

Executive Summary: Safe Campground for Residents in Transition

A Community Solution for Summerville

The Challenge

Summerville is not immune to the housing crisis facing communities across the country. Many local residents are experiencing housing instability, not because of crime or addiction, but because their income is too low to ever afford traditional rentals.

- Some people relying on **fixed Social Security or disability benefits** are locked out of the rental market entirely.
- Families who have experienced setbacks, or individuals who cannot repair their credit, have no affordable housing pathway.
- Full-time low-wage earners are locked out of traditional housing because they do not make three times the rent.
- Existing shelters are overcrowded and unable to accommodate families with pets or individuals with specific needs.
- Unsanctioned encampments, though small, are growing and create strain on public safety, sanitation, and community trust.

Right now, these residents are left with few options. A new approach is needed — one that is **practical, affordable, and sustainable**.

The Idea

The **Safe Campground for Residents in Transition** is a 12-acre managed campground designed to provide a dignified, low-cost housing alternative.

This is not a shelter, nor is it “free housing.” Like any traditional campground, residents pay a modest fee to stay. In return, they benefit from safety, stability, and access to resources that help them live with dignity and prepare for the future.

The site combines tents, car, van, and RV accommodations with bathrooms, showers, a business center, and community gathering spaces. It is structured, managed, and designed to balance the needs of residents with the priorities of the broader Summerville community.

Why It Matters

1. Keeps Families Together

When families lose stable housing, children often enter foster care. This is devastating for the family and a major cost to taxpayers. By offering a safe, affordable option, families can remain together and rebuild stability.

2. Supports People on Fixed Incomes

Those living on SSI, Social Security, or disability benefits, including disabled veterans, or those unable to rebuild credit, are effectively shut out of the housing market. This campground provides a realistic option for long-term affordability.

3. Creates Options for Working Residents

Full-time low-wage earners are also locked out of traditional housing because they do not make three times the rent. This requirement excludes many people who work hard but earn modest wages. The campground ensures they are not left without a safe place to live.

4. Reduces Strain on Shelters and Encampments

The campground relieves pressure on overcrowded shelters and reduces the population living in unsafe, unsanctioned encampments. This creates healthier outcomes for residents and safer conditions across the community.

5. Saves Taxpayer Dollars

Emergency services, DSS interventions, law enforcement, and animal shelters all bear high costs when residents have no safe housing. By providing a structured alternative, taxpayers save money while achieving better results.

6. Preserves Summerville's Character

The campground keeps the land wooded and shaded, conserving green space and preventing clear-cutting. It ensures Summerville remains a place where community solutions reflect both compassion and responsibility.

Key Features

- **Housing Options:** 50 tent sites, 30 RV sites, 50 van hookup stalls, and 50 day-use parking spaces.
- **Restroom & Shower Facilities:** 3 restroom buildings (2 large, 1 small) with 2 ADA-accessible showers.
- **Employment Resources:** A business center with computers, Wi-Fi, and job search and remote work support.
- **Family & Community Amenities:** Dog park, large playground, covered shelters, 20 grills, 40 picnic tables, and a fishing pond.
- **Energy & Sustainability:** Hybrid solar + electric power system to reduce long-term utility costs and environmental impact.
- **Safety & Management:** On-site staff and clear rules ensure safety, order, quiet, and accountability.
- **Smart Lighting:** Bollard and pathway lighting designed for security without harsh overhead floodlights.

Community Benefits

- **Dignity and Stability:** Residents gain a safe, structured place to live without fear of eviction or harassment.
- **Public Safety:** Managed facilities reduce unsanctioned camps and associated health and sanitation risks.
- **Resource Efficiency:** Saves taxpayer dollars by lowering costs for foster care, ER visits, law enforcement, and animal shelter intake.
- **Conservation:** Protects Summerville's natural wooded areas while integrating trails, shade, and green space.

- **Community Character:** Demonstrates that Summerville can lead with compassion, innovation, and responsibility.
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Next Steps

We invite partnership and guidance from Summerville Parks & Recreation and the Summerville Town Council to lead this project as a publicly funded community solution.

Immediate steps include:

1. **Site Review:** Identify suitable parcels of land within Summerville that meet size and zoning requirements.
2. **Zoning Confirmation:** Work with the Town Council to ensure the campground use is permitted or to explore adjustments if needed.
3. **Budget & Funding:** Allocate municipal resources for land preparation, infrastructure, and operations. This project is designed to save taxpayer dollars long-term by reducing costs for foster care, emergency services, law enforcement, and shelter overcrowding.
4. **Operational Oversight:** Establish a management structure through Parks & Recreation or a contracted municipal partner to ensure safety, rules, and accountability on-site.
5. **Community Engagement:** Host information sessions to share the plan with residents, answer questions, and build public trust.

This project is a public investment in Summerville's future. By leading and funding the campground directly, the Town ensures that it is operated responsibly, that community standards are met, and that the savings are returned directly to local taxpayers.

Leadership & Experience

Theresa M. Kelly – Project Designer

Theresa M. Kelly, a Summerville resident, is the creator of the Safe Campground for Residents in Transition concept. Drawing from both personal experience with

homelessness, housing instability, and years of work in crisis-focused initiatives, she brings a deep understanding of the challenges facing residents who live outside traditional housing systems.

Theresa currently lives in an RV park and has faced homelessness herself, giving her unique insight into the gaps in current housing solutions. With 18 years of sobriety, she personally understands the struggles of addiction. As a recipient of SSID and VA survivors' benefits, she also understands the difficulty of living on a low fixed income. Her vision for a managed campground is rooted in practicality, dignity, and fiscal responsibility.

Nichole Broach – Community Partner

Nichole Broach, Summerville resident, is the Founder, Director, and CEO of **The Red Bird Foundation**, a nonprofit dedicated to creating a community-based support system for individuals and families affected by the opioid crisis and the growing issue of homelessness in America. Nichole has extensive experience in building compassionate responses to complex social issues. Her leadership ensures that the project is not only structurally sound but also connected to wider networks of support for those most affected by housing instability.

Together, Theresa and Nichole bring lived experience, professional leadership, and a strong community-centered mission to this project. Their collaboration ensures that the Safe Campground model is both realistic to implement and responsive to the needs of Summerville residents.

Contact Information

Theresa M. Kelly

- Phone (843) 552 0976
- Email: dr.tkelly@yahoo.com

Nichole Broach

- Phone: (843) 371-0230
- Email: theredbirdfoundation@hotmail.com