items or bags was often a sign of residency and that this instruction may lead to an under-count. If an official SKCCH organized training was provided to all volunteer it would likely include additional instructions; however, providing detailed training for 900+ volunteers is prohibitively expensive and impractical. SKCCH has performed invaluable work organizing the ONC successfully for the last 30 years; we hope that our findings may add to their current pool of knowledge and provide easily usable tools which can assist their efforts to accurately document hidden populations.

In the end, not all vehicles appear as homes nor do all enforcement or outreach personnel have training to distinguish a vehicle residence from a “junk” or abandoned vehicle. Furthermore, the many practices used to become invisible make it difficult to create a single system which can classify vehicles of various types as residences; a person in a cargo van may use very different techniques for hiding than someone in a car or recreational vehicle. The dilemma of creating a single catalog of characteristics for all vehicle residencies necessitates either a complex list of attributes by vehicle type or a system of identification which can be applied to all vehicles. To resolve these concerns, we chose to use a *schema* for identification, because this format allows for flexibility based upon variations in subjects or populations yet retains the rigidity necessary to provide accurate data.

Our research began this schema by a creating a list of characteristics which could be used to determine vehicles being used as residences. We then confirmed this system with a collaboration of SPD’s North Seattle Parking Enforcement Supervisors George Murray and Laura Fox, local service providers and current or former vehicle residents. After several iterations, we confirmed a list of six characteristics which were common to vehicle residencies of many types. Because our goal was to document vehicle residencies in public space, our system had to be selective enough to discern between vehicles which were and were not used as residence. In addition, different vehicle types may use different combinations of these characteristics and we needed to find a way for our system to remain flexible enough to document multiple vehicle models. For these reasons, our team decided our schema should require **a minimum of two out of six characteristics** to determine a vehicle as a residence. Finally, we presented this system, named the Vehicle Identification Schema, to the aforementioned collaboration of enforcement, advocates and vehicle residents, who verified the system as an effective tool in documenting vehicle residences of numerous types.

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Our Vehicle Identification Schema defines vehicle residence as possessing **at least two of six** characteristics:



1. **The view through the front to rear windows is blocked.** Curtains are a regular accessory in many RVs and Vans, while “sun shades,” cardboard and blankets are often used in cars and trucks. Blocking the view through a front window is a common practice used by non-vehicle residents; for this reason, we stipulate that to match this characteristic the view must be completely restricted through the front to the back windows.



2. **At least one side window is blocked by sheeting, blankets, panels, and/or curtains.** Much like the first characteristic, side window curtains are common in RVs and Vans, while cardboard and blankets are often used in cars and trucks. Observations throughout our study areas confirm that most vehicles which are not used for habitation do not actively block side windows. Additionally, a vehicle-home may only block the window which is most open to public view; we often observed vehicle-homes with unblocked side windows facing a wall or bushes.



3. **There is evidence of unfrozen condensation on windows.** Condensation from breathing is often a sign of habitation; this may be more or less effective as a characteristic, depending on the weather and time when the observation is made. During moderate and warm conditions, evidence of moisture in the vehicle is less clear, while cold weather often makes the moisture more apparent. This is particularly important regarding counts performed during winter, as a vehicle residence typically exhibits wet condensation as opposed to frozen condensation on uninhabited vehicles. Vehicle residents may attempt to reduce this condensation by venting or opening a window (characteristic number four).



4. **At least one window is partially open.** Moisture build-up is a frequent side effect of breathing within the closed environment of a vehicle. In extreme cases it can cause mold, rotting, and pooling which can prove detrimental to the health of the vehicle and its resident. A common way to ease the effects of moisture and condensation is to open at least one window, allowing a free flow of air.



5. **There are items often associated with vehicle residency such as generators, bicycles, or storage containers externally secured.** A vehicle-home, as with all residences, is typically and primarily used for shelter, privacy, and storage. Within vehicle-homes, the limited available space for possessions can lead to an overflow into attached storage containers. Additionally, objects which are too large to fit within the vehicle, such as bicycles or generators, are often externally secured.



6. **There are unusually large volumes of possessions, sometimes appearing as “garbage” (often in bags), within or near the vehicle.** Possessions, in bags or otherwise, may be used as cover to insulate or provide privacy. In the example photo #6, a board is used to support bags of possessions; with the door open, we can see a hidden person underneath. This is especially important when we consider the enforcement of “junk” vehicle restrictions (SMC 11.14.268).

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## VII. Map study design

Because our research was based upon techniques used by the ONC and is intended to provide tools which may build upon their model, we designed our methods to be easily taught and used by volunteers and researchers. We produced a Vehicle Residency Research Guide (Fig. 13) containing the Vehicle Identification Schema and instructions for collecting population size data of vehicle residency. While mapping instructions were useful for collecting data on the use of space, they are not necessary for single night counts and should be used for confidential observation, only. To this point, all data for this project was collected confidentially, to preserve the safety of vehicle residents, their communities, and researchers. All participants were trained upon conscientious research and instructed to avoid any contact or drawing attention to other vehicles or people during their work. Neither license plates nor distinguishing characteristics, beyond basic vehicle type, were documented during this research. Above all else, researchers were taught to document the presence of human lives, keeping the safety of these lives as a constant concern.

With our locations throughout greater North Seattle chosen and our schema for identification determined, we prepared to send teams onto North Seattle streets to document where people parked vehicle residencies. Our initial design was based upon our Project Lead's previous research at the University of Washington involving weekly mapping of the total population of vehicle residents within Ballard. However, the addition of multiple teams of researchers allowed a new revision to include mapping several areas during different times of the day. Because of our goal to document methods which other communities and organizations may incorporate into their processes, we started by outlining a basic mapping system.

We gave each research team a clipboard, a photocopied map of their study area, a set of colored markers, a letter from the project sponsors explaining their participation in research (especially important for early morning research teams when questioned by police), and the Vehicle Residency Research Guide. Volunteer teams, with a Team Lead observing, drove throughout their designated locations and documented all vehicles determined as matching our Variable Identification Schema. Each team maintained a set of notes about their experiences and relayed this information through their team leads at our weekly project meetings. All maps were compiled on a weekly basis; their information entered into a project database and digitally copied for analysis.



# Vehicle Residency Research Guide

This guide was produced by the Seattle University Project on Family Homelessness and the Vehicular Residency Research Project to help identify and document vehicles which are used as homes. This information is for data collection only, so that service providers or governmental agencies can better identify people who may be in need of assistance and secure the proper resources to aid.

## Vehicle Identification Schema

A vehicle should be considered a vehicle residence if it exhibits two of the following six characteristics:

1. The view through the front to rear windows is blocked.
2. The side and/or rear windows are blocked by sheeting, panels, and/or curtains to restrict visibility on both sides,
3. There is evidence of unfrozen condensation on windows.
4. At least one window is partially open.
5. There are items often associated with vehicle residency such as generators, bicycles, or storage containers externally secured.
6. There are unusually large volumes of possessions, sometimes appearing to be “refuse” (often in bags), within or near the vehicle.



## Vehicle Residence Mapping Instructions

1. **DO NOT INTERACT WITH ANYONE. DO NOT SHINE LIGHT INSIDE OTHER VEHICLES. DO NOT BRING ATTENTION TO YOURSELF OR OTHER VEHICLES.**
2. Attach your Study Area Map to your clipboard, write the researchers’ initials, create a basic color code key (suggested below), then note the date and time when you are beginning the count.
3. On your Study Area Map, highlight each block in **red** if there is a vehicle residence (VR) matching the *vehicle identification schema* parked on that block, **green** if there is no VR.

If there is a VR parked on a block, write the total number of vehicle(s) in descending order to the WEST of a N/S street or SOUTH on the EAST side of a W/E street.

Use your color code to show the total of each vehicle type; suggested color code:

**Car**

**Van**

**Truck** (including any non-car or van VRs which is less than 80” wide)

**RV** (including and limited to any VR over 80” wide)

**Example:**

**Total: 14 / 3 / 3 / 2**



4. When you have documented all blocks within your study area(s), write the end time, then tally the totals by vehicle type, using the color code for each total.

Fig. 13: Vehicle Residency Research Guide

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## Findings

### VIII. Data

Our research recorded fourteen sets of data over a four week period during the spring of 2012. Dedicated volunteers and team leads documented the two study areas (Ballard & Greater North Seattle) twice a week, during early mornings and afternoons, turning blank maps (Fig. 14 & 16) into a total census of vehicle residence (Fig. 15 & 17) within their study locations. As often as possible, researchers collected their data beginning at 2am or 3pm to compare public street usage between night and day. Final data sets showed patterns of consistent population densities on specific streets, in addition to variations of average vehicle type based upon location. Each map was totaled, digitally recorded, and coded for Geographic Information System (GIS) reporting and analysis. Our first map created (Ballard) could not be photocopied due to a lightening of the ink caused by evaporation on our provided laminated maps. For this reason, we immediately switched to paper maps for use through the remainder of the study. While our first map is not available for this report, its totals are included in our charts (Figs. 20 & 22). On the the following page you will find the summary of our collected data, as well as averages for each area; the full data set of our maps can be found in the Appendix.



Fig. 14: Map of Ballard study area

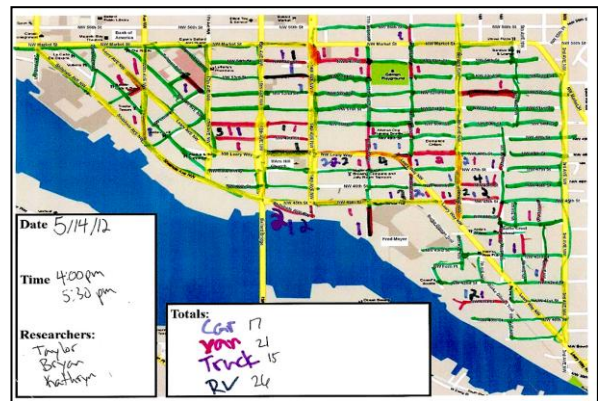


Fig. 15: Vehicle Residency in Ballard (16:00-17:30, 5/14/12)

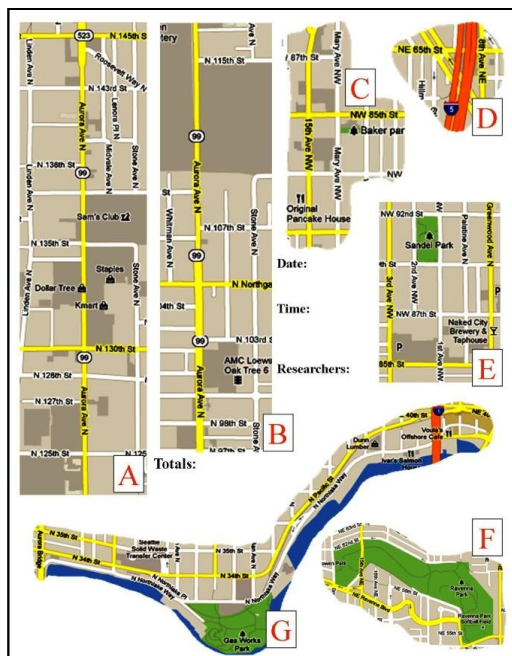


Fig. 16: Map of North Seattle study areas

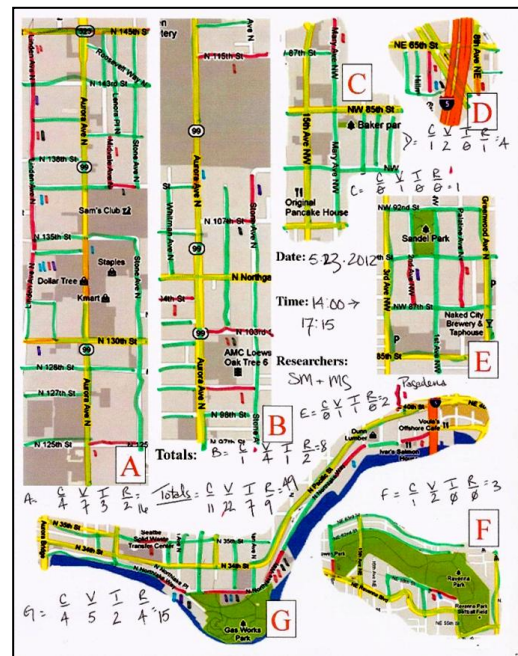


Fig. 17: Vehicle Residency in the North Seattle study areas (14:00-17:15, 5/23/12)

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## Seattle Vehicular Residency Research Project

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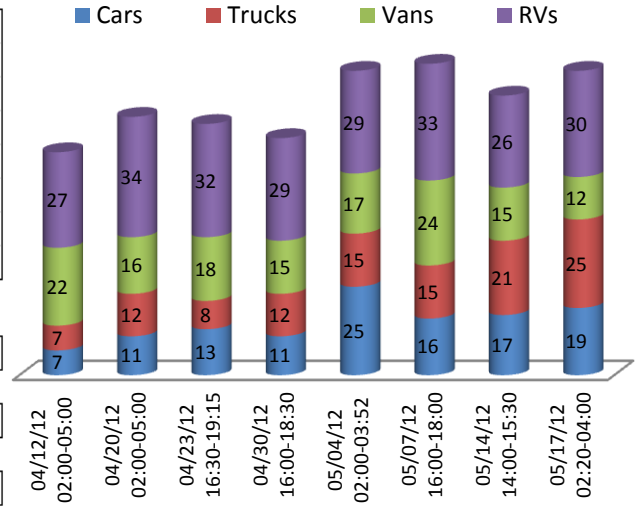


**Ballard Mapped Data Set (4/12/12 - 5/17/12)**

	Cars	Trucks	Vans	RVs	Total VRs
04/12/12 02:00-05:00	7	7	22	27	63
04/20/12 02:00-05:00	11	12	16	34	73
04/23/12 16:30-19:15	13	8	18	32	71
04/30/12 16:00-18:30	11	12	15	29	67
05/04/12 02:00-03:52	25	15	17	29	86
05/07/12 16:00-18:00	16	15	24	33	88
05/14/12 14:00-15:30	17	21	15	26	79
05/17/12 02:20-04:00	19	25	12	30	86

	Cars	Trucks	Vans	RVs	Total VRs
<i>Ballard Average</i>	15	14	17	30	79
<i>Ballard Average AM</i>	16	15	17	30	79
<i>Ballard Average PM</i>	14	14	18	30	61

**Ballard Mapped Data Set; Graphical (4/12/12 - 5/17/12)**



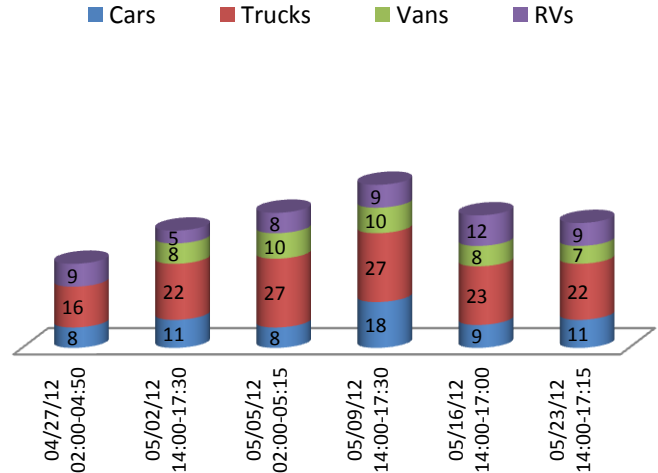
**Fig. 18: Ballard Mapped Data Summaries; Set and Graphical (4/12/12-5/17/12)**

**Greater North Seattle Mapped Data Set (4/27/12-5/23/12)**

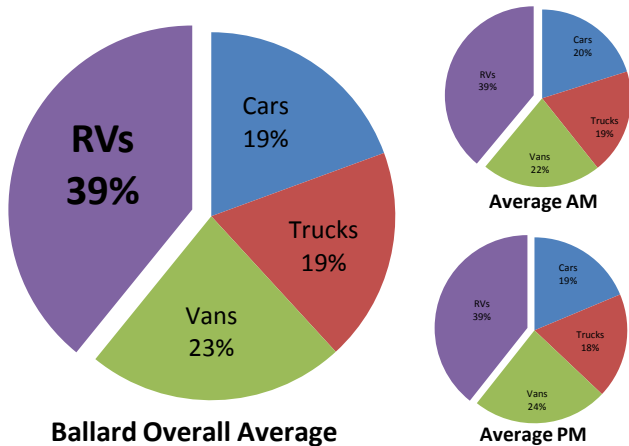
	Cars	Trucks	Vans	RVs	Total VRs
04/27/12 02:00-04:50	8	16	0	9	33
05/02/12 14:00-17:30	11	22	8	5	46
05/05/12 02:00-05:15	8	27	10	8	53
05/09/12 14:00-17:30	18	27	10	9	64
05/16/12 14:00-17:00	9	23	8	12	52
05/23/12 14:00-17:15	11	22	7	9	49

	Cars	Trucks	Vans	RVs	Total VRs
<i>N Seattle Average</i>	11	23	7	9	50
<i>N Seattle Average AM</i>	8	22	5	9	43
<i>N Seattle Average PM</i>	12	24	8	9	53

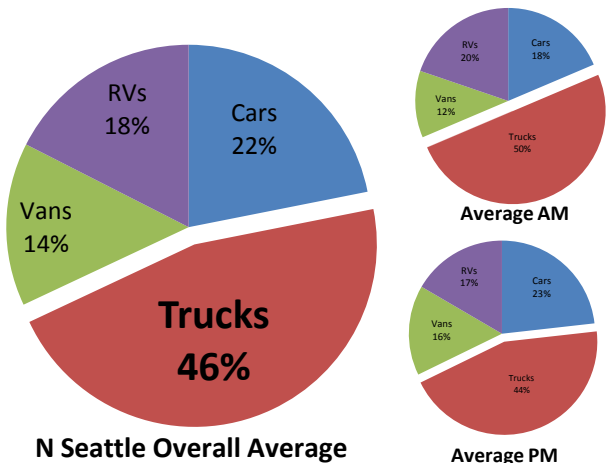
**North Seattle Mapped Data Set; Graphical (4/17/12 - 5/23/12)**



**Fig. 19: Greater North Mapped Data Summaries; Set and Graphical (4/17/12-5/23/12)**



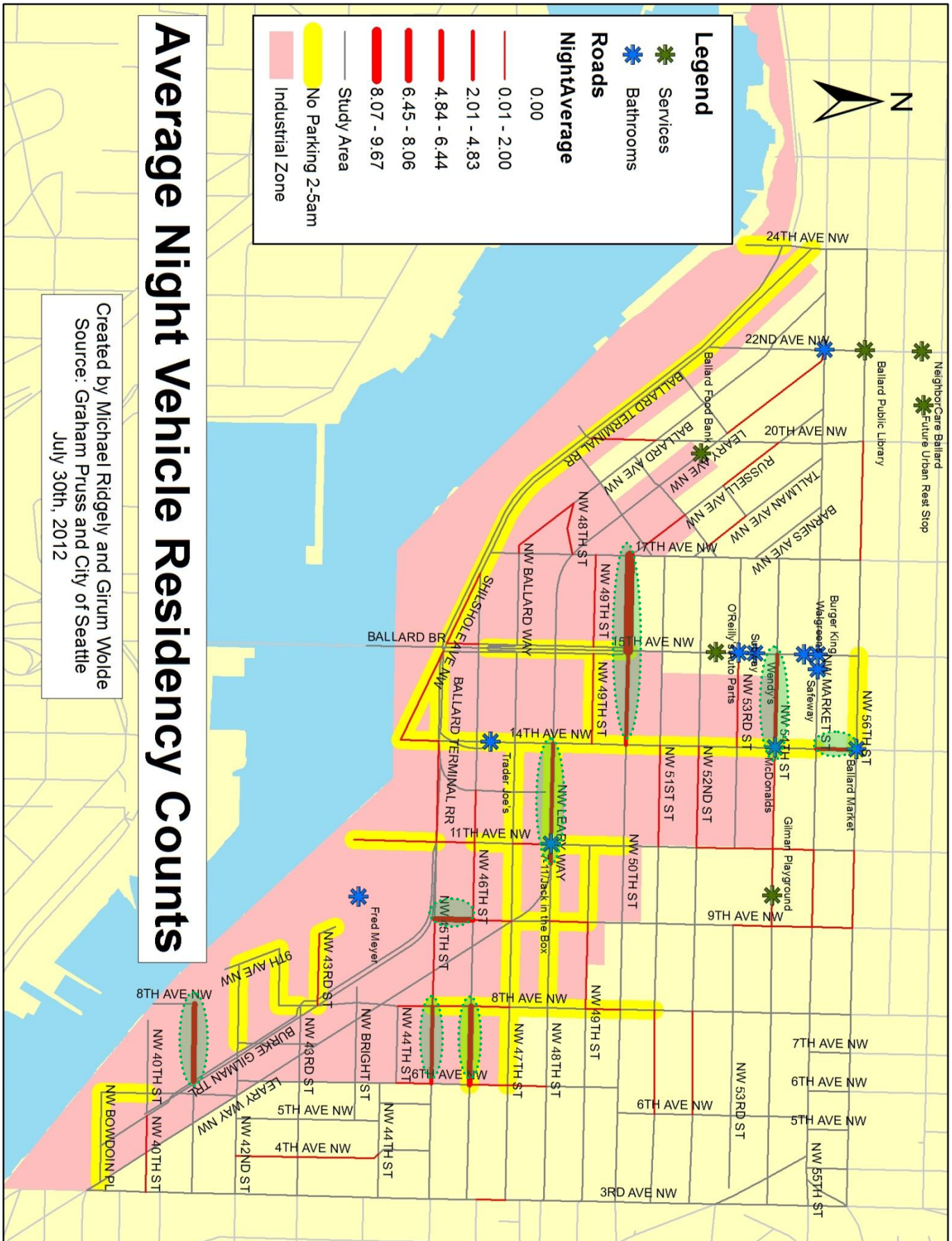
**Fig. 20: Ballard Averages (4/12/12-5/17/12)**



**Fig. 21: Greater North Seattle Averages (4/17/12-5/23/12)**



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Created by Michael Ridgely and Girm Wolde  
 Source: Graham Pruss and City of Seattle  
 July 30th, 2012

Fig. 22: GIS Mapped Data, Ballard Night Averages  
 Green circle highlights added to show streets with an average density >4

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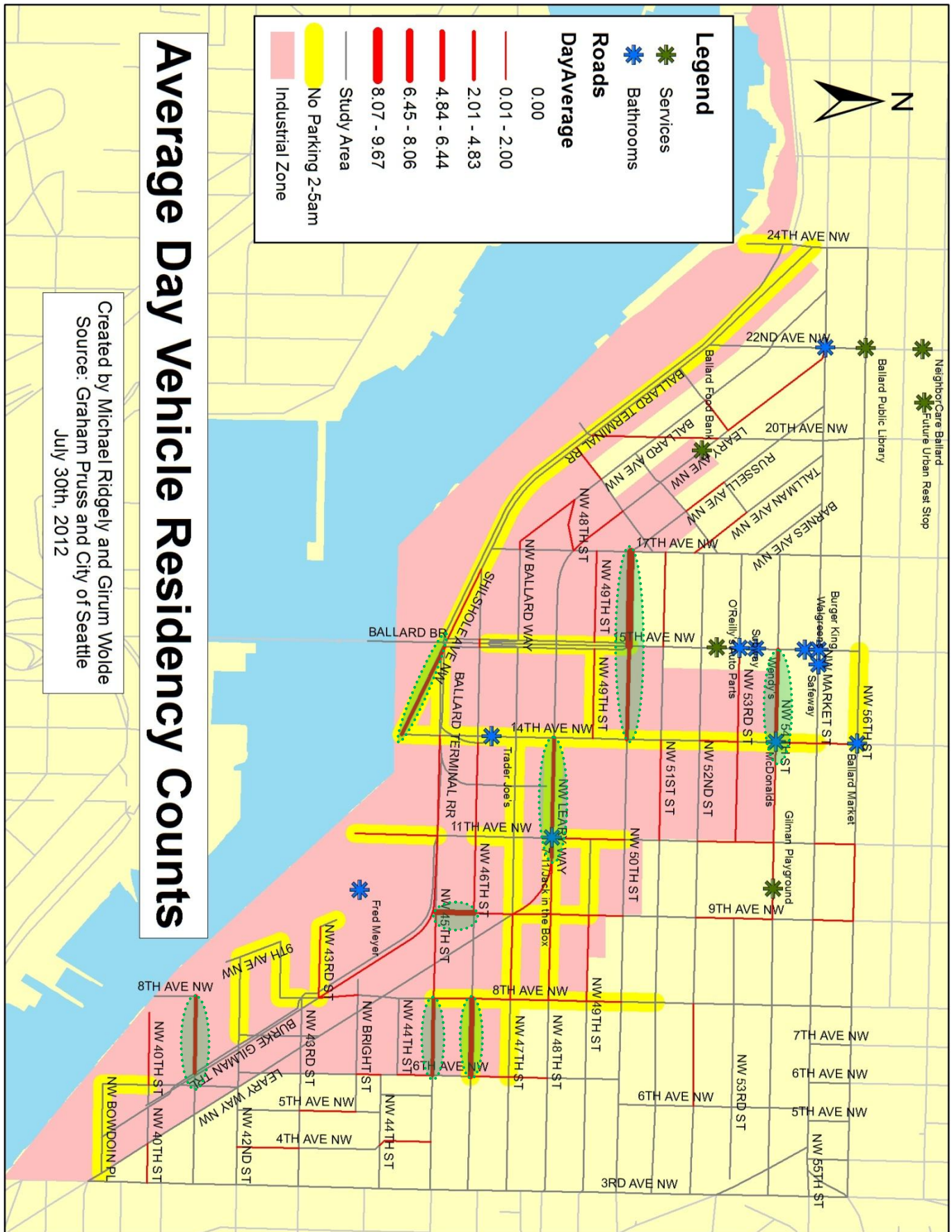


Fig. 23: GIS Mapped Data, Ballard Day Average (green circle highlights added to show streets with an average density >4)

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### VIII. Analysis

We were very fortunate to invite two University of Washington School of Geography graduates to help analyze our mapped data for the Ballard area (due to time constraints, they were only able to process the Ballard data set). Michael Ridgley and Girum Wolde volunteered their services to enter our data into Geographic Information Systems (GIS) format and perform a computerized spatial and temporal (space- and time-based) analysis (Figs. 22 & 23). Using this data, we could see how vehicle residents occupied public streets with varying degrees of density over the study period. We then took this information and correlated it with industrial/manufacturing zoning in the area in addition to the presence of “No Parking 2-5am” signage. Finally, we added the locations of services within the study area which may be utilized by vehicle residents. Among these services we included private restrooms; it is important to note that most of these are closely monitored for their usage and may require purchase at the business, and/or are closed between the hours of 10pm and 6am. One business (“7-11/Jack in the Box” at NW Leary Ave and 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NW) is available between 10pm and 6am and two businesses (“Safeway” and “Fred Meyer’s” NW 53<sup>rd</sup> St and 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NW, and NW 45<sup>th</sup> St and 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NW, respectively) have restrooms which are not closely monitored and do not grant individual permission for public usage. Throughout this study, the one permanent public restroom located at the Gilman Park (NW 52<sup>nd</sup> Ave and 9<sup>th</sup> Ave NW) was closed; the sole public restroom (a “Honey Bucket” portable restroom) was located on the busy intersection of NW Market St and 22<sup>nd</sup> Ave NW – it has since been relocated to the Commons Park at NW 56<sup>th</sup> St and 24<sup>th</sup> Ave NW.

The mapping performed by our researchers provided material and empirical evidence from which we developed several conclusions. We analyzed our information by comparing the totals and averages of our areas, vehicle resident population densities on Ballard streets, and how these densities correlate with parking ordinances. The first maps collected for both areas are considered outliers, most likely reflect the learning curve of research teams, and were not included in the totals. Our basic assumptions include:

- 1. The documented total numbers of vehicles by type are relatively stable for each area – increases and decreases in totals may be based on seasonal, monthly, or hourly differences (Figs. 18 & 19).** We can see in Fig. 18 that the number of vehicle residencies in the Ballard study area shows a small yet steady increase throughout the course of the study, beginning at 73 and ending at 86, but is relatively stable; this data had range of 67-88 and an average of 79. The Greater North Seattle data (Fig. 19) shows a similar relative consistency, beginning at 46 and ending at 49; this data had a range of 46-74 and an average of 50. This shows that there appears to be a relatively consistent pattern of parking on these public streets during this time period, with differences specific to the two areas, by a variety of vehicle residencies.
- 2. The Ballard industrial waterfront has a vehicle resident population which is consistently higher than the Greater North Seattle area (Figs. 18 & 19).** When the averages of the Greater North Seattle and Ballard data sets are compared, we can see a ratio of 50 to 79 or 1:1.58; meaning, on average there are more than 1 ½ times the number of vehicle residents in the relatively small Ballard study area than the much larger space covered in Greater North Seattle study area. It should be recognized that the Greater North Seattle study area is not entire inclusive of North Seattle, but consists of the primary locations for vehicle residency known to local parking enforcement. The larger vehicle resident population in Ballard appears to correlate with the presence of “RVs” (vehicle residencies over 80’ wide) which are legally required to park within industrial zones (Figs 20 & 21). Ballard contains one of the only large industrial zones north of Lake Union, Salmon Bay and the “Cut” connecting these bodies of water.

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- 3. The two study areas show considerably different patterns of residence by vehicle type (Figs. 20 & 21).** Throughout the study, Ballard shows a higher proportion of “RVs,” while the Greater North Seattle area has a higher proportion of “Trucks” (vehicles other than “cars” and “vans” which are less than 80” wide). Interestingly, the average percentages are almost reversed between the groups: Ballard reports “RVs” at 39% and “Trucks” at 19% of its total, while Greater North Seattle reports “RVs” at 18% and “Trucks” at 46% of its total.
- 4. Parking patterns over time by vehicle residents within the Ballard study area show high average densities on specific industrially zoned streets (Figs. 22 & 23) which are not restricted, in whole, by “No Parking 2-5am” signs.** When we focus on the use of public space in Ballard, we can see that certain streets are regularly occupied by certain types of vehicles residencies (Appendix A). GIS mapped data shows the average densities of total vehicle residency by streets (Figs. 22 & 23) and identifies several areas with particularly dense vehicle residence. When looking at these maps, we can see that these densities are consistent throughout the study (Appendix A). We should recognize that streets labeled as having “No Parking 2-5am” signs, contain this restriction on at least one side of the street – these streets may often have vehicles parked overnight on the opposite, unrestricted, side. Additionally, zoning may run down the middle of a street, with one side industrially and the other residentially zoned.

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## IX. Conclusions

This research was designed to provide empirical data on the amount of vehicles within North Seattle and their correlation with parking ordinance, specifically so we can put our data to unfamiliar faces. From the analysis of our mapped data, in addition to many conversations with vehicle residents, service providers, advocates and parking enforcement personnel, we developed four primary conclusions:

- 1. Public perception of vehicle resident population size and spatial/resource use is often different from reality.** While vehicle residency has been the dominant group of unsheltered individuals for over a decade, they are not widely discussed except as evidence of crime within communities where they reside. Many people who travel through these communities do not see these vehicles as evidence of large scale homelessness; in fact, many living in their vehicles do not consider themselves homeless. Data collected during this research in the Ballard industrial waterfront shows an average of 79 vehicles being used for residence. Using the accepted extrapolation of two people per vehicle, that would show an average of roughly 160 people living within this small area. Seattle's "tent cities" are currently limited to 100 people per encampment. This means the relatively small industrial waterfront in Ballard is currently supporting a population of people living in vehicles equal to one and half tent cities; yet, this size goes widely under-recognized. In truth, many of vehicle residents actively create this situation by attempting to hide from public view to ensure their safety, privacy and comfort.
- 2. The use of public parking space for vehicle residency in North Seattle demonstrates patterns of densities within highly constricted legal space.** Vehicle residents must comply with parking enforcement as much as possible, to protect against the loss of their home. Many are in a constant "cat and mouse" game with authorities - or "whack-a-mole", as it is sometimes called, due to their being "whacked" in one area and "popping up" in another. This creates an ever constricting and condensing area, with fewer streets remaining available for overnight parking, while the population numbers remain stable or rise. When we review the data, we can see that for many this is due to an extremely limited area of available overnight parking for their vehicle; for many others, it is the need to park in a place where their vehicle residence can safely go unnoticed.
- 3. Current ordinances within Seattle place vehicles residents at personal risk and position them in direct conflict with the communities where they reside.** The enforcement of a law which restricts overnight "oversized" vehicle parking to Seattle's industrial zones disproportionately affects people living within RVs. However, because the remaining legally available streets where these RVs congregate can become de facto vehicle resident camps, other non-RV owning vehicle residents tend to use these areas in an attempt to blend in with the group. Moreover, they may use and develop this community to share resources or information, especially important considering a near complete lack of effective assistance and the repeated citation of their primary survival tactic: parking their vehicle-home. As RVs are forced into an ever constricted area, the vehicle residence density rises on the few streets with legal overnight parking (i.e. those which did not receive a community request for overnight parking restriction before the current moratorium). This increases the visible presence of a vehicle resident community on these streets, despite attempts by some vehicle residents to distance themselves from others or camouflage their vehicle as anything but a home. Many objections regarding vehicle residency on public streets concern public garbage disposal, urination or defecation;

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however, there are typically no public restrooms, hygiene facilities or waste disposal units located within many high vehicle residency areas, often due to industrial/manufacturing zoning – this is particularly true along the Ballard industrial waterfront. When complaints are received by the communities which surround these new found densities, a response is often directed toward the entire street, not necessarily the source of the specific complaint. Responses to community complaint have historically been in the form of ticketing, impounding or the further installation of overnight parking restriction signs, placing vehicle residents in direct risk of harm.

- 4. Vehicle residents have specific needs which are unaddressed by general services designed for unsheltered people.** Programs which are effective for Seattle’s unsheltered and street-level homeless do not respond to many needs of vehicle residents, particularly those which do not provide adequate (including oversized) parking, non-shelter-based and accessible hot food services, or gas vouchers. Some services can even be detrimental, when the storage of a person’s vehicle is not accounted for and it must be parked at-risk on a city street while the owner is provided shelter. Through conversations with vehicle residents in the Ballard area, we found that many do not consider themselves homeless and are often new to living on the streets. Many of these people work and do not seek outreach or services because they are unfamiliar with them, scared of the perceived negative repercussions of inviting “authorities” into their lives, do not feel they need them, or are simply too proud to ask. For most, holding on to their vehicle is their last hope of holding on to their American Dream.

Almost three years have passed since Dan and Karen Grier spoke with *Real Change* in 2009, but little has changed which would have improved their lives; moreover, several of the laws and signage which the Griers cited as adding further pressure and dangers to their lives had now become entrenched and widely enforced. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012, we had the opportunity to sit down with “Junior” and “Star” (their chosen names for their interview) a married couple aged 28 and 32 respectively. They informed us that Junior is a two-tour veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan and Star is a stay-at-home mother who, until recently, had been caring for their three children (with another on the way) in Montana. Junior and Star explained that they had arrived to Seattle around two months before our conversation and, living in their truck, were experiencing many of the problems consistent with vehicle residency in Seattle. Star gave birth to their fourth child in early September; prior to the birth, they were told there is a minimum six-month wait to enter into a transitional housing program for the whole family. They fear the specter of further devastating loss, future creditors, and of agencies whom our society provides to ensure the safety and well-being of all. At the time of their interview, they were terrified by the cost of an un-insured birth as well as the thought of caring for, and hiding, a newborn while living out of their vehicle.

Junior explained their story further; he and Star had been married for two years with two children and a third on the way when he ended his active duty military service. Due to the circumstances of his dismissal, he would not receive military benefits for himself or his family - despite receiving a significant wound in his right side from a rocket propelled grenade. When Junior returned to Montana, he resumed a career in construction which he had began before his service, purchasing a house for his family with savings from his military signing bonus and service compensation. Not long after this, their third child was born with potentially terminal complications – essentially, a lack of insurance led to the accrual of “massive medical bills.” The couple struggled for months to cover the medical expenses, but drained the family’s remaining savings and declared bankruptcy. Three weeks later, the construction firm which employed Junior (the largest in his town) laid off roughly 95% of their work force; a week after that, the largest firm in the next town over did the same. Junior recalls that he didn’t receive his

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Unemployment Insurance for six months – in the mean time, Star learned she was pregnant as the couple sold off hard-earned possessions to cover their continuously growing past-due bills. It wasn't enough. With the help of local police, their bank seized the house and two of their three vehicles (the third was in a friend's name), giving the family an hour and a half to load a single "U-Haul" trailer with their lives. The family continued to look for employment but raising a family in their vehicle in their small town was far too difficult - they soon drove to Seattle for work and a chance to improve their lives.

Junior immediately began his job search, using North Seattle Community College's computers as well as the nearby Department of Social and Human Services Community Service and Work Source offices. Junior didn't want his family exposed to the dangers of street-life, so they stayed in a church parking lot at night. Soon, a church member saw them preparing the vehicle for their children to sleep and told them they couldn't stay; however, this generous person pre-paid a week of lodging for the family at a motel on Aurora Avenue N, unfortunately well known for its often substance-addicted and otherwise criminal clientele. Days later, this gracious act turned tragic when - two and a half weeks after arriving to Seattle and less than a month after watching their home and belongings repossessed - their remaining vehicle and the "U-Haul" trailer loaded with the few remnants of their lives, was stolen from the parking lot of the motel as they slept.

Finding themselves surviving on the streets of North Seattle with three small children, Junior and Star made one of the most difficult decisions any parent would have to face. Star swallowed back tears as Junior explained,

"My parents are Alzheimer's cases ... so, I don't have family to call, really. But I do have a sister who happens to be a teacher. She found out about our situation and she offered to watch the kids while we got our feet under us. So now, our kids are with my sister, and it's been four months, now .. no, six months, total. She lives in Southern California. She has a lot of friends and community there that are willing to help – so, they were able to fly up and help and get the kids. And since then, we've hitch-hiked down twice, because it's so hard to be away from our kids. On this last time we went down there, we ended up coming across a quick job and bought a car again."

- "**Junior, Current vehicle resident**" Personal Interview. July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Junior had found a week's worth of work in Medford, Oregon and used the money to make a down payment on a truck; however, he couldn't take ownership until the total had been paid off. The couple made cardboard signs and asked for money on corners, using whatever didn't go to food to pay off the vehicle. Within a couple of weeks they were able to pay off the truck and continue their return to Seattle in search of any employment they could find. They hoped to get their "feet under them" – at the very least, they believed that they were better off in their vehicle than living on the street. In the approximately seven months since their family had begun living in their vehicle, they have learned much about surviving – lessons many people hope they will never have to rely on. Underlying many of their problems is a lack of access to resources which will help them in their specific situation, directly because they are "lucky" to be able to sleep in their vehicle as opposed to a park bench. When they talk of services, it is often in relation to how they can't use what is being offered.

Junior arrived at the interview partially shaved, having been able to clean up in the bathroom of the DSHS that morning, before being found by custodial staff and told to leave. Before this, he had spent the morning continuing his search for a place to wash, aided by a referral and phone confirmation at DSHS that he could shower at a local community center. Upon arrival, the center informed him it was for paying community members only.

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“You either go and deal with all the problems downtown or you go without a shower. It’s not like out here where ... yeah, everybody says there’s feeds. Oh yeah, they feed there, they feed here, they feed there. There’s this Food Bank, that Food Bank. But, we can’t cook none of that. Not only can we not cook that food, but we have nowhere to put it. You can’t store a thing of meat in your car, it goes bad in hours or a day.

And then, to top it off, in order to get to the actual feeds where they actually have the food prepared – GAS. No place provides gas that we’ve found, and we’ve called a lot of places. We’ve called for help with vouchers FOR assistance in a motel. We’ve called for assistance for temporary living – and shelters, for that matter. Family shelters. We’re on a three year waiting list for a couple of places. Two years, a Year ... One said eight years. I’m going to wait six to eight years for a shelter?! What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to get clean to get work?

They say, ‘Well, you can go to the Urban Rest Stop.’ Perfect example. You get there, you sign up for showers. An hour, two hours, three hours later, you get your shower. Well, now it’s noon. Where are you going to go find work after noon? How are you going to park your vehicle downtown? It’s \$15 for an hour and a half for most places down there. Hell, if I had \$15 I could get a shower.

At this point, I can’t even go into Burger King for a job because I smell like ... until I can get a shower. And DSHS, all they say is, ‘Well, call these places.’ We’ve called EVERY number YOU have provided us. We have a stack, literally 2 ½ to 3 inches thick of four or five shelters or programs on there, per page. We’ve called every number in the book.

The last time we went in [to DSHS], two and half weeks ago, for gas assistance, they said, ‘We can help you with bus tickets.’ I said, ‘Ok, fine. I’ll park the car in a church parking lot and take the bus to these jobs and so forth.’ It worked out half-way decent, but was actually a real pain in the ass. You don’t know if your car is going to be there when you get back – which is your home. That’s like, you leaving your house and wondering, every time you leave is my house going to be blown up? Is it going to move? Is it going to be stolen?”

“We rely on each other out here, in reality. Most programs don’t help with anything. Very, very, very little do they actually help. People don’t realize that. When you’re driving down the road and you’re at a red light, and you give someone a \$5 bill – well, you shouldn’t see them tomorrow, right? Well, and it’s rare that you get \$5 ... you get a dollar, some change. And then they see you again and say, ‘What, you’re still here?’ Yeah, we’re still here.”

- “Junior, current vehicle resident” Personal Interview. July, 30<sup>th</sup> 2012

At night, they sleep in parking lots, trying to find places with indirect light where they can find privacy with some amount of public visibility for safety. In the mornings, Junior searches for jobs at North Seattle Community College, then heads off to Ballard to continue his search on the street. If nothing can be found, the couple asks for donations from drivers via a cardboard sign on street corners. They make about \$15 a day - whatever money they can collect between them will be spent on food (typically \$6 worth of \$1 menu fast food items) and gas for a return to Aurora Ave N to begin again. They fold down the seats of their truck (it shows no signs of being a vehicle-home during the day) to make a bed and block the windows with blankets, hoping to avoid notice which brings an inevitable and frequent response by police. They speak well of the police, saying that many are helpful even if they have to ask them to move. However, there are the times when people call in complaints that the couple are involved in drugs or prostitution (familiar to the North Seattle area where they park overnight) prompting a full, humiliating, search of their vehicle typically involving the removal and/or rearranging of their possessions. On that note, Junior and Star were adamant that they do not use drugs or drink (he remembers his last beer, a month and a half prior to our conversation), except for his one professed vice: smoking hand-rolled cigarettes – during our several encounters over three weeks, they have never appeared intoxicated in any way.

Junior and Star continued to shuffle through North Seattle up until the birth, trying to avoid losing their home while seeking the resources and assistance they needed to survive. Two days after the birth,



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the child was removed from the parents at the hospital by Child Protective Services (CPS). While homelessness alone is not a legal reason for CPS to take possession of a child, the “chronic homelessness” (in CPS’ words) of the couple provoked the question of drug abuse and enough concern for the safety of the child to open an investigation. The parents were reunited with the child after roughly a week, partially due to intervention by vehicle resident advocates; they were required to submit urine analysis test, which they both passed. Star is now inside the church with the child, while Junior has found space to park overnight at the Safe Parking Pilot program. It’s impossible to know where they will be when their number comes up after waiting six months for family shelter. The baby will be five months old by then; in the mean time, Junior and Star will fight to keep their family together and to create a place where they can reunite the one they’ve lost.

This story, among many, underscores the primary conclusions of this research and provides a potentially familiar face to our data. Unfortunately, because of the purposed clandestine practices required by vehicle residency, there is currently no way to collect large-scale demographic information on this unique and dominant subset of our unsheltered population. We don’t know how many vehicle residents are families struggling to survive, nor how many are veterans, elderly, or require special assistance. We don’t know how many are actively employed or seeking employment, how many face addiction or mental illness, or how many could be significantly assisted by available or basic resources. We do know that they occupy our public space, their presence and stories need to be documented, and they require a piece of earth where they can use the resources we all require to survive and succeed.

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## X. Recommendations

Although vehicle residency has represented the largest single category of unsheltered homelessness in Seattle/King County at roughly 30% for over a decade, the specific needs of this group have widely gone unresolved. It is somewhat ironic that the “Scofflaw Law”, a program meant to collect on unpaid tickets by use of a mechanical boot, has recently brought focus on this group. What could have been the “last ticket” for many vehicle residents has become a rallying cry for advocates, service providers and government officials who have watched this problem rise to a point of urgency. People in their vehicles in Seattle are still scared, they don’t know that change may be coming ... many can still only count on an uncertain future defined by tickets, constant migration and the ever-looming loss of their home. Current efforts are a step in the right direction and show a commitment on the part of our local government to help this long ignored population. Based on our collected data, its analysis and the general conclusions, our team identified several policy and procedural recommendations. In addition, we developed several tools which may assist organizations who provide outreach, connect people with resources, and document our unsheltered population.

1. First and foremost, vehicle residents need the development of a city-wide “Safe Parking” program which can provide a location(s) for them to live until they are able to enter into transitional or permanent housing. Any effort to provide safe parking has to be performed with the interests of the surrounding community at heart; this is primarily because of the neighborhood support needed to ensure site security, service funding and the successful integration of marginalized people into our society. Significant research into how this program may best serve all members of our community is needed; however, we have several suggestions as to its goals:
  - a. Ensure that vehicle residents have a place where they can safely park overnight and sleep within their vehicle.
  - b. Provide a central location where service providers and case managers can maintain contact with their clients.
  - c. Work with pre-existing facilities and organizations to address this population on a regional scale while maintaining a positive relationship with local communities.
  - d. Enforce a general code of conduct to protect the safety of Safe Parking Program participants and the communities in which they reside.
  - e. This “Safe Parking Program” should provide access to:
    - i. Resources to attain housing, employment, medical and mental health care.
    - ii. Restrooms, hygiene facilities, waste disposal, electrical outlets and fresh water.
    - iii. Dry kitchen, eating, meeting and parking areas in addition to food storage capabilities.
    - iv. Public transportation and/or gas vouchers, in addition to convenient access to transportation hubs.
    - v. Assistance with licensing and maintenance of vehicles.

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- 2. An overall policy review of ordinance and enforcement relating to vehicle residency** is necessary to untangle the multiple restrictions which cause harm as well as to ensure a legal space within which people can access resources needed to succeed. Current ordinances which help create dense areas of vehicle residency on limited streets and place the well-being of vehicle residents at risk include the “oversized” overnight parking restriction to industrial/manufacturing zones (SMC 11.72.070), the city-wide 72-hour parking restriction (SMC 11.72.440), the use of “No Parking 2-5am” signs within areas of high vehicle residency, and the “Scofflaw Law” which enables the mechanical immobilization of vehicles with multiple unpaid tickets (SMC 11.35). Furthermore, our parking enforcement officers are placed in the middle of this situation, compelled to issue citations which are known to cause devastating effects on vehicle residents when unsheltered homeless outreach should be provided instead – essentially, to do their job, law enforcers must to criminalize those struggling to survive within their remaining legal space. Several North Seattle Parking Enforcement Officers we spoke to during this research indicated that they were keenly aware of the result of citations on vehicle residents and expressed the desire for a better solution. Jean Darsie, a *Scofflaw Mitigation Fund* director, reports that many of the requests that they receive for outreach and assistance to vehicle residents who face impound come from information provided by Seattle Police Department Parking Enforcement Officers and the Seattle Municipal Courts. This compassionate, yet informal, reaction by members of our local government who maintain the closest contact with vehicle residents underlies our need for policy change and specific service availability, so that our government may effectively perform its role to serve and protect all within our communities.
- 3. Public restrooms, hygiene facilities and waste disposal units in areas of high vehicle residency are needed immediately.** Until a city-wide safe parking program and general ordinance revision can effectively ease current densities of public parking used for vehicle residence, a large number of people will be compelled to park on specific streets without nearby access to important amenities. Public urination, defecation and waste disposal is frequently cited as a source of complaints to local Police and Parking enforcement by community members; however, a lack of immediate access to these facilities and the long distance from their public availability is a likely cause of these actions.
- 4. The City of Seattle should increase support and/or funding for programs such as the Safe Parking Pilot Project, the Safe Parking Outreach Coordinator, the Scofflaw Mitigation Fund, and the Office of the Mayor’s Vehicle Resident Action Coalition.** The programs currently provide the first steps of addressing this previously under-recognized population – their support and success helps increase positive public awareness for their efforts. The Safe Parking Pilot Project currently provides case management, safe parking and restrooms for up to seven parking places in church owned lots (although, only one lot currently allows families or RVs). The Safe Parking Outreach Coordinator position was created through a grant funded by the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods to document the effectiveness of current programs, work to increase awareness as well as secure future funding and sites. The Scofflaw Mitigation Fund, an all volunteer organization, is currently on the front lines of saving people from the loss of their vehicle-home. This fund was created through private donations in mid-2011 to help people who have had, or are at risk of having, their vehicle impounded. The volunteers in this group work with Parking Enforcement, Human Services, the Seattle Municipal Courts as well as

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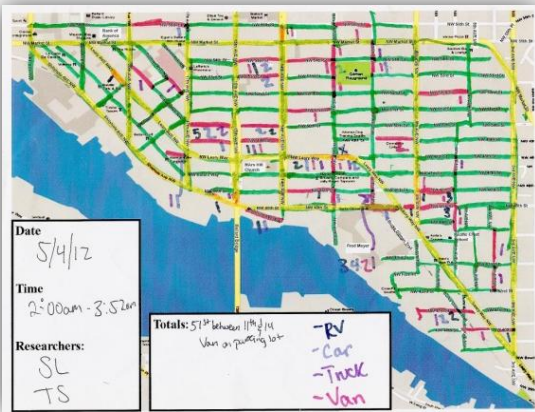
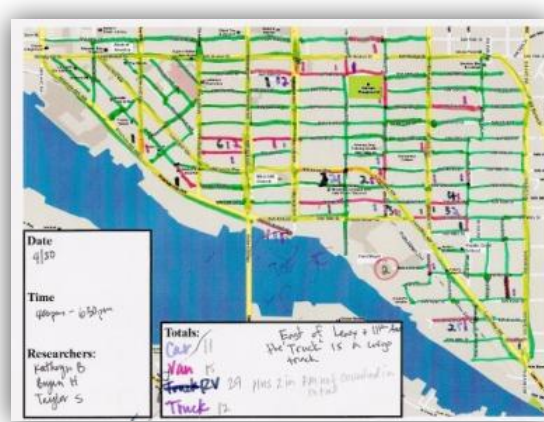
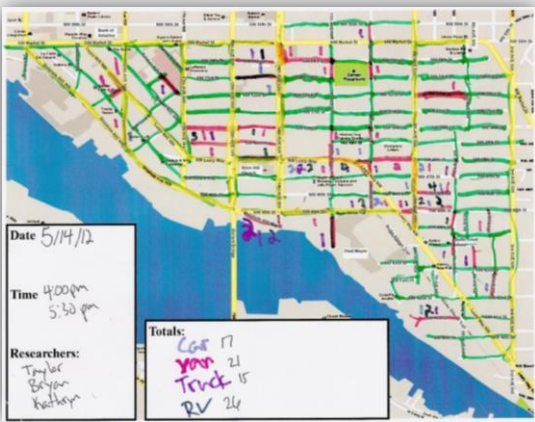
local impound lots and vehicle service centers to release (and often repair) vehicle-homes, but their fund is rapidly diminishing. The Scofflaw Mitigation Fund is, essentially, a stop-gap to help people who may have already lost their vehicle-home; this is useful to help mitigate harm, however a program which halts the creation of this harm is necessary. The Interfaith Taskforce on Homelessness and Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness & Hunger, founders of the Scofflaw Mitigation Fund, are members of the Office of the Mayor's Vehicle Resident Action Coalition and work for their specific recommendations beyond those called for in this report. Their further recommendations include direct funding for the Scofflaw Mitigation Fund, a policy change to discontinue the use of "Impound" comments along with tickets for vehicle residencies, a buffer involving professional outreach between community complaints and known vehicle residents, and strict adherence to the use of orange tags to warn vehicles of impending 72-hour non-compliance. The Office of the Mayor's Vehicle Resident Action Coalition is currently collecting information from departments throughout Seattle City government on the total costs of personnel, enforcement, as well as fees for towing and impound to compare with revenue received from "scofflaw" enforcement on vehicle residences.

5. **Further research on effective methods of collecting demographics is required to know not only who lives in vehicles, but how they may be best assisted.** Our findings do not provide answers to questions about the demographic make-up of vehicle residents. We currently cannot know this information because, as opposed to people who use shelters, vehicle residents do not regularly use services which collect demographic data for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). For shelters, HMIS compliance is a requirement to receive national McKinney-Vento funds for local homeless assistance programs; however, the lack of inclusion in this system of many vehicle residents shows a dearth in the understanding of this unique and enormous population.
6. **A significantly larger study sample is needed to comprehensively understand vehicle residency in Seattle and King County.** Our data focused on Ballard and select areas of North Seattle; many locations, including large industrial zones found in South Seattle, were undocumented. A review of the average total for the Ballard industrial waterfront (roughly 160 vehicle residents) in comparison with the 2012 One Night Count (519 vehicle residents within Seattle city limits) shows that either: a) an area representing less than 1% of Seattle contains 30% of the city's total vehicle residents, or b) that our actual population of vehicle residents is larger than currently reported. Based upon our findings in Ballard compared with reported totals, the latter appears to be the case. Extensive mapping throughout Seattle/King County by multiple teams over a year is necessary to fully understand how local areas are used for vehicle residency in accordance to parking ordinance, time of day, seasonal weather, and available resources.
7. **The Vehicle Identification Schema, or a similar system, can help many organizations locate vehicles residents for outreach, assistance and documentation.** A variable system helps address several prerequisites necessary to recognize this population for documentation and/or outreach, particularly by volunteers or professionals with little training. These include a formal way to document a vehicle resident based solely upon the evidence of their vehicle (useful for nighttime counts and daytime outreach), a basic set of identifying characteristics which can be quickly learned or referenced, and the ability to use a single system for identifying vehicle-homes within a range of vehicle types.

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**XI. Appendix**  
**SVRRP Ballard Map Data Set (4/20/12 – 5/17**



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### SVRRP North Seattle Map Data Set (4/27/12 – 5/23/12)



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