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# Encampment eviction leaves residents exhausted, uncertain

STORY BY EMMA FLANNERY AND NAMRATHA PRASAD; PHOTOS BY CLAYTON STEWARD AND CAROLINE MCCONE

Apr 24, 2023



At 7:30 a.m. Monday, Columbia Parks and Recreation Department trucks, police cars and a city volunteer van lined up to clear one of Columbia's largest encampments.

One of those sites included the camp site of Keyara and her partner, Jerry Venneman. Some sources at the encampment gave the Missourian only their first names.



Jerry Venneman and Keyara's chickens sit in a crate prior to being moved on Monday at the camp located near the interchange of U.S. 63 and I-70 in Columbia. Venneman said that these chickens are mostly Keyara's pets and that they will take them to the next place that they live.

CLAYTON STEWARD/MISSOURIAN

Venneman pulled a cart stacked with two mattresses, a tent and other items that filled the space they called home. As he went, city workers and volunteers wearing neon vests passed by with shovels and rakes.

Keyara and Venneman moved everything out of their site but a bench he bought her just a few days ago. The couple had lived in the encampment less than a week, but it still took a lot of effort to move all their belongings out. They had recently been evicted from another encampment.

The couple barely slept the night before the trucks arrived.

"We didn't go to bed," Keyara said. "We took an hour cat nap and that's it."





Jerry Venneman, Keyara and their dog, Scooby, pause while packing their camp early in the morning on Monday. The couple has been experiencing homelessness for two years and this is the second time that they have had to move in the last year.

CLAYTON STEWARD/MISSOURIAN

The encampment beside Hinkson Creek that held about 30 people is the last in a string of evictions on city property. City officials have been in talks about addressing issues in encampments since the summer, spokesperson Sydney Olsen said.

Olsen added that encampments would only be evicted if an issue arises. The Hinkson Creek encampment had been the subject of a complaint from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Ten to 15 residents came to the encampment after being previously evicted from other encampments, according to CoMo Mobile Aid Collective member Cat Armbrust. At least 10 people remained in the encampment Monday morning. Several had left in the days leading up to the eviction.





Columbia police officers inform Keyara that everyone in the camp needs to get their items removed or they may be arrested for trespassing. Those in the camp were informed around 7 a.m. that there was machinery coming in and that they had to leave.

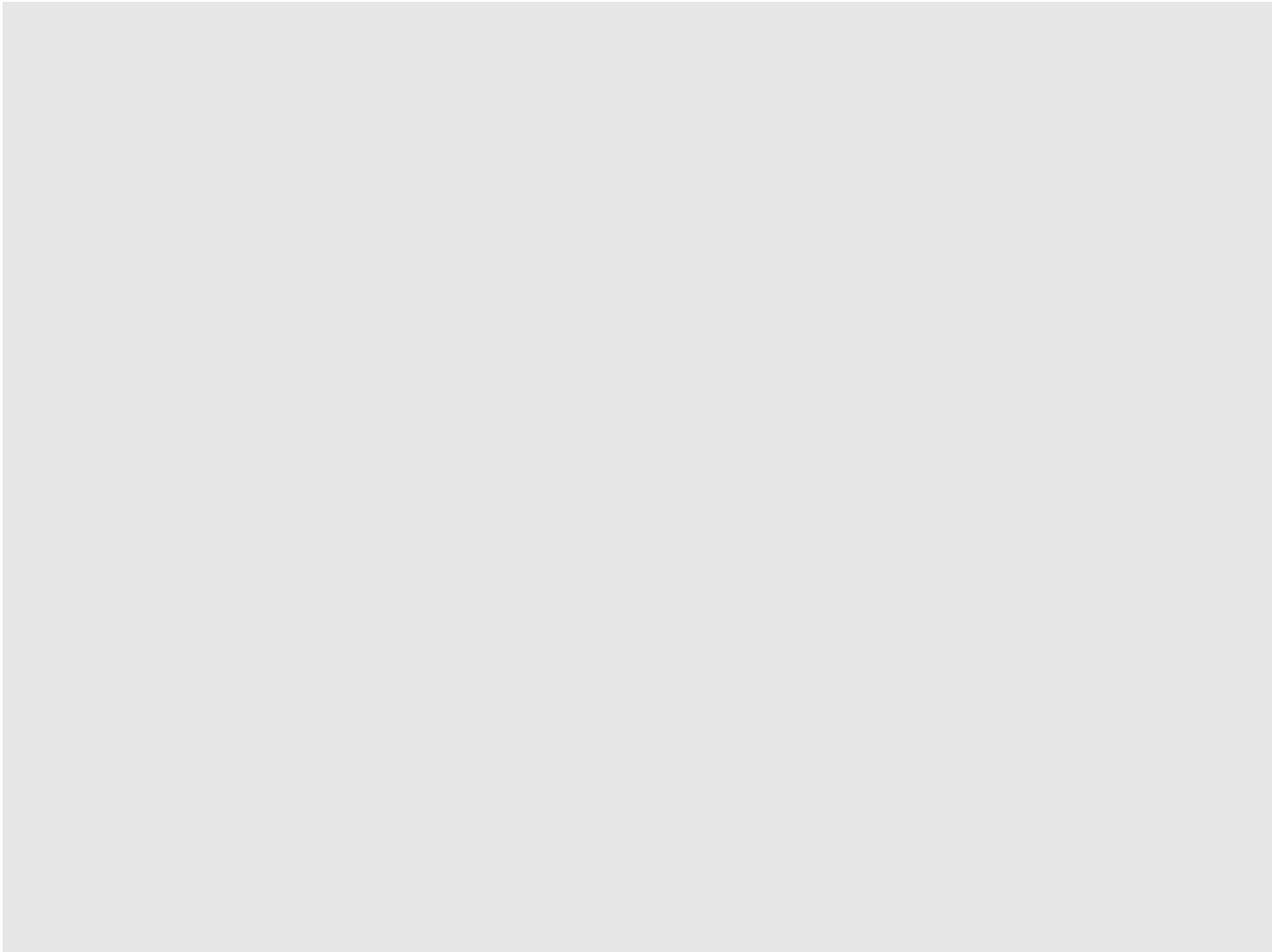
CLAYTON STEWARD/MISSOURIAN

Armbrust said Monday was the first encampment eviction for which the group had advance notice with a set date. Residents and the aid collective had about a month's notice about the eviction. In Columbia, encampments have been cleared by the city and private property owners.

It took Tina several days to pack and move all of her belongings, including her dog, Radio, and her cat, Snowball. She said there still wasn't enough time to pack everything.

"There were some things that were kind of sentimental but we had to leave behind," Tina said.

“We have been working non-stop for three days. I haven’t taken my shoes off. I haven’t slept.”



Cat Armbrust talks to Tina, wiping a tear, after the two embraced in a hug. Armbrust is a member of CoMo Mobile Aid Collective and was part of the crew helping folks to remove items from the encampment.

CLAYTON STEWARD/MISSOURIAN

At about 8 a.m., city crews began using front-end loaders to haul leftover belongings — including tents and shoes — into a garbage truck. Volunteers cleared trash from the ground.

Volunteers from the CoMo Mobile Aid Collective wore purple vests as they helped residents move out. The aid collective was unaffiliated with city volunteers.





A Bobcat skid-steer dumps items that are being cleaned up into a trailer. The city of Columbia provided a port-a-potty and lunch for city employees and volunteers assisting with the cleanup.

CLAYTON STEWARD/MISSOURIAN

As Tina moved the last of her belongings onto the shoulder of U.S. 63, members of the aid collective provided residents with food and water.

To volunteer Margaret McConnell, her purple vest represents the CoMo Mobile Aid's purpose in helping residents like Tina.

“We’re wearing purple vests for people, (city volunteers are) wearing green vests for the environment,” she said.

McConnell said the trash would not be such an issue if the city provided dumpsters to people living in encampments. She contested the city's argument that it lacks the resources for encampment dumpsters, and argued that emptying one once a week is an effective way of managing waste.





Cat Armbrust, Dirk Burhans and other members from CoMo Mobile Aid Collective load the belongings of a couple being evicted into a moving truck. The collective helped move personal belongings before the city and volunteers cleared the area.

CAROLINE MCCONE/MISSOURIAN

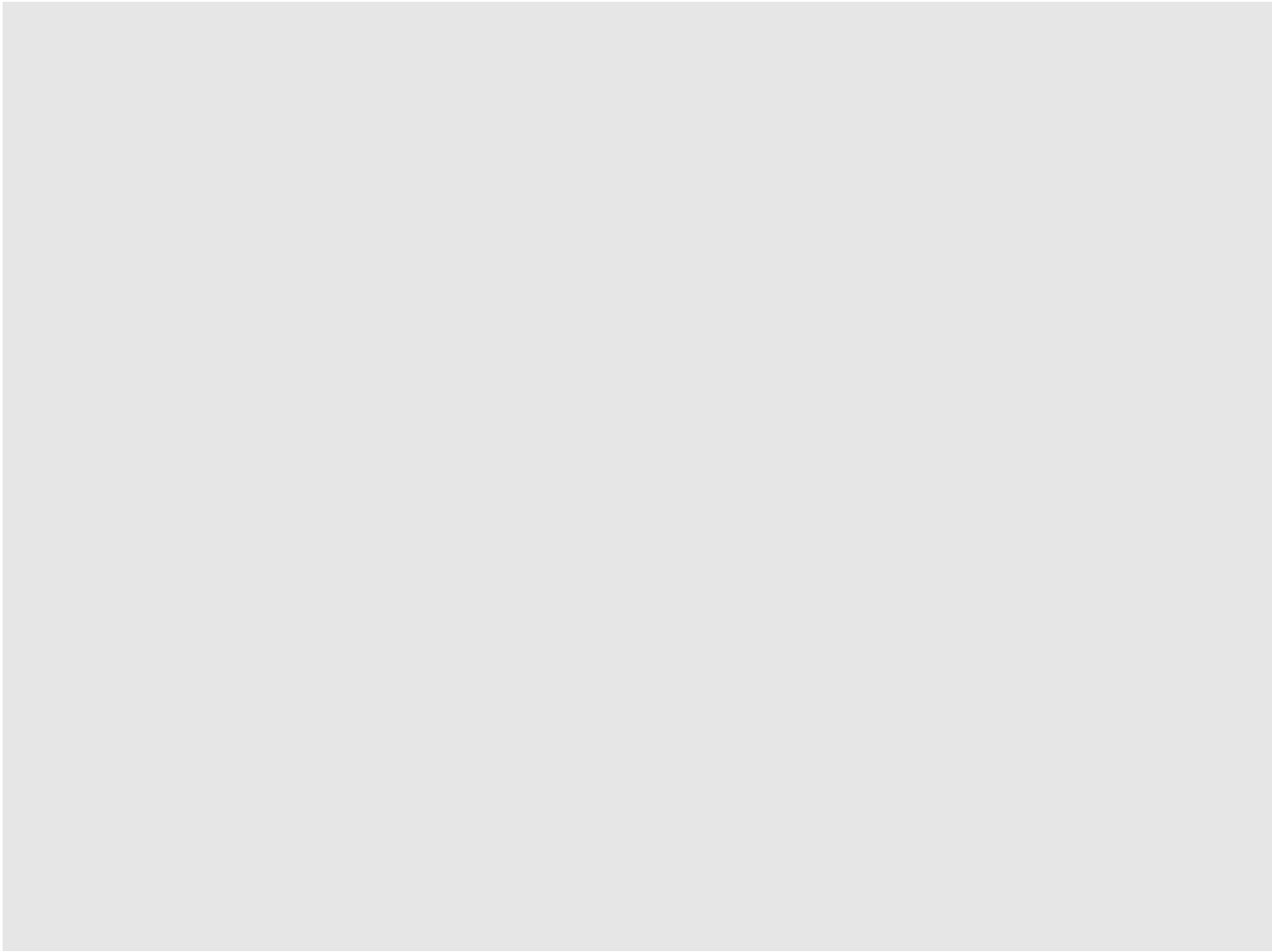
“CoMAC has offered to fund the city’s dumpsters and offered to check on them,” McConnell said.

Shelter options are limited for Columbia’s homeless community as the summer begins. Room at the Inn, an overnight winter shelter, closed for the season on April 1. Columbia has no low-barrier shelter open the entire year.

Tina said she did not know what her next steps entail. She said she has been too busy and too tired to think about her options for a living situation, especially since the threat of evictions on city property leave the future of encampments uncertain.

“I almost blacked out,” she said. “I’m exhausted.”

*Clarification: a previous version of this story mischaracterized a warning to the city from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.*



Jerry Venneman, right, and Keyara pull belongings from their camp on Monday at the shoulder of U.S. 63. Keyara and Venneman finished packing items up early this morning.

CLAYTON STEWARD/MISSOURIAN

**MORE INFORMATION**





Evictions displace encampment residents, continue Monday

Homeless face displacement, instability through the winter

Columbia must find better way to deal with homelessness

City should invest in hygiene services for homeless community to use

City Council to discuss sports field house, bus routes, homelessness and more

A picture of life in Columbia's homeless community

Addressing issues of affordable housing could serve community need

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