



CITY OF HAMILTON
HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT
General Manager’s Office
and
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Licensing and By-law Services Division

Protocol Development Sessions with Community Stakeholders

On March 24, 2023, and March 27, 2023, as directed by Council, City staff led two development sessions with community stakeholders regarding the development of a Proposed Encampment Protocol. The meetings held with community organizations were to be used to ‘develop a new encampment protocol rooted in an approach that upholds the human rights of residents living encamped and reflects the concerns shared by the delegates who presented on January 18, 2023.’

Stakeholders from eleven organizations who provide outreach, frontline, and other supports and services to people living in encampments were represented. The feedback received from these conversations was analyzed by City staff to identify themes. For each of these themes, a series of probing questions were asked, and stakeholders were able to discuss each topic separately and ask clarifying questions of staff. Due to the intimate nature of the two sessions, each topic was discussed at-large with the entire group, while ensuring all voices were given an opportunity to share their unique perspectives on encampment response.

After the two sessions were complete, HSD staff analysed and grouped the information thematically. The feedback received was then used by staff to inform the recommendations contained in this report for a Proposed Encampment Protocol. Some of the findings fell outside of the scope of developing a proposed Protocol, but these ideas are still being presented to ensure the voices of those who participated are accurately represented.

The following themes were identified by analysing the information provided from community stakeholders who participated in the development sessions. To ensure that the views of participants were accurately captured, City staff provided a ‘what we heard’ draft for review. All feedback and responses were integrated into the following themes:

1. There should be several sanctioned sites throughout the City giving people living in encampments options to select from, while also ensuring no punitive action for those who choose to live in encampments elsewhere in the community.
 - A suggestion was made that sanctioned areas would be most preferable, given that people living in encampments have differing social circles and

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- preferred environments to be in. An initial suggestion was that five sites might be appropriate, in varied locations across the City.
- There was a belief amongst stakeholders that there would be significant interest in these sites from people living in encampments.
 - Stakeholders suggested that while sanctioned sites would be beneficial for many people currently living in encampments, others may not be interested in a sanctioned site due to personal preferences and would prefer to have the ability to camp at any other city property. This should be accommodated, and these sites would fall under an Encampment Protocol to be developed.
2. There were divided opinions regarding an enforced limit to the number of individuals or tents at a particular park, as well as defining a tent.
- Some stakeholders suggested that if a limit be invoked, it should be specific and be based upon on a reasonable amount of space (i.e., ten tents per 100m-squared), otherwise parks of different sizes such as Gage Park (large) and Gore Park (very small) are enforced in a similar way.
 - Other stakeholders suggested that as an alternative to a maximum based upon number of tents, intervention should be approached as it is in shelters and only require movement when behavioural criteria are met (i.e., excessive noise, appropriate use of washrooms, appropriate clean-up of garbage). If none of the criteria was met, the number would be irrelevant.
 - It was also raised that when a limit to the number of people or tents is identified, it creates an adversarial situation once the limit is met and puts enforcement and housing-first approaches in conflict.
 - It was also raised that there should be no cap on people, even though there was a discussion on the cap on the number of tents.
3. People living in encampments should have on-site, or nearby access to portable bathrooms, showers, and clean running water.
- People living in encampments must have the resources available to them to maintain their own hygiene.
 - If sanctioned sites are developed, having washrooms and showers on-site or nearby would be critical. Heat and electricity were also discussed as options.
 - For those not located within sanctioned sites, and where it is not practical or reasonable to offer bathrooms, showers, and/or clean running water, the use of community facilities via a recreational pass may provide ongoing, safe access.

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4. An individual's acuity should not be a determinant in the service they are provided, particularly as it relates to being required to move sites.
 - A VI-SPDAT assessment tool score should never be used as a criterion in an encampment protocol.
 - In the previous iteration of an Encampment Enforcement Protocol, this resulted in people living in encampments wanting to score higher in acuity to ensure they were allowed to stay in place and would not need to move to a new location. As a result, it did not work as intended.

 5. The Protocol should respond to behaviours, and not arbitrarily provide timelines for which someone in an encampment would be required to move to a new location.
 - The belief was that providing specific timelines does not allow stakeholders to effectively case manage and provide necessary supports, while also penalizing the person experiencing homelessness who has no suitable alternatives.
 - In the previous Encampment Bylaw Protocol which enforced a limit of 14 days that someone who is living unsheltered and without high acuity could stay at a particular location, it was noted that having restrictive timelines for staying in a specific location regularly leads to unnecessary negative emotional and physical impacts. Additionally, it limits the ability of the individual experiencing homelessness to access appropriate health and housing supports on a regular basis.
 - Due to fears of their encampment being dismantled when they leave for an appointment, individuals in encampments choose to stay nearby to protect their belongings and site and do not attend necessary appointments.

 6. After all other proactive avenues have been explored, a lack of site cleanliness, particularly the spread of used syringes that put others at-risk, may require intervention from City as part of a holistic view of the encampment and individuals residing there.
 - City should work with people living in encampments to develop solutions to accumulated waste, i.e., provide waste receptacles and sharps containers onsite, and develop schedules in conjunction with Parks staff to encourage ongoing garbage pickup.
 - Stakeholders expressed support to fund peers (i.e., people with lived or living experience of homelessness) to support site clean-up
 - Stakeholders suggested hiring more parks/sanitation workers to support clean-up endeavours may also be an option.

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7. Community stakeholders noted that moving someone from their preferred location or *home*, should be viewed as last resort after all other approaches were exhausted, or not happen at all.
 - A suggestion was made to develop a task force or committee, comprised of City staff, community stakeholders, and people with lived experience to review each instance where someone may need to be moved due to a concern for their, or others' safety.
 - Through associated case conferencing, members of the committee could identify all potential supports required to address the root of the behaviours. This would require broad participation of community stakeholders and the addressing of barriers related to privacy concerns.
 - Fostering better connections between the City staff and frontline efforts in the non-profit sector would help to ensure coordination was formalized and efficient.
 - Individuals in encampments who do not pick up their used needles and other garbage may require intervention from City staff due to the impacts on other individuals staying in encampments, and the public.
 - Policing and enforcement should be viewed as a last resort, or not used at all.

 8. The City should consider embedding peer supports into their coordination, outreach response, and site clean-up processes, as it presents several positive outcomes for people with lived experience, as well as those currently living in encampments.
 - If there are barriers to hiring, the City should pursue funding relationships with community agencies who have more direct access and already employ people with lived experience of homelessness.
 - Peer workers who are hired for this work should be remunerated at an acceptable, fair rate of pay.
 - The benefit of having peers is clear and has been demonstrated by service providers already doing this work. Peers can build rapport and make suggestions to people with lived experience in ways that City staff are unable to, and as a result should be a part of the first response to an encampment.
 - Peers could become part of a broader community engagement strategy.

 9. Interactions of frontline staff with Indigenous people living in encampments should be rooted in relationship-building with an understanding of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization.
 - To better support Indigenous people living in encampments, the need for ongoing rapport and relationship building is vital.

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- One suggestion was to start conversations with food and/or drink (i.e., fry bread, cedar tea, strawberry juice), and making traditional medicines available to improving wellbeing and establish meaningful, reciprocal relationships that provide spiritual grounding.
- Building a relationship with someone allows for an understanding of their triggers and boundaries, which is particularly important for Indigenous people who are often managing traumas related to colonization.
- An encampment response program should be understanding of and reflect the stability that is required for people to make changes. Ongoing movement is not suitable.

One of the most salient themes raised in the development sessions was a preference toward the establishment of sanctioned sites within the city. Sanctioned sites are locations designated as permissible for people experiencing homelessness to camp within. Ideally, infrastructure such as running water, washrooms, and showers are integrated or nearby the site. Additionally, the site would be equipped with permanent staff who assist with day-to-day needs and conduct light casework, as well as additional staff who visit on an ongoing basis to provide intensive case management support and address other health and housing needs. This provides people living in sanctioned sites an opportunity to stay in place and receive services directly on an ongoing basis, as well as the familiarity of an area and community of people.

Community stakeholders suggested that providing several sanctioned sites or areas was most preferable, as it would provide the benefit of choice and autonomy to people living unsheltered in the community. This would help to ensure sites were more harmonious, as people would be more likely to gravitate towards sites that are more suitable to their needs (i.e., sites that are likely to be closer in proximity to services and supports and include likeminded people).

Focusing a protocol on where an individual may not set up a tent places a burden on encamped individuals to be informed of where they may set up a tent. Stakeholders recommended the establishing of sanctioned sites to alleviate this burden.

Additional Feedback from Community Partners

The following are additional themes and/or ideas that were identified by community stakeholders in the encampment protocol development sessions, but did not fit directly within the Proposed Encampment Protocol:

1. The City should continue to pursue the development and integration of various types of shelter and housing to provide unsheltered people with choice of type of support(s) and/or location(s) that provide the greatest suitability to their current circumstances and preferences. This may include several approaches, such as:

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several sanctioned sites, one sanctioned site, and/or a Protocol governing the City's response to individuals who choose none of these supports. Stakeholders believed this could also help diminish the overreliance on one model or approach and ensure the needs of unsheltered people can be adequately met.

- The City should consider adding more pilots, such as the Intensive Supports Pilot, that would provide greater, more individualized access to indoor spaces.
 - Expansion of the shelter system to increase capacity and meet the needs of people who are unsheltered could be another solution to decrease the number of encampments.
 - City should consider creating priority initiatives in social housing to streamline access to housing for individuals living in encampments.
2. City should further analyze pathways that previous people living in encampments have taken toward permanent housing and seek to formalize those.
 3. City should continue its review of shelter restriction policies and update policies to ensure they are time-restrictive and reviewable.
 4. The Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters (HATS) model was not viewed as a best practices approach by other community organizations. Concerns were noted regarding exclusionary intake criteria, and potential outflow into housing which was noted as poor in other locations where this approach had been applied.
 5. All approaches to improve the safety of people living in encampments should be considered in the process of developing an encampment protocol, and in the day-to-day operations of encampment response.
 6. Stakeholders recommended that all approaches to encampment response be aligned and integrated with strategic objectives of the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan.
 - Additionally, that community stakeholders work together to address homelessness as a collective instead of in funding and practice silos.
 7. One of the barriers to developing sanctioned sites is the appropriation of risk onto other parties, namely the City of Hamilton. As such, the City should work to understand these limitations and find practical solutions.

Staff are continuing to review the additional feedback provided by community stakeholders in the protocol development sessions which did not make it directly into the Proposed Encampment Protocol, with the intent of aligning to ongoing work in HFSO and strategic planning goals in HSD. The feedback provided will be integrated,

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whenever possible, into encampment response policies and procedures, and inform collaboration with other teams within the City.