



CITY OF OWOSSO
CITY MANAGER'S REPORT
September 2026

Special Report: Homelessness and the City's Response

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This month's report focuses on homelessness in Owosso and the work underway with our community partners. Like most cities, Owosso has an unhoused population that has grown in recent years. The City's approach has two parts: keeping parks and other public property safe, sanitary, and available to everyone, and supporting the local organizations working on shelter and services. The City does not ask anyone to leave a park simply for being homeless; enforcement is aimed at camping and the conditions encampments create.

What Staff Has Encountered

Encampments on City property have generated repeated resident complaints and public health and safety concerns over the past several summers. Examples include:

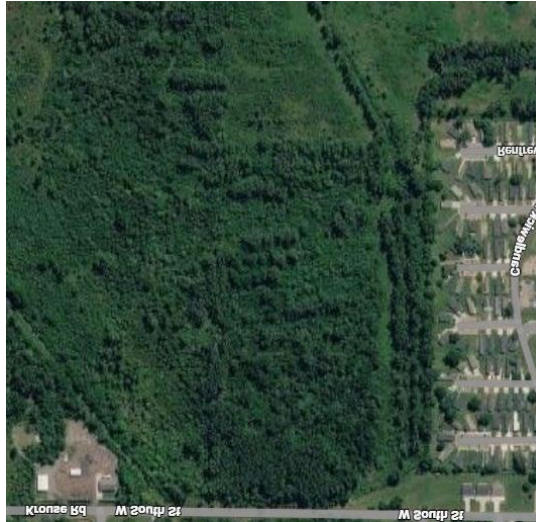
- **Curwood Castle:** A man camped in a tent beside the Castle for about a month last summer. The site was cleared after he broke into a neighboring home, where he was caught inside by the homeowner's security system.
- **Curwood Park (Paymaster Building):** A group gathering behind the building last summer urinated there regularly despite a portable toilet nearby. Removing the picnic table from the area helped.
- **Bentley Park:** Two years ago, a person repeatedly pitched a tent in the middle of the basketball court and later blocked the entrance to a downtown business.
- **Rosevear Park and Hopkins Lake:** Camps at Rosevear over two summers, one within 50 feet of a resident's backyard, were cleared this summer after many neighbor complaints. Staff found human waste and accumulated trash, and trash thrown into the creek caused flooding until DPW removed tarps and debris. Similar conditions occurred at Hopkins Lake.
- **Conditions inside the camps:** Staff has found and cleaned up tents filled with feces. Encampment residents have hand-dug wells and built huts from sticks and dirt, one with a wood-burning stove installed. All of this was on City property.
- **Gould Street trail:** An arrangement for campers to bag trash for weekly DPW pickup lasted only briefly; DPW ultimately cleared the site with a loader attachment. Staff do not clean these sites by hand because of the risk from discarded needles and human waste.

Placing trash cans near camps and offering to empty them has not resolved these problems.

It is important to be clear: the City has no ordinance prohibiting camping in parks. The rule against overnight camping in parks is a park rule established by Council resolution, not an ordinance. A resolution does not carry the enforcement weight of an ordinance, and the rule applies only overnight. When someone pitches a tent in the middle of a basketball court during the day, officers have no ordinance to enforce; they can only ask the person to move or wait until the park closes or in extreme examples, trespass the person from the park.

South Street Encampment

On August 25, Chief Lenkart, Community Development staff, and two officers visited an encampment about a quarter mile off South Street, reachable only by a narrow walking path, following two complaints from a Carr Street resident. Five to six people were present and cooperative; they were told they would need to leave and were given suggestions on where to go. Public Safety is following up to determine whether DPW equipment can reach the site, which is crossed by several gullies, and to deliver the City's written notice to vacate.



Wooded area south of W. South Street where the encampment is located.

Proposed Camping Ordinance — Sec. 21-10

At the recommendation of Public Safety, Council will hold a public hearing on October 5 on a proposed ordinance adding Section 21-10, Prohibition of Unauthorized Camping and Overnight Occupation of City Property, to Chapter 21 (Parks and Recreation) of the City Code. The Parks and Recreation Commission was notified in advance. The ordinance would:

- Prohibit camping, establishing a temporary place to live or sleep, or occupying City-owned or City-controlled property overnight, including sleeping overnight in vehicles.
- Apply to parks, parking lots, streets, alleys, sidewalks, rights-of-way, easements, trails, recreational areas, and other public areas.
- Give owners a reasonable opportunity to remove tents and belongings before the City removes and handles them under City policy and applicable law.
- Make a violation a municipal civil infraction.

Responses to Council Questions

A councilmember submitted five questions on the proposed ordinance on September 28. Staff's responses follow.

1. What prompted the proposed ordinance, and what is its goal?

Ongoing complaints about encampments on City property, particularly at Rosevear Park. The first complaint this year was received April 6, followed by others by email and social media, and officers also patrolled the park proactively. Residents have also come to Council meetings throughout the year to describe how nearby encampments affect their quality of life and sense of public safety. Those residents and their concerns have not gone away. The goal is a clear, enforceable rule on camping and overnight occupation of City property. The ordinance addresses conduct on public property; it is not presented as a strategy to reduce homelessness.

2. Where would people be directed if they are told to leave a camping area?

The ordinance does not designate an alternative camping location or shelter. Officers refer people to available local resources, and the City's written notice invites them to call the Owosso Police Department at 989-725-0580 for help with resources. Public Safety works with Todd Fowler of Jennifer's Place on outreach, and a

community warming center is being organized (see below). Staff will not represent that a shelter placement is available unless one is confirmed.

Staff will continue connecting people with resources, but enforcement cannot be tied to services the City is not able to provide, such as alternative camping locations or payments for relocation. If the rule can be enforced only when those conditions are met, it cannot be enforced, and staff will be unable to do the job residents expect.

3. Is City staff working with local entities on a homeless shelter or other solution?

Yes. Staff is working with Hope Works Mid-Michigan and SafeCenter on a proposed shelter, and Public Safety is supporting the community warming center effort. Both are described below.

4. Has staff studied the ordinance's impact on homelessness?

No formal study has been conducted, and the ordinance is not presented as a measure to reduce homelessness. Its purpose is to address unauthorized camping on City property and the problems staff has documented: neighborhood complaints, human waste, accumulated trash and property, flooding, and loss of public access to park facilities. Earlier alternatives, including trash cans and designated trash pickup, did not resolve those problems.

5. What authority was used at Rosevear Park, and why not rely only on trespassing?

The City used its existing trespassing ordinance (19-64). The City's notice directs a person to remove belongings and vacate, states that refusing to leave after being told to do so is trespassing, and states that property left behind will be considered abandoned. Trespassing applies only after a person refuses to leave. The proposed ordinance would define and prohibit camping and overnight occupation directly, cover all City property including overnight sleeping in vehicles, and set out a process giving owners an opportunity to retrieve belongings before removal. **Public safety officers are trained extensively on enforcement and are recommending that Council support their efforts by adopting updated laws that allow them to do their job to the best of their ability – and to make official city action legally defensible.**

Shelter Planning — Hope Works Mid-Michigan and SafeCenter

On September 9, Hope Works Mid-Michigan (formerly Gratiot County Hope House) informed the City it planned to open a shelter in November in unoccupied duplex units on SafeCenter Domestic and Sexual Violence Services' campus. SafeCenter has proposed a broader "housing hub" bringing housing and homeless service providers together on one site, a concept it reports is supported by its board, state funders and coalitions, and the Cook Family Foundation.

The campus is zoned R-1 Single-Family Residential. Community Development found that the Planning Commission approved a special use permit for four duplexes in 1997 and that a 2010 Zoning Board of Appeals variance allowed use by SafeCenter (RAVE, Inc.), conditioned on the 1997 site plan. Community Development Director Tanya Buckelew has advised that SafeCenter's existing operation, in place since 2011, may continue, but that a new shelter is not permitted in a residential district under the current ordinance. City Planner Justin Sprague of OHM Advisors has been consulted on the best way forward. Staff will continue working with both organizations, with further discussion expected after SafeCenter's leadership returns October 12.

Warming Center and Outreach Partners

St. John's United Church of Christ is hosting a community meeting on an Owosso warming center and shelter on October 1 at 4:00 p.m. at the church, 429 N. Washington St. Chief Lenkart will attend to answer questions. Earlier that day, the Chief is meeting with Todd Fowler of Jennifer's Place, who has supported the department's efforts and assisted with outreach to people experiencing homelessness.

Looking Ahead

Council's October 5 public hearing on Sec. 21-10 is the next step on the ordinance. Shelter discussions with Hope Works and SafeCenter will resume in mid-October, and staff will report on warming center plans as they develop.

Public Works & Utilities

Trees Fallen into the Shiawassee River

In response to recent public comments, staff reviewed whether property owners must remove trees that fall into the river. Neither Michigan law nor the City Code imposes that requirement; the adjacent owner generally owns and controls the tree but has no duty to remove it. EGLE regulates removal rather than requiring it: hand removal that does not disturb the bed, banks, or sediment generally needs no permit, while removal involving embedded wood, sediment, or heavy equipment does. EGLE recommends leaving woody debris in place unless it creates a safety, navigation, or use concern. The City may remove trees threatening public infrastructure, subject to EGLE permitting, and obstructions in county drains fall to the Shiawassee County Drain Commissioner. Details are in the September 25 memo to Council.

Community Development

Building Permits — Commercial Activity

- 220 W Main St — New roof.
- 216 E Comstock St — Renovations for Great Lakes Bay Health Center.
- 123 E Comstock St — New roof.
- 804 W Main St — Exterior wall repairs following the demolition of 800 W Main St.
- 1020 S Washington St — Student Center renovations.
- 102 W Main St — New business, Chestnut Supply.

Rezoning, Site Plans & Land Divisions

No rezoning requests, site plans, or land divisions/combinations were submitted during this reporting period.

Marihuana Licenses

The following marihuana licenses are active within the City of Owosso:

Type	Address	Status
Grow	1370 E South St	Medical/Recreational — Renewed Sept. 2026
Grow	1455 Industrial	Recreational — Renewed Oct. 2025
Grow	1750 E South St	Recreational — Renewed March 2026
Grow	1410 Hathaway	Recreational — Issued August 2026
Processing	1750 E South St Ste. 1	Recreational — Renewed Jan. 2026
Retail	117 E Main St	Medical & Recreational — Renewed Oct. 2025
Retail	200 E Main	Recreational — Renewed May 2026
Retail	116 N Washington	Recreational — Renewed Jan. 2026

MSHDA / Housing Grants

We continue to actively leverage state and federal housing grant funding. The CDBG Round 2 figures below reflect a September 2026 update: based on preliminary estimates and completed applications, the number of homes increased from 10 to 15.

Program	Year	Grant Amt.	Admin. Reimb.	Scope / Status
NEP Round 8	2023	\$70,000	\$5,000	5 homes — Completed
NEP Round 9	2024	\$70,000	\$2,500	3 homes — Completed
NEP Round 9 Public Amenity	2024	\$15,000	\$0	Grand Ave Park Equipment — Completed
MI-HOPE	2024–25	\$250,000	\$15,000	11 homes, energy efficient — Completed
MI-HOPE HiPerformer	2024–25	\$100,000	\$0	5 homes, energy efficient — Completed
MIN 1.0 & 2.0 (CDBG)	2025–26	\$860,831	\$64,469	30 homes — Complete by Nov. 2026
CDBG Round 2	2026–27	\$400,000	\$72,000	15 homes — Complete in 2027 (Sept.: increased from 10)
CDBG Round 3 — Residential	2027–28	\$760,000	\$115,930	19 homes — Complete 2027/2028
CDBG Round 3 — Citizens Loft	2026–27	\$500,000	\$76,270	5 rental units downtown — Complete in 2027
CDBG Round 4	2028–29	\$1,262,500	\$212,500	32 homes
TOTALS		\$4,288,331	\$564,669	125 homes — Grand Total: \$4,853,000

Parks & Recreation

Curwood Castle Restoration

Exterior restoration is nearing completion. At the August 28 site visit, roofers were installing slate selected to match the turrets, with copper flashing in place; the City approved the additional EIFS work, and the pay application is being processed. By September 28, the roof, stucco, EIFS, gutters, and downspouts were complete (one downspout damaged after installation will be replaced), and electrical work was nearly complete. Exterior cleaning and painting are next and should be finished within two weeks.

EIFS damaged again by woodpeckers has been repaired, and a decoy owl will be placed near the chimney as a deterrent. Interior plaster has shown no moisture in repeated checks; repair of the most heavily damaged area will wait until spring to confirm no further moisture enters. A quote for heat tape in the gutter pan above that area has been requested and will go to the approval body once received.



Curwood Castle with roof, stucco, and gutters completed, September 28, 2026 (H2A Architects).

Public Safety

Georgia-Pacific Donation — Fire Department

Georgia-Pacific has approved a \$3,000 charitable donation to the Owosso Fire Department, the third consecutive year of this support. The City will submit an invoice describing how the funds will be used, as required by Georgia-Pacific's giving process.

Finance

New Finance Director

Nicole Hart will join the City as Finance Director on October 13. She currently serves as Assistant Finance Director for Grand Blanc Township, previously spent four and a half years as an auditor with Plante Moran, and has worked in financial aid at Oakland University and Mott Community College.

Investment Outlook — Meeder Public Funds

Meeder's August commentary reports that Federal Reserve Chair Warsh views financial conditions as accommodative but inflation as too high. The Fed has lowered its benchmark rate by 1.75 percentage points this cycle, to 3.75%, but futures markets at the end of August priced in roughly two quarter-point increases by the end of 2027, reversing the two cuts expected in February before the Iran conflict began. Core PCE inflation, the Fed's preferred gauge, stands at 3.3% and has exceeded the 2% target for 64 consecutive months. Unemployment remains low at 4.1%, and the 30-year Treasury yield reached a 19-year high on debt and inflation concerns.