

City of Woonsocket Rhode Island



April 21, A.D. 2025

ORDINANCE CHAPTER

PROHIBITING CAMPING ON PUBLIC PROPERTY

WHEREAS, pursuant to the City of Woonsocket's Code of Ordinances, littering is explicitly prohibited. Specifically, Chapter 10, Section 10-10(b) states, with emphasis added: *Littering prohibited. No person shall throw, drop, deposit, discard or otherwise dispose of litter, from a motor vehicle, bicycle, or on foot, upon any public property in the city, or in any waters in the city or upon private property in this city not owned by him or her;* and

WHEREAS, Chapter 10, Section 10-10(a) defines "litter" as follows, with emphasis added: *Litter defined. Litter means garbage, trash, waste, rubbish, ashes, cans, bottles, wire, paper, cartons, boxes, automobile parts, furniture, glass, or anything else of an unsightly or unsanitary nature thrown, dropped, discarded, placed or deposited by a person on public property, on private property not owned by the person, or in or on waters of the city, unless said material is placed in a litter receptacle in a manner that prevents it from being carried away by the elements.;* and

WHEREAS, Chapter 10, Section 10-4, Unlawful Deposits, provides the following, with emphasis added: *It shall be unlawful for any person to throw or in any way deposit, place or cause to be placed any filth, dirt, rubbish, or other offensive substance of any description whatsoever, or any paper, sawdust, shavings, cartons, bottles, cans, or any refuse, animal or vegetable matter of any kind, in any street, lane, highway or park, into any catch basin or gravel catcher in this city, and it shall be unlawful for any person to deposit or scatter, or cause to be deposited or scattered any handbills, circulars, programs, or advertising slips in*

or upon any street, public place, school premises, park sidewalk or highway of this city.; and

WHEREAS, individuals have been congregating on public and private property throughout the City, establishing campsites and / or shelters that lack water, sewer and sanitation services, and, in so doing, have created significant accumulations of trash, waste and filth (i.e. litter) that have negatively impacted and imperiled the health, safety, welfare and quality of life of the City and its residents; and

WHEREAS, the challenging access to many of the campsites creates an undue burden for timely emergency services, as well as imposes risks for public safety/first responders; and

WHEREAS, unauthorized camping on public property often interferes with the intended use of the public space.

**NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL
OF THE CITY OF WOONSOCKET AS FOLLOWS:**

Section 1. DEFINITIONS:

“Camp”, “Camping” or “To Camp” shall mean: *To shelter in a tent, under a tarp or canopy, in a motor vehicle, camper, or in any other outdoor shelter for the purpose of living accommodations.*

“Camping Materials”: *Any item used to camp or to provide outdoor shelter, such as a tent, tarp, canopy, mattress, furniture, fuel tanks, stoves, heating units, luggage, backpacks, and cooking paraphernalia.*

Campsite or Encampment: *Any place where a tent, tarp, or other temporary structure is located for the purpose of providing outdoor shelter or Camping.*

Public Property: *Any city owned property, improved or unimproved, including, but not limited to a public park, public street, public sidewalk, public parking lot, public alley, public education institution and property, public recreation facility, public right-of-way, river bank, river walk and bike path.*

Section 2. It is unlawful to Camp, or occupy a Campsite, or to have or leave Camping Materials on Public Property unless specifically authorized to do so by the Director of Public Works or his/her designee for an approved, permitted event.

Section 3. Any Camping Materials and/or personal property left at an unauthorized Campsite may be removed and properly disposed of by the City. The City, its agents, and/or employees shall not be liable for any loss or damage of any kind associated with the removal and disposal of property left at unauthorized Campsites. Before

removing any personal property left at an unauthorized Campsite, a public safety officer or his/her designee shall attempt to provide any readily apparent owners with at least 72 hours notice of intent to remove the personal property and a reasonable opportunity to remove the personal property from Public Property. If there is no readily apparent owner, or if the apparent owner refuses to remove the personal property from Public Property, then the public safety officer or his/her designee may cause the personal property to be removed from the Public Property. The public safety officer shall post a notice on or near the personal property so as to communicate notice to the owner the following information:

- a) The location where the personal property was located.
- b) The date and time the notice was served or posted
- c) A statement that the storage of personal property violates the City's Code of Ordinances.
- d) An advisement that the City has either disposed of the personal property or has impounded it, the process to recover the personal property if it has not been disposed of and the storage location and that personal property impounded will be disposed of after 14 days if not claimed. The public safety officer or his/her designee may immediately properly dispose of or secure, without impounding for 14 days, any items which in their judgement constitute an immediate threat to health or safety of the public or items that constitute evidence of a crime or contraband that may be legally seized, as permitted by law.

Section 4. Any person found to be in violation of any provision of this Ordinance may be subject to a non-criminal hearing in Municipal Court via a summons to appear and be issued a No Trespass Warning documented by the Police Department during a First Offense. A Second Offense or subsequent offense shall include a Municipal Court hearing with a punishment by a fine not exceeding \$250 at the discretion of the Municipal Court Judge, along with a continuance for acceptable appropriate social services. Violations of any No Trespass orders shall be handled within the jurisdiction of the District Court.

Section 5. This Ordinance shall take effect on the eleventh consecutive day following its passage by the City Council, as provided in Chapter III, Section 9 of the Woonsocket Home Rule Charter and all Ordinances or parts of Ordinances inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed.

James C. Cournoyer
City Council

Daniel M. Gendron
City Council President