



## ***OCCUPY MADISON HISTORY***

***UPDATE TODAY: April 27, 2013***

### **Day 558 of the Occupy Madison Encampment (79 Weeks and 5 Days)**

After a long and trying winter at Token Creek County Park and a one month stay on Mr. Koua Vang's private property on Portage Road in Madison, the Occupy Madison Encampment has moved back to the Dane County Parks System because it is the only legal option for people experiencing homelessness. Mr. Koua Vang offered his land to the campers after Dane County ended permitted camping in Token Creek. Before the encampment moved to his land the City of Madison zoning department warned him of potential fines and tried to deter him from allowing homeless individuals from staying on his private land. After a failed attempt to appeal the zoning ordinance (it is illegal to camp in anywhere in Madison) the zoning department issued a decision to fine Mr. Vang if the encampment was not moved by April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Mr. Vang and Occupy Madison abided by the ruling and moved to Lake Farm County Park on April 16<sup>th</sup>. After a full day of breaking down the encampment and setting up at the Lake Farm County Park the rangers inform the campers of a new rule that appears to be created specifically for the Occupy Madison residents. Apparently the Dane County Parks System installed a rule one tent per campsite rule in an attempt to evict homeless individuals from camping in the parks. We are still waiting for an answer on how this rule was created since there is no evidence that the parks commission passed a new rule. Forcing an eviction or renting 18 separate camping sites, Occupy Madison purchased three large tents to accommodate the 18 people staying on 3 sites. This while others set up two tents on the next site and were never asked to change their camping arrangements.

Effort: In 558 days the encampment has moved 30 times.

Result: It is still illegal to sleep outdoors in the City of Madison or Dane County unless you have money to stay in a county park.

The other 70 weeks are chronicled in the remainder of this document.

## **The Occupy Madison Encampments**

This is a review of the Occupy Madison encampments since they began in October 2011. Occupy Madison has worked tirelessly to maintain a safe and legal space. The group has been transparent and always made an effort to communicate with anyone or any government body that is open to a respectful dialogue. A tremendous amount of time, energy, and money has been spent trying to shape the encampment so it would conform to laws, codes, and regulations.

### ***October 2011: Reynolds Park, Madison, WI***

The encampment started in October of 2011 in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street.

### ***October 2011: Veterans Plaza, Madison, WI***

Worked with city police and voted to move from Reynolds Park to Veterans Plaza to appease the concerns of the neighborhood.

### ***November 2011: Monona Terrace, Madison, WI***

Worked with city police and voted to move to Monona Terrace because of Freakfest.

### ***November 2011: 800 East Washington, Madison, WI***

After concerns were raised by Monona Terrace management the city asked us to move to 800 East Washington, the group accepted the new location via a vote from the GA.

#### ***Cooperation at 800 East Washington***

- City requests porta-potties onsite; Occupy Madison complies; cost \$350 per month.
- City requested group to apply for a permit from the state. After a few days of debate Occupy Madison capitulated and submitted an application for a permit with a fee of \$150. Permit was approved.
- Occupy Madison builds a test hoop house to house individual occupants, fire marshal deems the wood structure on small hoop houses are out of compliance. Occupy Madison redesigns hoop houses with metal structure. (5 built @ \$75 each = \$375)
- City officials request that the original meeting and kitchen tent be removed because it is unsightliness. Occupy Madison builds a new kitchen tent and removes original tent.
- Fire marshal deems the new kitchen building (wood structure) does not meet code; Occupy Madison stops construction, removes all wood above flooring, and reassembles with metal framing. (Cost = \$350)
- Fire marshal deems all tarps used to cover large structures, small hoop houses, and kitchen building does not meet code. Occupy Madison submits material safety data sheets for fire retardant polyethylene (PE) to cover structures for approval. Fire department approves the new materials; Occupy Madison orders \$400 dollars worth of PE and retrofits all buildings.
- Occupy Madison builds a large unheated hoop house to comply with city codes. Original plan for larger military tent scrapped because of concerns of the city. (Cost = \$750)
- Occupy Madison builds a forced air heating system to keep people warm in large hoop house. Fire marshal deems it does not meet code. After spending \$600 attempting to meet code, the heating system is disassembled at the request of the fire marshal just 24 hours after its

completion.

- Occupy Madison worked closely with the health department to comply with codes that pertained to food storage, food preparation, and dish washing methods.

- Occupy Madison moved tents and restructured camp so emergency vehicles could easily enter camp.

- Occupy Madison worked with fire department to redesign the outdoor fire.

In summary the occupants of 800 East Washington worked with the fire department, police department, health department, and the mayor's office and responded to all requests. The encampment had weekly contact with police and fire department. Random inspections were done by the health inspectors. Towards the end of the encampment 11 government officials attended a meeting at the site and the concerns of both sides were worked out.

### ***May 2012: 800 East Washington, Madison, WI***

Occupy Madison filed a restraining order to attempt to stay on the property, the case was unsuccessful. The people of the camp accepted the results and worked with the city police to plan an orderly end to the encampment. People began removing unessential tents and gear a week before the end of the encampment. 30 people volunteered on the final day to remove the remaining tents and gear.

The final day of the 800 East Washington encampment went as plan without any issues!

### ***May 2012: Token Creek County Park, Burke, WI***

Left with no legal option, 6 people from the encampment move to Token Creek to continue the living with the safety of the community. Others retreat to the smaller illegal locations around the city or the benches downtown.

### ***May 2012: Lake Farm County Park, Madison, WI***

Due to distance and transportation limitations, Token Creek becomes unsustainable, the encampment decides to reform at Lake Farm Park. The camp swells to 25 people because the new location is more suitable to maintaining employment and reaching town for services.

### ***July 2012: MUM Report***

County Board asks Madison Urban Ministries to submit a report on the state of homelessness and gaps in the system. Many people involved in the Occupy Madison meet weekly to help complete this report. MUM delivers report to the county board with list of responses including suggestions for new location for an encampment. Members of Occupy Madison appeared at city and county meetings all summer long in attempt to make government aware of the reported gaps and the issue of criminalizing homelessness (no legal options).

### ***May through Oct 2012: Lake Farm County Park, Mendota County Park, Token Creek Park***

The camp population varies between 10 and 30 people. The camp moves for 2 days every 14 days to comply with campground regulations. It moved to Token Creek or Mendota for 2 days

on weekends to comply with the campground requirements. These two locations were less than ideal.

In summary 70 different people use the campgrounds, with 50 people staying for over a week. 17 people achieve some type of housing. The residents and allies lobbied the county for resolutions to change the camping regulations to allow some stability for people. These resolutions were killed. The camp continued and used \$3500 in donation and \$1000 from residents to create a legal home for people. Additional time and money was required to continuously move the camp to stay in compliance

The stability of this legal space allowed 17 people achieved housing

**Oct 2012: 800 East Washington, Madison, WI**

(Legal options end when county parks close) Faced with no legal options and no response from the city or county, the encampment votes to move back to 800 East Washington. Regular communication starts with city police. Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association comes to have open dialogue. City posts no trespassing signs. Occupy Madison is asked to leave, city extends eviction date, finally the camp votes to move to Lake View County Park.

**November 2012: Lake View County Park, Madison, WI**

Faced again with no legal option the encampment votes to move to Lake View County Park. As in the past 26 moves all decisions are made in an open and transparent General Assembly meeting. This should have been no surprise to anyone concerned with the encampment, the list of possible sites was had been in public circulation since the MUM report was published in July of 2012.

**November 2012: Token Creek County Park, Burke, WI**

When first asked to leave and faced with no legal option the people of the encampment decide to stay in hopes of a meaningful dialogue with county officials. The county decides not to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the occupants. Over a 7 day period the county escalates written warnings eventually leading to a late night event that included tickets. 2 days before removing people the county issues a written offer to move to Token Creek Park. The occupants of the encampment respond with a written counter offer to move to Lake Farm Park. The county ignores the counter offer and physically removes the people from Lake Farm and moves their belongings to Token Creek using force and intimidation.

Meaningful dialogue is still absent, instructions sent via outside allies and delivered to the camp.

The encampment has existed for more than 15 months, it has peacefully and voluntarily moved 26 times. In an attempt to stay legal Occupy Madison has spent roughly \$9000 plus the time, energy, and gasoline of many volunteers. Every move was done to avoid conflict and allow for the best possible outcome for the so people could remain in a self-govern safe community. In every case the camp has always looked for a viable legal option to exist.

The 27th move was due to a total lack of communication and meaningful dialogue. The people of encampment were prepared to discuss options and move to a practical location. Instead they were forced to accept a remote location, the street, or the wrath of the shelter.

On Feb 17th the homeless folks staying Token Creek Park were asked to leave with no legal place to go. The one day \$11,000 taxpayer funded relocation of 20 people from Lake View Hill to Token Creek is coming to an end. After 16 months, 27 relocations, a comprehensive report by Madison Area Ministries, and countless hours of testimony at city and county meetings nothing has changed. Is this a lack of compassion or a lack of creativity?

- This single relocation action cost the county (taxpayers) over \$11,000.
- Privately funded, the entire cost for keeping the encampment legal this summer was \$4,500 in camping fees (\$4,500 of revenue for the county).

After agreeing to never ask to stay in the county parks for the winter (people did not ask to stay in the parks for the winter, they were moved there without very few or no options), Dane county extend the winter permit until March 17<sup>th</sup> leaving no legal place to go until the county campgrounds opened on April 16<sup>th</sup>.

### ***January 2013:***

Occupy Madison recently formed a non-profit to pursue solutions for people facing homelessness in Madison.

The search continues while people are forced to live illegally in our city.

## **Conclusion: NO LEGAL PLACE TO GO!!!!**