

Park Security Frequently Asked Questions

Oct. 25, 2018

On Oct. 22, the City Council approved the specific source of funding for a pilot program aimed at keeping Tempe parks even safer and cleaner. The pilot is already underway and involves expanding the current use of private security in city parks that have experienced higher calls for service from resident complaints about litter, disruptive conduct, off-leash animals and other issues. Residents have had comments and questions about the program, so the city wanted to provide more information. If you don't see the answer to your question below, please email councilcommunicator@tempe.gov.

Why are you using private security at city parks?

Everyone has a right to clean, safe parks. All community members should be able to use them without fear or hesitation. The city imposes reasonable regulations to ensure that our parks are open to as many people as possible.

The purpose of the pilot program is to provide cleaner and safer parks. It is a response to recent communications from residents about park safety. The annual community satisfaction survey is showing a downward trend in residents' satisfaction with how safe they feel in city parks, particularly at night. The current city contract with private security firm G4S will be used to select trained, certified G4S guards for the parks assignment. There is an existing private security program at various city facilities that has been successful, including at Escalante Park.

The City Council agreed on Oct. 22 to take the \$250,000 cost of the pilot program from the city's contingency budget as a mid-budget year expense. The item before the City Council on Oct. 22 was not a vote about whether to authorize the park security program. The decision to expand the use of the G4S contract had already been made by the City Manager and Tempe Police. The vote was about whether to fund the pilot by either transferring \$250,000 from the city's contingency fund or by having the Police Department absorb the costs in its current 2018-19 budget.

Serious concerns have been expressed in recent months about escalating illegal and unsafe behaviors in parks. Residents have voiced that they feel fearful and unable to use their parks. This is unacceptable. Tempe has invested millions of dollars in our neighborhood parks and that investment should be protected.

Tempe is already responding and wanted to be able to provide additional funds to assist in a solution in this time period before the city's 2019-20 fiscal year, which starts July 1, 2019. Because it is not possible for Tempe Police officers to be everywhere all the time, the responsible decision was to engage private security until a more permanent solution for city park safety could be proposed, considered, budgeted and funded.

Where is this happening?

The program has started in Clark and Hudson parks and will soon expand to other city parks on a rotating basis. About 10 city parks will be able to get routine, rotating coverage during this pilot, which lasts through June 2019. The list of included parks is being finalized based on calls for service and reports of issues from residents and city staff.

G4S personnel already work at the Escalante Center/Escalante Park, Tempe City Hall/Sixth Street Park, Tempe Municipal Court and Tempe Public Library. This pilot parks program is an expansion of their current, successful work at those locations.

Is this idea related to homelessness?

The pilot program is intended to prevent and resolve disruptive behaviors and illegal activity in city parks. It is aimed at behaviors exhibited by all persons and is not aimed at homeless people. Homeless people also have a right to be safe in our parks.

The idea is to improve behaviors through visibility and education about what is appropriate in our parks through a Code of Conduct. From littering to unleashed pets, this Code of Conduct applies to everyone.

Are the G4S security guards armed?

Currently, the G4S guards assigned to city facilities like Tempe City Hall/Sixth Street Park, Tempe Municipal Court, Tempe Public Library and the Escalante Community Center/Escalante Park carry firearms, pepper spray and Tasers. This is part of their contract with the city and they have done so for years without incident.

For the park security pilot program, that practice is not planned to be changed at this time. Tempe Police have received calls for service in parks where the individuals are armed with a weapon of some kind. The G4S role is to primarily function as eyes and ears in the parks and as educators about the parks Code of Conduct. They will engage professionally and in a non-confrontational manner and they will back away from a situation if the individual becomes confrontational.

There have been no reports of issues with G4S services in Tempe. G4S guards are highly trained and many have law enforcement backgrounds. Those guards who have been certified to carry weapons are the most highly trained personnel G4S employs.

Why can't you use police officers or park rangers in parks?

Tempe Police officers do have a presence in city parks. On-duty and overtime officers patrol, but they cannot be everywhere all the time.

Two Tempe Police officers are dedicated to city parks; they work with homeless individuals, among other responsibilities. Tempe Police will also be requesting two officers and a sergeant for the 2019-20 budget cycle, completing the final year of the Council-approved three-year Homeless Operations Team plan. This will complete the Police Parks squad.

We needed a practical, workable way to increase a presence in our parks. Private security can be that professional, additional presence and resource for neighborhood parks. G4S guards will attempt to resolve issues and call Tempe Police if help is needed. This process has worked very well for years at Escalante Park and Sixth Street Park near Tempe City Hall.

Tempe had a park ranger program until several years ago when the financial downturn caused many city programs to be pulled back throughout the Valley.

What are the rules that security guards will be enforcing?

The city has developed a parks Code of Conduct based on city ordinances and state statutes that details the types of behaviors that can detract from other users' safety or enjoyment of the parks. These discouraged behaviors are what G4S personnel will keep in mind as they patrol the parks and educate individuals as needed. For the parks Code of Conduct, visit www.tempe.gov/parks or www.tempe.gov/recreation. It is also included below for reference.

Can security guards make arrests or give citations?

No. Only Tempe Police can make arrest or cite people. G4S personnel will educate park users as necessary about appropriate behaviors according to the Code of Conduct. In Tempe, any violation of a park ordinance is a civil matter, not criminal. If a serious problem arises, G4S will be able to call for support from Tempe Police.

Will the security guards enforce park curfews?

Given that the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that municipal urban camping ordinances cannot be enforced unless homeless individuals have another place to go, the City Attorney's Office is evaluating the City's park curfew rules. Park curfew and other park rules are enforced equally and apply to everyone. We expect to provide additional information on park curfew soon. More information about the higher court decision has been posted to www.tempe.gov/EndingHomelessness.

How will you approach people; what will happen during these interactions?

Security guards are not going to be in parks to act as police officers. If G4S personnel notice that someone in the park is behaving in a way that is contrary to the parks Code of Conduct, they will approach with courtesy to educate the individual about the Code of Conduct. If more support is needed, G4S can choose to call for Tempe Police response. Visibility and polite, professional engagement are the aims.

What if a person in a park is homeless – how will they be approached by security guards?

The park security guards will approach individuals without regard to who they are. The aim is to have positive, courteous interactions in order to greet people and, if needed, provide reminders about Code of Conduct provisions.

The security personnel will be able to connect people in the parks to city homeless services, if that is needed. The city's HOPE homeless outreach team has had amazing success in reaching people and helping them with housing and other needs.

How will the security guards be trained?

Per their contract with Tempe, G4S hires only certified security officers. The company trains its personnel extensively in a variety of topics, including implicit bias and many others. The training occurs at the beginning of their hiring and on an ongoing basis. Tempe also provides additional training to G4S officers.

In addition, for this park security pilot, La Frontera Center has agreed to provide its La Frontera Empact Mental and Behavior First Aid class. This is mental health awareness training for G4S officers in Tempe and for Tempe Police officers.

G4S parks patrol personnel – like all Tempe Police officers – will be trained in how to communicate with and de-escalate situations involving individuals who may be affected by mental illness.

Why have guards started to be used in Clark and Hudson parks without that mental health training?

The G4S officers currently in Hudson and Clark parks have experience at the various Tempe facilities and parks where G4S is utilized. Should they see something that requires enforcement, they notify an officer to respond. The new-to-Tempe G4S officers will not be in the parks until they receive the training.

Is G4S going to be replaced soon? I'm hearing about a rebidding process for their city contract.

The City of Tempe must go through a competitive selection process guided by state law when any vendor's contract is expiring. The city's contract with G4S is expiring Dec. 31, 2018, and we must have a security contractor in place on Jan. 1, 2019. G4S and other companies have submitted proposals to be chosen for the contract that starts next year. The city will be evaluating all responses and the City Council will vote on a selection later this year.

Why was this pilot program already decided before the Oct. 22 Council meeting?

The item before the City Council on Oct. 22 was not a vote about whether to authorize the park security program. That had already been a decision of the City Manager and Tempe Police. The vote was whether to fund the pilot by either transferring \$250,000 from the city's contingency fund or by having the Police Department absorb the costs in its current 2018-19 budget.

Over the last several months, the Police Department has discussed the idea of using private security in some parks with neighbors at a variety of public meetings.

Are most residents supportive of this pilot program?

Tempe is listening to all community members and we are providing information and answering questions from everyone. The majority of residents who have contacted the city, responded to social media posts or spoken with city staff and elected officials are supportive. Many have thanked the city for trying this program.

Recent and increasing reports from residents led the city to begin exploring the idea. We heard from residents about disruptive behaviors, litter and dangerous situations in parks. Residents asked the city for help in resolving the behaviors that detracted from their ability to enjoy their parks.

What's the city doing to address homelessness?

Homelessness is a challenging, complex national issue that impacts people in many cities. Individuals and families are frequently impacted by mental or physical health issues, past trauma and addiction.

Locally and nationally, there is an increase in unsheltered homelessness. Maricopa County has experienced a 27 percent increase over the past two years according to HUD's annual point in time count. Recently, CASS, a homeless shelter located in Phoenix, closed its overflow shelter, which has compounded the impact on the entire regional community.

According to Tempe and regional reporting, there are about 1,100 homeless people in Tempe. Our HOPE homeless outreach team alone (not including CARE 7 or Tempe Community Council agencies) have seen more than 600 unduplicated people in Tempe so far in 2018.

During fiscal year 2017-18, 103 people in Tempe were permanently housed through the HOPE program, which is approximately an average of nine permanent housing move-ins per month.

A total of 22 families (which included 55 kids from TD3) were assisted in 17-18 with case management, housing assistance as available, financial coaching, childcare and more.

The city is taking action and making progress to prevent and reduce homelessness. For more information on Tempe's efforts to end homelessness, visit www.tempe.gov/EndingHomelessness.

Why spend \$250,000 on this program when you could be doing so many other things?

Tempe spends more on human services per capita than any other city in the East Valley. Tempe spends 32 percent more than the next-highest city in the East Valley, which is Scottsdale, according to a 2014 MAG study. Tempe spends \$85.75 per capita and Scottsdale spends \$65.04.

Tempe dedicates \$1.6 million per year to assist families and individuals to end their homelessness (approximately 1,117 individuals assisted per year).

Approximately \$11.6 million is dedicated to serve families and individuals with subsidized housing per year (approximately 3,000 individuals assisted per year).

Each year, the city budgets about \$1.3 million to support local human services organizations. Some of the human services organizations supported by Tempe include homeless services such as I-HELP and Tumbleweed, as well as homelessness prevention programs such as food banks and more.

Why doesn't Tempe build a shelter?

A homeless shelter is not in the City of Tempe's plans at this time because the city has decided on a Housing First approach to helping people out of homelessness. Housing First is a nationally tested approach to quickly connect individuals and families to housing without preconditions and barriers to entry. This model has proven successful in other communities across the country.

A homeless shelter would be a costly city expense to build and operate. We strongly believe that a shelter would be at capacity basically from the day it opens, which would not solve issues. Tempe believes, based on research and experiences from other communities, that a Housing First approach is the most proven way of impacting homelessness.

City of Tempe Neighborhood Parks Code of Conduct

Parks are for everyone to enjoy. To help ensure they remain true to their intent, the City has developed a Code of Conduct based on city ordinances and state statutes for everyone to follow.

Provisions and Prohibitions:

1. Parks are open from 6:00 AM until 10:00 PM unless otherwise posted
2. No one should do anything that endangers the health and safety of themselves or others
3. No vehicles including motorized skateboards or play vehicles are permitted in parks unless in designated parking areas
4. No damaging or improper use of facilities, toilets, lighting, trees/landscaping and water fountains
5. No golfing related activities in parks
6. No use of archery, firearms or any other projectile-producing devices
7. Water use is not for bathing, washing clothes, cleaning fish or other unsanitary activities
8. No use of bikes, skateboards or skates where signs say not to or in a manner that is unsafe
9. No alcohol or glass beverage containers are allowed without an issued permit
10. No littering; intentionally or otherwise
11. No amplified sound without a permit
12. Dogs must be under the direct physical control of a person and kept on a leash no longer than six feet
13. Respect and adhere to park reservations as well as employees of the City and its representatives who are conducting maintenance, cleaning and repairs or any other official City business.

14. No threatening, intimidating, harassing or disorderly behavior which includes threatening to harm or cause damage, fighting, unreasonable noise and abusive or offensive language likely to provoke physical retaliation

Further details and information can be found in Tempe City Code – Chapter 23: Parks and Recreation as well as Arizona Revised Statutes – Title 13: Criminal Code.

Violations of the above code of conduct and any other illegal behavior may result in receiving a citation, fines, arrest and/or being issued a trespass order that you may not return to the park for one year.