

Curbed Enthusiasm

Legal parking is a challenge for San Franciscans who live in their vehicles. It doesn't have to be.

By *Jeremy Lybarger*

You'll find them on the desolate

side streets of Potrero Hill and Bayview, along Golden Gate Park in the Sunset, and in other outlying neighborhoods: Campers and RVs parked in rows, their curtains drawn. Some are empty and sitting curbside because their owners don't have space to lodge them elsewhere. But others are full-time homes on wheels.

More than 250 people live in their vehicles, according to the city's latest homeless count. Nicholas Kimura of the Coalition on Homelessness says the real figure is likely much higher. And he says it's time for San Francisco to give RV residents legal parking. Other cities have designated sanctioned overnight lots for the "vehicularly housed," including San Diego, Santa Rosa, Ballard, Wash., and, soon perhaps, L.A.

"[San Francisco] has plenty of money and plenty of surplus property," Kimura says, adding that the city's current efforts to restrict street parking for oversized vehicles is ineffective at best, and discriminatory at worst.

Although it's illegal to inhabit a vehicle in San Francisco between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., police rarely enforce that law. RVs were singled out for special treatment in 2012, when the Board of Supervisors limited the areas where vehicles longer than 22 feet or higher than seven feet could park. This made streets in the Sunset, Richmond, Bayview, and Potrero verboten for RVs, but this law has proved hard to enforce, too.

Since citations must be hand-delivered rather than tucked under a windshield wiper, camper dwellers simply refuse to answer their doors, according to the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's Andy Thornley.

"Homeless advocates said it was an attack on people who lived in their cars, and the MTA said that's a

would oversee them. During the last two years, representatives from the SFMTA, the Coalition on Homelessness, and Mayor Ed Lee's office have met to discuss the issue, but have made little headway.

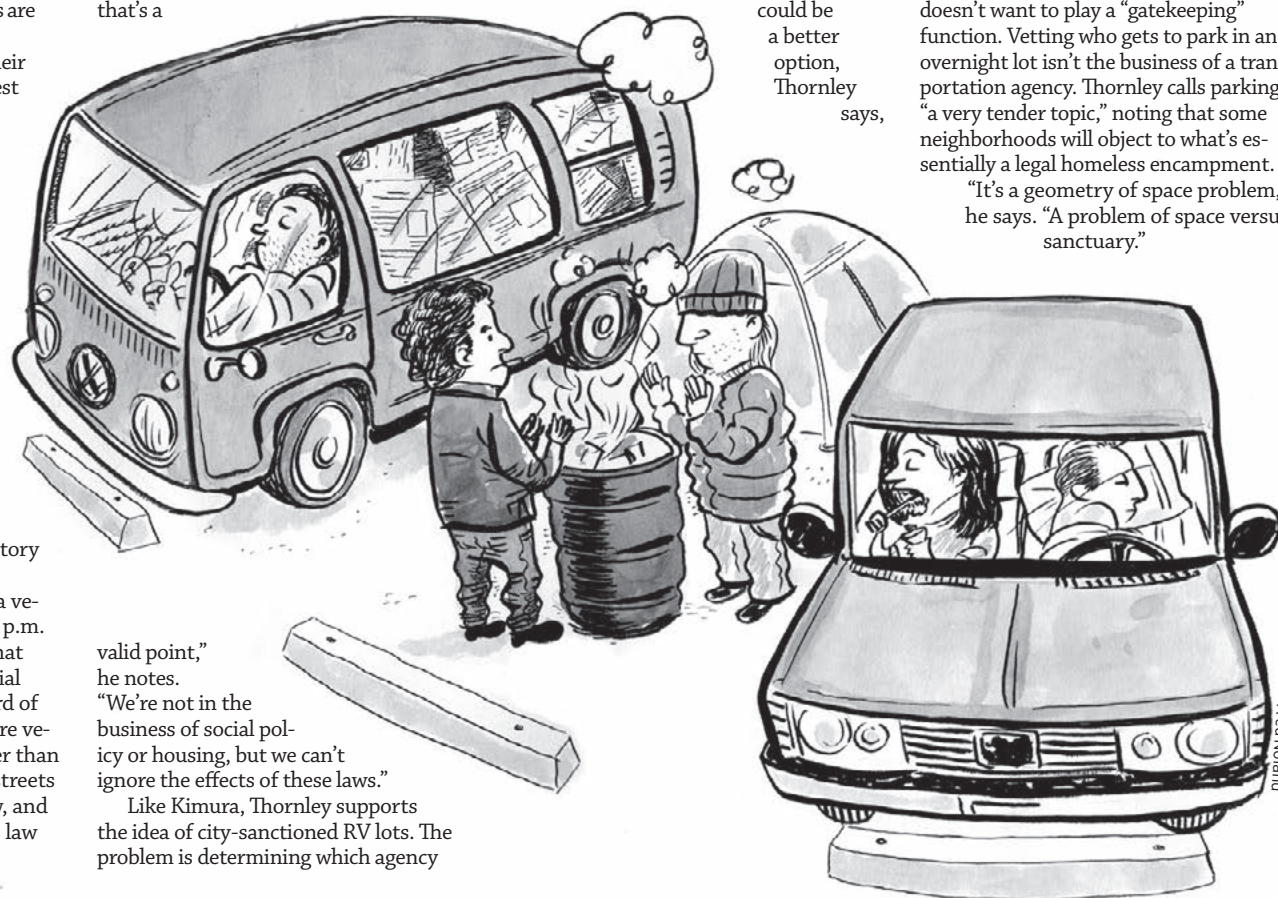
The SFMTA manages 19 parking lots, most of which are too small to accommodate more than a handful of vehicles.

Church lots could be a better option, Thornley says,

and the city's Interfaith Council has been invited to join parking talks. Another possible site is the property Caltrans owns beneath the I-280 overpass in Potrero Hill. Lava Mae, the mobile shower and sanitation company, could provide on-site services, although there are no specific proposals from anyone yet.

What is certain is that the SFMTA doesn't want to play a "gatekeeping" function. Vetting who gets to park in an overnight lot isn't the business of a transportation agency. Thornley calls parking "a very tender topic," noting that some neighborhoods will object to what's essentially a legal homeless encampment.

"It's a geometry of space problem," he says. "A problem of space versus sanctuary."



valid point," he notes.

"We're not in the business of social policy or housing, but we can't ignore the effects of these laws."

Like Kimura, Thornley supports the idea of city-sanctioned RV lots. The problem is determining which agency

Give Different

Are tech companies putting their money where their meme is?

By *Julia Carrie Wong*

In 1997, when Apple was still a

not-all-that-popular computer manufacturer, the company launched an ad campaign pairing black and white photographs of iconic figures — Albert Einstein, John Lennon, Amelia Earhart, Muhammed Ali — with the slogan "Think Different." Apple's success at reinventing its image became legendary, and the company's then-newly

returned CEO, Steve Jobs, was on his own way to becoming a cultural icon. Jobs is now linked to a different kind of rebranding: the public perception of Syrian refugees.

In September, soon after images of a drowned three-year-old Syrian boy shook consciences, tech entrepreneur David Galbraith tweeted a black and white photograph of Jobs with the caption, "A Syrian migrants' child." The message — that a reviled and demonized refugee could become the next Silicon Valley visionary — has reverberated through the tech community. Galbraith's tweet was retweeted more than 15,000 times, and a similar message has been reshared again and again by tech

industry pillars such as venture capitalist Marc Andreessen to his 440,000 Twitter followers.

But in the age of hashtag slacktivism and French flag Facebook profile picture filters, is there any meat behind the tech industry's embrace of a meme? After all, when we reached out to Andreessen Horowitz, to ask whether the \$4 billion VC firm was backing up the rhetoric, a spokesperson responded, "Views of the firm's general partners on Twitter are explicitly their own and the firm has nothing here to share."

A social media share seems to be the extent of some of the Bay Area's biggest tech firms' involvement in the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Facebook, which has been at the forefront

of lobbying for immigration reform to allow more skilled workers to enter the U.S., offered CEO Mark Zuckerberg's Nov. 18 post sharing an online fundraiser for refugee Mercy Corps — one of the principal non-governmental organizations supporting refugees — as proof of its commitment to the cause.

Some tech companies have done more. Google has matched €5M in user donations and another €1.2M in Google employee donations to NGOs. Airbnb has focused on providing credits for housing for NGO relief workers and has pledged to match \$200,000 in donations from its user base.

Yahoo, Twitter, Salesforce, and Apple all failed to respond to queries, though in a leaked memo, Apple CEO Tim Cook

promised that the company is "making a substantial donation" to humanitarian groups addressing the crisis.

Neil Grungas, executive director of the Organization of Refugee, Asylum, and Migration, a San Francisco-based group that focuses on policy and assistance for LGBTQI refugees, says that the tech industry's openness toward migrants and refugees is an overall benefit to his cause, although he'd like to see more.

"There's a difference between supporting work visas and refugees. High tech firms tend to look at the positive side of migration. The next migrant might be the next Einstein," he says. "And that's not a joke. Einstein was a refugee."

Psych Cops

When do suspects who are larger than life need a shrink?

Last week, a half-naked

woman sauntering down the Bay Bridge made headlines and snarled traffic for nearly an hour. When the California Highway Patrol arrived, she reportedly resisted arrest, still in her underwear, and earned a ride to San Francisco General Hospital for a mental check-up.

How does law enforcement decide when behavior is just flamboyant and when it merits the proverbial men in white coats?

"In the simplest of terms, if a person is a danger to themselves, a danger to others, or gravely disabled due to a mental illness, law enforcement can place the individual on a 5150 hold and take them to the hospital for a psychiatric assessment," says Tanya Mera of San Francisco's Jail Health Services.

5150 refers to a section of the Welfare and Institutions Code that governs involuntary psych holds. Per the code, there's a 72 hour period during which suspects in custody can undergo mental evaluations.

The first stop is usually a nurse who, upon booking, asks questions regarding prescription meds, urgent or chronic medical conditions, substance abuse, and tuberculosis status. The idea is to determine whether suspects in custody can be safely accepted into jail. If they can't, the arresting officer transports them to the hospital for another battery of medical and mental health testing.

CHP Officer Andrew Barclay puts it succinctly: "Most people will assume that mental illness, drugs, or alcohol causes a person to [strip on the Bay Bridge]. We operate under the same assumption." **JL**