




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members City Council
DATE:	October 5, 2022
SUBJECT:	Encampment Coordination Team Update – September 2022 (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Angela Burden General Manager Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

Background:

On March 31, 2022, City Council approved:

- (a) That an Encampment Coordination Team be created as a pilot to the end of 2022 with an estimated cost of \$305,000, funded first from COVID-19 Government Funds (eligible costs), then COVID-19 Reserve (eligible costs), then departmental budgets surplus and finally by the Tax Stabilization Reserve; and,
- (b) That all reporting from staff related to encampment coordination and response in Hamilton be brought forward to the General Issues Committee for discussion and decisions.

This is the sixth monthly update for the dedicated Encampment Coordination Team which began on April 11, 2022, and the final update for this term of Council. A report on the pilot project will be brought forward to the next term of Council, to the General Issues Committee on November 30, 2022.

Information:

The Encampment Response Team (Municipal Law Enforcement, Housing Services, Housing Focused Street Outreach, Hamilton Police Services Encampment Engagement Team and Public Works – Parks) continue to work together in an integrated and coordinated approach to encampments and to date have continued to achieve compliance of the Parks By-law. This is achieved through a strategic approach and ongoing collaboration to provide a housing-focused and humanistic coordinated response to encampments.

During the month of September 2022, staff investigated 120 encampment sites on City and private property. For the 120 investigations the following results were achieved:

- At 67 encampments voluntary compliance was achieved (58 City/9 private)
- 53 complaints were unfounded (33 City/20 private) (not encampment sites, but garbage and debris, partying locations, etc.);
- It was necessary to issue Notices of Trespass at 11 encampment sites on City property and voluntary compliance was achieved at 7 sites however 4 were referred to HPS for assistance and compliance was ultimately achieved;
- Parks staff provided cleanup and maintenance at 81 sites in City Parks;
- Approximately 44 unique individuals that we are aware of currently remain unsheltered and regularly living in encampments throughout the City
- 39 unique individuals (both in encampments and otherwise) engaged with Outreach for supports/referrals (examples include: referrals to shelters &/or other community supports, housing searches, open bank accounts, obtain ID, etc.).
- 6 unique individuals were assisted by Outreach through Housing Services OW Case Managers in obtaining or stabilizing their Social Assistance
- 2 unique individuals were housed directly from an encampment
- City staff assisted one unsheltered individual with the temporary storage of their personal belongings at a City facility.

Since the pilot started, there has been a slight increase in the number of unique individuals living unsheltered and who regularly live in encampments. Housing-focused Outreach continues to be a challenge due to a lack of permanent and temporary housing options and encampment residents who refuse emergency shelter when it is available due to previous trauma, substance use, and/or complex mental health challenges.

As well, there continues to be several very challenging sites that require daily visits from various City departments and on-going concerns and public complaints about behaviour and illegal activities (e.g. alcohol and drug consumption), as well as persistent garbage and debris which presents a health and safety risk for staff and the public. The unsheltered individuals at these sites have been offered outreach but, in most cases, refuse and continue to return to sites they are comfortable with requiring regular proactive and reactive inspections and enforcement actions.

Several continuous improvement measures have been implemented and detailed in previous communication updates. Staff will continue report on efficiencies and improvements as they are identified and implemented. Recent continuous improvement measures include:

- Unsheltered individuals often use combustible materials/equipment in encampment sites which could present a health and safety concern for encampment residents and/or the general public. City staff have met with Hamilton Fire Department staff to share these safety concerns. Additional meetings have been proposed to discuss risk implications and consider possible mitigation strategies.

- Hamilton staff continue to be approached by other municipalities interested in the approach Hamilton is taking in dealing with encampments on both City and private property. The MLEO Supervisor participated this month as a guest speaker with staff from the Town of Brockville who are dealing with two large visible encampments. The City of London also reached out to discuss similar issues/challenges associated with encampments. This meeting resulted in 6 MLEO's from London coming to Hamilton to observe Hamilton's MLE Encampment field operations. Meetings are also planned with staff of the Town of Milton and the City of Cambridge. Staff will continue to network with other Municipalities to discuss strategies to improve responses to encampments and unsheltered individuals.
- The City's Encampment Response Team continues to work with private property owners to assist them with issues around encampments and unsheltered individuals including facilitating the written authorization for HPS to enforce the Trespass to Property Act (TPA) as necessary. In a coordinated effort CN Rail worked collaboratively with City staff to resolve the huge amounts of garbage and debris at an encampment site. CN agreed to cover the significant clean-up costs, and they will perform remedial work to deter unsheltered individuals from setting up again in this area. Several other private property owners are strategizing to resolve encampments on their property including having HPS Crime Managers assist with security audits (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) to help prevent on-going vandalism and enforcement of the TPA.
- Communications staff from the City Manager's Office are now an integral part of the City's Encampment Response Team ensuring timely, accurate and consistent responses to public and media inquiries, and coordinating responses with various staff from different Divisions/Departments having roles in dealing with encampments.
- The Hamilton Police Service is progressing in the development of a Rapid Intervention and Support Team (RIST). This team will be comprised of community navigators who share their sector expertise (e.g., housing, mental health, Indigenous women, etc.), and will provide case management to high acuity clients with a focus on homelessness, mental health, and addictions. The Encampment Coordination Team intend to work closely with the Hamilton Police Service to operationalize and support the success of RIST and its ongoing partners to support people living rough and the City's response to encampments.

As reported in an earlier Communications Update, in July a consultant engaged 35 representative stakeholders to come together to develop a shared understanding of the issues and potential next steps to be taken by the community towards developing a coordinated, person-centred, health and housing focused approach to encampment response. This was in follow-up to a motion by Councillor Nann approved by the Emergency and Community Services Committee for Comprehensive, Human-rights Based, Health focused Housing Solutions for Residents Living Encamped across Hamilton.

In September, staff lead a follow-up engagement session to review with representative stakeholders the draft recommendations and to ensure that the voice of the community is being accurately depicted. A report on the stakeholder consultation along with staff recommendations is expected to be presented to the new City Council in early 2023.

Please direct any inquiries to Marty Hazell, Director, Response Coordination at (905) 546-2424 ext. 4588 or by email at Marty.Hazell@hamilton.ca.