



CITY OF HAMILTON
HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT
Housing Services Division
and
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Licensing and By-law Services Division
and
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
Environmental Services Division

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 15, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Encampment Observation Report (HSC24020/PED24080/ PW24030) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Mike Jones (905) 546-2424 Ext.3824
SUBMITTED BY:	Michelle Baird Director, Housing Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	
SUBMITTED BY:	Dan Smith Acting Director, Licensing and Bylaw Services Planning and Economic Development Department
SIGNATURE:	
SUBMITTED BY:	Cynthia Graham Director, Environmental Services Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) The Encampment Protocol (Appendix “A” in Report HSC20038(g)) be modified to remove the following provision from Section D, indicating the removal of encampments, temporary shelters, or tents “on or within 50 metres of the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters model site. For the purpose of this site the full length of the Strachan Linear Park, Bay Street North to Ferguson Street North, will be considered the site.”

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- (b) That the Housing Services Division report back with recommendations on how to address the needs of individuals who are unhoused and any additional service gaps highlighted in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the findings associated with implementing the Encampment Response protocol. The Encampment Protocol represents a concerted effort to mitigate the challenges faced by individuals living unsheltered and address concerns raised by the broader community.

Since its ratification in August 2023, the Protocol has undergone several phases of response, from initial ground truthing efforts (i.e., using maps to determine a site's compliance before confirming in-person) aimed to delineate compliant and non-compliant areas, followed by ongoing outreach efforts by Housing Focused Street Outreach to make individuals aware of the protocol's requirements and available resources.

The City has effectively established a housing-led approach that prioritizes supportive outreach over punitive measures, yet several challenges persist, such as difficulties in enforcing compliance timelines, managing garbage and debris at encampment sites, and seasonal considerations regarding the implementation of the protocol.

Overall, the implementation of the protocol has provided greater transparency and clarity regarding the processes used by the City in responding to encampments in the community and has been an effective tool in balancing the needs of individuals living unsheltered with the broader community's needs. However, sustained efforts focused on permanent, humane, cost-effective solutions is needed to address the systemic multifaceted challenges faced by individuals living unsheltered. To this end, Housing Services Division will be proposing several recommendations in Report HSC23021(b) aimed at responding to some of the concerns outlined in this report with the ultimate goal of ending chronic homelessness in Hamilton.

Alternatives for Consideration – N/A

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: N/A

Staffing: N/A

Legal: N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On March 23, 2023, staff presented information report HSC23021, Ending Chronic Homelessness, identifying interventions that were successful as well as needed investments to make progress on resolving chronic homelessness in Hamilton.

On May 17, 2023, staff recommended that Council adopt a Proposed Encampment Protocol (HSC20038(f)/PED21188(c)) in the interim, while a period of public comment occurred until June 30, 2023, to obtain public comment around the concept of sanctioned sites and to conduct a jurisdictional scan.

In addition, to respond to concerns related to basic needs supports and the need to integrate frontline stakeholders and people with lived experience into the encampment response, Council directed staff to provide access to washrooms, showers, clean drinking water, as well as integrate Indigenous and peer supports into its encampment response program. Further, staff were asked to develop a task force or committee comprised of City staff, community stakeholders, and people with lived experience to advise on the development of an encampment response policy and appeals process.

The period of public comment resulted in significant feedback on the draft Protocol, including 11,943 visitors to the Engage Hamilton website who contributed 15,965 individual comments, as well as approximately 2,000 attendees at three in-person community engagement sessions. Once the period of public comment closed, it was recommended that the City make the necessary changes and provide a final recommended Protocol to Council in August 2023.

On August 18, 2023, Council adopted and ratified an Encampment Protocol in Encampment Response Update – August 2023 (HSC23066), identifying approaches, processes, and service levels associated with responding to encampments in the City. In addition, Council provided necessary resources in staffing and equipment to support the implementation of the Protocol. While a broad approach involving sanctioned sites was not recommended by Staff due to its prohibitive costs better utilized in prevention efforts and/or housing, Council also approved a two-year Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters pilot for up to 25 tiny homes on City lands at no cost to the City.

On September 6, 2023, staff followed up on the Ending Chronic Homelessness report with HSC23041 – Addressing the needs of Unsheltered Individuals and those Relying on Hamilton’s Emergency Shelter System. This recommended several investments to address capacity challenges in the shelter system, including providing additional space for those living encamped. These items were referred to Budget 2024 and subsequently approved as part of the budget process.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

N/A

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Several consultations were conducted and were the basis for analysing the implementation of the Encampment Protocol.

Housing Focused Street Outreach consulted with internal divisions including Municipal Law Enforcement, Parks Section, Parking Enforcement, and Hamilton Fire Department, as well as Hamilton Police Services. In addition, an open-ended questionnaire was sent to several community partners who comprise the Encampment Liaison Committee, including Keeping Six, St. Matthew's House, HAMSMRT, and Hamilton Regional Indian Centre.

People living in encampments throughout the City were also consulted from March 7-12, 2024.

Housing Focused Street Outreach staff consulted with nearby municipalities that are considering adopting a Protocol to direct encampment-related work in Guelph and Toronto, to compare approaches and findings. The consultation helped to inform the analysis below.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

While this report focuses on the impacts of unsheltered homelessness in the City of Hamilton, it is important to note that increasing levels of unsheltered homelessness is being experienced in communities across Canada. With increased costs of housing and rental prices, inflation with stagnant wages, as well as insufficient income from supports such as Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, it is exceedingly difficult for low-income households, particularly singles, to access suitable and appropriate housing. Adding to the precarity being experienced, in Hamilton and across Canada, emergency shelter capacities are also being met and chronically exceeded across sectors, particularly for adult men, resulting in overflow into hotel spaces.

With both housing and emergency shelter largely inaccessible, and with more individuals entering into unsheltered homelessness, the constellation of existing supports is unable to meet the growing demand. More people are confronted with the reality of living in an encampment, a lifestyle that contributes to worsened physical and mental health outcomes and often associated with increased substance use.

Limited coordination and accountability to-date from Federal and Provincial levels of government has further complicated efforts to address the issue. Nonetheless, there is

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still a need to address unsheltered homelessness at a community level to ensure individuals living outside do so with dignity, while also meeting the needs of the broader community. As such, the Encampment Protocol was adopted to provide transparency and expectations around the City's approach to encampment response, and to balance the needs of everyone in the community.

To evaluate how the Protocol is being implemented, several consultations were conducted, including with people with lived experience, community partners, and members of the Coordinated Response Team, who have provided ongoing oversight throughout implementation to various aspects of the program through ongoing collaboration and coordination, to calibrate how supports are best utilized to achieve the maximum impact. Given the volume of responses from the community (particularly from concerned citizens, Business Improvement Areas, and local businesses) to the unsheltered inbox, their voice is also represented in the following analysis. The recommendations being made reflect all the feedback received.

The following section of the report will provide context around the implementation of the Protocol, and review feedback received from the consultations conducted, including both what was achieved, as well as challenges.

Volume of Requests and Approach to Communication

Since the establishment of the Encampment Protocol in August 2023 until April 15, 2024, Housing Focused Street Outreach has been contacted 3825 times (including follow-ups and repeated contact) via its unsheltered email, as well as hundreds more times by voicemail. The majority of complaints or service requests received by Housing Focused Street Outreach are initiated by concerned citizens (70%) and include requests for additional supports onsite, reporting of encampments, and requests for removal as per the terms of the Protocol, yet several other internal and external sources have also contacted Housing Focused Street Outreach regarding encampment-related concerns or requests.

With a high volume of complaints and service requests received by Housing Focused Street Outreach via email and voicemail, the ability of Housing Focused Street Outreach to respond to each request without a dedicated staffing complement has not been possible. As a result, complainants have not received personalized responses, leading to a lack of clarity and significant frustration. As part of a concerted effort to respond to complaints and requests, and to improve transparency with the public, Housing Focused Street Outreach has established a Program Secretary tasked with responding to inquiries, and the team has developed several new approaches to managing the inflow of complaints and service requests to its unsheltered mailbox and voicemail.

Enforcement-related Complaints and Requests for Service

Since implementation of the Protocol, the overall number of complaints and service requests has gradually declined, peaking at 860 in September 2023 before gradually declining to 328 in March 2024. There has also been a gradual decrease in the reporting of and requests to enforce encampments, which totalled a high of 526 in September 2023 before dropping to 130 in February 2024. This suggests that the efforts of Housing Focused Street Outreach and its partners has been successful in working with individuals living unsheltered to access compliant spaces.

While the complaints and requests for service regarding encampments have decreased month-over-month since the Protocol was established, from 897 in September 2023 to 328 in March 2024, it increased substantially in April 2024 to 481 complaints and requests for service. With warmer weather anticipated in the upcoming months it is expected that the total number of complaints and service requests related to encampments will increase to, or higher than the levels experienced in September 2023. This will place an additional strain on resources as staff attempt to address the community's concerns and suggestions.

Coordination amongst Partners and Stakeholders

Implementation of the Encampment Protocol requires significant effort and expertise from several teams. The Coordinated Response Team - made up of staff from Housing Focused Street Outreach, Municipal Law Enforcement, Parks Section, Parking Enforcement, Corporate Security, Hamilton Fire Department, and Hamilton Police Services - meet three times weekly to strategize around approaches to sites with acute challenges, coordinate encampment response through the City, and address issues via new, innovative approaches that build upon previous experiences. On a daily basis, several divisions are involved in ongoing coordination of frontline efforts to ensure sites are effectively engaged and when necessary, escalated to the appropriate parties who work together to enforce. To ensure the frontline work is well-coordinated, significant administrative work is needed to ensure all incoming communications are logged, new sites are identified and prioritized effectively, with frontline information (i.e., site visits, interactions/engagement with individuals living in encampments, enforcement actions, site clean-ups) about new and existing sites updated across teams within shared repositories on a daily basis. These interactions are the backbone of implementation, and this collaboration has been noted by all partners as being necessary and successful.

In terms of external partnerships, Housing Focused Street Outreach held an initial meeting in February 2024 with community stakeholders and persons with lived experience of homelessness to develop a Terms of Reference that outlines the purpose, values, objectives, and scope of the work. Due to the cybersecurity incident, timelines have been impacted and a next meeting is being rescheduled for May 2024.

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Housing Focused Street Outreach will conduct ongoing research with individuals living unsheltered to establish appropriate baselines and to ensure there is ongoing evaluation of the community's needs that also correspond with the program's objectives. This will also provide staff with an opportunity to develop and track more reliable equity-based indicators to assess the impacts on people disproportionately impacted by unsheltered homelessness, which can be used to inform new partnerships and approaches to service.

Service Levels

As per the guidelines established in the Encampment Protocol, Housing Focused Street Outreach (Housing Services Division), Municipal Law Enforcement (Licensing and Bylaw), and Parks Section (Public Works) have service levels associated with their response to encampments. While other divisions (i.e., Parking enforcement, Hamilton Fire Department), and partners (i.e., Hamilton Police Services) are involved via the Coordinated Response Team, they do not have service levels guiding their response.

As of April 15, 2024, Housing Focused Street Outreach has received and visited 472 sites within the scope of the Encampment Protocol. Of the sites with a defined outcome, Housing Focused Street Outreach met its service level of attending and escalating each identified site with 72 hours 89% of the time and escalates 96% of sites to Municipal Law Enforcement within a week of being identified.

Due to the cybersecurity incident, there has been a significant loss of historical data related to Municipal Law Enforcement's service levels. Broadly, given the staffing levels available (i.e., a Municipal Law Enforcement Supervisor and two Municipal Law Enforcement Officers), there have been significant challenges in meeting the defined service level, and Municipal Law Enforcement would require additional staffing, as well as the support of additional Hamilton Police Encampment Engagement team staff to avoid enforcement bottlenecks.

While there are service levels identified within the Encampment Protocol defining clean-ups and site maintenance, Parks Section simultaneously manages routine garbage pickup, ad hoc clean-ups resulting from enforcement actions, as well as complaints and/or service requests, making it challenging to track each specific type of request. Additional mechanisms to track and identify work requests are under development.

Housing-Led Approach

The goal of a housing-led approach is for Housing Focused Street Outreach to be the first point of contact for individuals living unsheltered on public property, to establish rapport and work towards connecting them with services and supports that maintain their well-being, and to only escalate sites with potential compliance concerns to Municipal Law Enforcement (i.e., sites with no clear compliance issues would not be

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escalated to Municipal Law Enforcement for investigation). To date, this has been effective during the implementation of the Encampment Protocol, and individuals living unsheltered reported having less or little interaction with Municipal Law Enforcement and Hamilton Police since the Protocol had been established.

Under the existing approach of having compliant spaces available for access, 50% of individuals living unsheltered felt the current approach was working for them. When comparing to a similar survey done in 2022, at a time when there was a 12–72-hour bylaw required individuals living unsheltered to move frequently to new locations, only 10% believed that approach was working for them.

To aide in continuous improvement of service to individuals living unsheltered, Housing Focused Street Outreach has developed several new processes to assist in triaging of complaints and requests, data analysis, and reporting. The new approaches will be used to collect more reliable, accurate systems data from outreach staff to assist with site prioritization and better define the work being completed by outreach staff. Housing Focused Street Outreach is also in the process of adding three (3) peer support workers who will be funded to support rapport-building, harm reduction, and site remediation.

Distance Away from Schools and Childcare Facilities

During the consultation period in summer 2023, and prior to the ratification of the Encampment Protocol, there was significant feedback provided by the public related to the proximity of encampments to places frequented by toddlers and school-aged children. As a result, in the final version of the Protocol the distances were extended from 50-metres to 100-metres away from schools and childcare facilities. This has been successful, with sites being identified near a school of childcare facility dropping from 12% in September 2023, to none in March 2023.

Number of Encampments Per Cluster

The Protocol provides direction regarding number of tents permitted in a cluster and distances between clusters. From the experiences of staff, corroborated through the experiences of a majority of individuals living unsheltered, as well as the complaints data, this has been a successful provision within the Protocol. While enforcement is based upon a five-tent limit, it is common for sites to include tents that are not inhabited, and instead used for storage of food and personal items, which adds to the size of a site. Largely, when sites exceed a manageable number of tents, i.e., approximately five tents, there is a clear increase in the number of associated complaints and concerns with the site.

At a community level, an increase in tents at a site is generally associated with an increase in complaints related to garbage and debris in a concentrated area, more combustibles, violence and use of weapons, and reports of feeling intimidated by the

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number of people. In addition, individuals living in encampments also reported concerns with larger sites, included theft, lack of privacy, and varying and at times conflicting lifestyles and goals amongst the people living there.

Additional Protocol Considerations

While the intent of the Protocol is to balance the needs of individuals living unsheltered and the broader community, there were additional considerations made by internal staff and people with lived experience regarding potential changes that would add to the Protocol, as well as modify, and remove existing clauses.

One change to the Encampment Protocol being recommended is the following from Section D, indicating the removal of encampments, temporary shelters, or tents “on or within 50 metres of the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters model site. For the purpose of this site the full length of the Strachan Linear Park, Bay Street North to Ferguson Street North, will be considered the site.” It has since been confirmed that this area will not be used for the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Homes pilot project, and to reflect this update, this provision should be removed from the Protocol.

For other potential changes, given that the Protocol has not been implemented for a full year yet and understanding that the warmer months have higher rates of people living unsheltered, more information is required to better understand the impacts of the Protocol prior to recommending any changes. In addition, before a recommendation(s) is made, each consideration would require a comprehensive policy and risk analysis of associated impacts. See Appendix “A” for a detailed list of considerations.

Compliant Spaces

With less required movement of people living unsheltered throughout the city as a result of compliant spaces being available, there are several compliant sites that have had a stable group of individuals living there. This has allowed Housing Focused Street Outreach and other frontline providers to build effective rapport with the same individuals over a longer period of time, leading to more successful outcomes. Both Outreach staff and individuals living unsheltered noted that having a place to stay for longer periods of time was very beneficial, especially when compared to approaches used in the past that required ongoing movement to new areas. However, this approach has been problematic for some neighbours and local businesses nearby who report concerns with an ongoing encampment presence nearby, particularly when there are presenting concerns around health and safety, namely garbage, debris, and waste.

In terms of frequented areas of the city, as expected given the proximity to services and supports, Ward 2 (34%), Ward 3 (29%), Ward 5 (9%), Ward 1 (9%), and Ward 4 (7%) have had the most newly identified encampments in non-compliant spaces, while all other Wards have had less than 5% of the total number of new encampments identified.

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In general, the significant majority of encampments are in the lower City. Given the concentration of encampments in lower City wards, it is anticipated that this may lead to an increase in sites with numerical non-compliance (i.e., five or more tents, lack of distance between clusters), geographically non-compliant sites (i.e., proximity to), and more tents within escarpment areas during warmer weather months when historically more people live outside.

Safety Concerns

Concerned citizens and local businesses have detailed several health and safety issues in their complaints to Housing Focused Street Outreach, such as light posts being compromised for electricity, human waste exposure, and personal safety concerns. Businesses have detailed that the presence of encampments has negatively impacted their operations. This has led to significant frustration amongst all parties.

Several encampment residents who were interviewed also expressed concerns for their safety, sharing instances where their presence had resulted in confrontation from neighbours and youth.

Enforcement Challenges

The consistent enforcement of sites has been impacted by a lack of staffing available to manage the responsibilities of the portfolio. Currently, there are two Hamilton Police Services Encampment Engagement Team officers responsible for attending all site visits with Municipal Law Enforcement officers, coordinating and leading private property enforcement and the enforcement of sites on public property. With a high number of non-compliant sites resulting from the disbandment of larger sites like Woodlands Park and City Hall, and in using a hands-off approach to enforcement, the time required to enforce requires more resources than currently allocated.

Since Hamilton Police's Encampment Engagement Team was established in September 2023, the team has attended 441 encampment site visits. Some of these visits are supporting the issuing of 419 Trespass Notices by Municipal Law Enforcement Officers. In addition, Hamilton Police Service's Encampment Engagement team has spent a total of 248 hours enforcing previously issued notices. This does not include time spent assisting other agencies and enforcing encampments on private property.

Contributing to the time spent enforcing previously issued notices are several locations within the city that are often habitually occupied by encampments. Some examples include MacNab St S and Hunter St W, Jackson St W and MacNab St S, Vine between Park and York, and the Hamilton Convention Centre alcoves on King St W. Given the proximity of these sites/areas to community resources and services that meet the basic needs of individuals living unsheltered, these sites quickly re-establish after enforcement has occurred with new occupants, triggering a new round of engagement

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and enforcement. In addition, other street-related concerns not related to encampments are often grouped under the heading of encampments, including loitering and illegal dumping or garbage. These issues, although not related to encampments and more frequently associated with mental health and substance abuse issues, are brought to the attention of the City via the unsheltered inbox. These sites are also resource-intensive for Municipal Law Enforcement and Housing Focused Street Outreach to assess and address.

Recreational Vehicles and Trailers

Since the Encampment Protocol was adopted by Council, a growing number of locations throughout the city have been occupied by individuals inhabiting within Recreational Vehicles (RVs) and trailers. Many of the RVs and trailers being inhabited also have had additional semi-permanent structures built into them. With existing Parks Bylaws already governing the use of RVs and trailers, particularly for habitation, as well as several other Parking-related violations, the use of these vehicles in this manner is not compliant and there are no designated areas for free parking of Recreational Vehicles or trailers on public lands in the City of Hamilton.

To support this work, the City's Parking Enforcement team has joined the Coordinated Response Team to provide best practices related to managing these concerns, and in coordination with Housing Focused Street Outreach, has allowed for Outreach staff to visit individuals to ensure they are provided with additional options and resources prior to enforcement.

Fire and Combustibles

The use of fire pits and other combustibles by individuals who are unsheltered to maintain warmth during colder months has resulted in several complaints and concerns from neighbours of sites who feel at risk. The Hamilton Fire Department has been actively engaged with incidents related to encampments, categorized into those necessitating emergency response and those that do not. The main types of incidents responded to include burning complaints, rubbish fires, and calls for medical assistance. In January 2023, burning complaints were the predominant response call-type, numbering 31 responses. During such responses, fire-related situations are promptly extinguished, and encampment occupants are reminded of the open-air burning by-law.

The Hamilton Fire Department, in collaboration with the Housing Focused Outreach team, developed a printed resource to increase fire safety awareness and support educating people living unsheltered. Approximately 800 of these two-sided, non-destructible flyers were distributed to resource centres and the City's Encampment Response Team in early 2024. In addition, in January 2024 a representative from the Hamilton Fire Department joined the City's Coordinated Response Team to provide ongoing support and best practices related to coordination and risk mitigation at sites.

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An important aspect to note is that application of the Ontario Fire Code principally pertains to buildings and structures but does not apply to tents smaller than 30m² used for camping, personal, or non-commercial purposes. Additionally, the Fire Department is not licensed to remove or transport hazardous materials (including propane cylinders). As such, there is currently no defined process for removal of flammable or combustible materials.

Washroom Access

The need for access to washrooms was echoed by several individuals living in encampments who want the option of using facilities nearby, as well as community partners who provide frontline service. Housing Focused Street Outreach has received several complaints from members of the community reporting human waste requiring clean up or wanting portable washrooms at compliant sites.

To address some of the concerns, two washroom programs were established at central locations within the city and are available on a 24/7 basis. Individuals encamped near washroom programs (i.e., JC Beemer, Corktown Park) report it as one of the reasons they stay nearby but given logistical concerns in counting users of the washrooms who are experiencing homelessness, staff were unable to identify the frequency individuals access the 24/7 washrooms.

In September 2023, shower programs were also established within two locations within the City, Norman Pinky Lewis Recreational Centre, and Bennetto Community Centre. Previously, the City operated a shower program at Eastwood Arena, but due to low uptake (33 visitors over 15 weeks), the program was moved to Bennetto in January 2024, which has seen a mild increase in uptake (6 per week, vs 2 per week). In contrast, Norman Pinky Lewis has seen an average of 14 individuals experiencing homelessness utilize the service each week. More work is required to better understand barriers to service use.

Garbage and Debris Pickup

Housing Focused Street Outreach received several complaints describing parks as being unusable due to the presence of garbage and debris. As individuals move to compliant sites and stay in a single place for longer periods of time, they often accumulate more items at the site, particularly during colder weather months. As a result, the number of complaints related to garbage and debris has maintained at the same level (67-80 requests per month), despite a significant decrease to the number of sites and overall complaints and requests for service.

To facilitate clean-ups at sites across the city, the Parks Section has created a schedule to assist in managing garbage and debris pickup at encampments. To ensure adequate coverage, larger sites that may contain more than one cluster or are currently non-

compliant with five or more tents are attended to every other day given the level of need, while smaller sites are visited at least once a week.

Managing clean-ups throughout the city can be challenging given that there are ongoing ad hoc requests made of Parks section staff, sometimes related to sites being vacated or recently vacated. As such, a consistent, planned schedules for all sites is not possible. In the meantime, all known encampment sites visited by Parks section are offered garbage bags to help mitigate the spread of garbage and debris, and staff coordinate with individual(s) at the site to detail the location to leave bagged garbage, and approximate time of next pickup.

Additionally, there have been concerns about garbage/debris on private property associated with encampments, which is presently not within the City's scope of work. To alleviate the burden on members of the public to clean up after garbage/debris has been left on their property, Public Works is bringing forward a recommendation report in May 2024 to suggest an approach to address and mitigate these concerns.

Special Events

Throughout the year, the City of Hamilton, and its partners host community events on public lands across the city. As part of holding events the Special Events Advisory Committee (SEAT) reviews the operational details to ensure the health and safety of participants and City assets (parks, roads). Occasionally, some of the 350+ events held each year are planned in spaces already occupied by encampments in a compliant location.

With no specific clause in the Encampment Protocol delineating a process for managing co-location and given the mental health impacts of moving individuals from their compliant space, individual(s) in residing in compliant locations will not be moved as a result of an upcoming or planned event. As encampments move throughout the City, particularly in the summer months, this can lead to tensions and challenges amongst event organizers and City staff that are managed on a case-by-case basis.

Barriers to Housing and Emergency Shelter

Without identified outflow from encampments into indoor spaces such as emergency shelter, temporary or transitional housing, or permanent housing, encampments are likely to maintain or increase in total.

Individual(s) living unsheltered reported several barriers to emergency shelter, including a lack of pet-friendly and couples' spaces, harm reduction friendly policies, privacy concerns, and requirements to leave and return to secure a bed every day, that precluded them from wanting to access the service. When asked if they would consider accessing spaces in the emergency shelter system more suitable to their needs (i.e.,

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some of the barriers to access were potentially reduced), 71% were interested. To reflect this need, Housing Services division continues to explore various program models aimed at providing more inclusive service.

To address the impacts of colder weather and increasing need, in 2023-24 Housing Services Division introduced a number of services and supports aimed at providing greater access to warm, indoor spaces, particularly for individuals who are less likely to access traditional service models and may spend time in encampments. Services offered included the warming bus which operated in cold-weather months overnight and was staffed by two outreach employees, extended hours at resource centres and libraries for individuals looking for immediate respite from colder weather, 45 overnight spaces at Willow's Place, and 50 warming spaces at Good Shepherd Cathedral. Given the benefits associated with the City's Winter Response Strategy and the ongoing need for indoor space, particularly for hardest-to-reach populations, these services have been extended until November 30, 2024. An investment in resources within the Family Shelter system allowed for additional support services for clients in this sector.

Housing also continues to be difficult to acquire for individuals living in encampments, especially those who may require supports that assist in their transition. While many of the individuals living outside had connected with housing workers and were on the Access to Housing waitlist, many still felt unsupported, and shared little to no hope in acquiring housing. While the Encampment Protocol has been developed to provide clarity and balance the needs of individuals living unsheltered and the broader community, and with the knowledge that other approaches (i.e., sanctioned sites) have been considered that would provide temporary relief at high costs, the goal is to use resources towards permanent, humane, cost-effective solutions such as housing. To this end, Housing Service Division has identified resources and strategies that would effectively end chronic homelessness in Hamilton and will be bringing a report with actionable recommendations for Council to consider in June 2024.

To ensure individuals are able to stay in their housing, the City of Hamilton is currently implementing the expanded Tenant Support Program as approved by City Council to help stop vulnerable tenants being displaced and possibly entering into the homelessness serving system. This expanded program includes a partnership with the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic to provide legal support for tenants facing displacement through N-13 and N-12 notices. Additional supports as part of this program are outreach services to tenants through ACORN Hamilton and housing plans and support for tenants who do need to be displaced because of legitimate renovations through the Housing Help Centre Hamilton and Area.

The issue of homelessness and related issues of addiction and mental health continue to cause pressures across the housing and homelessness system and beyond. These are multi-faceted complex issues, and the continuously growing needs are pressuring the capacity of the existing systems. In addition, the issues are challenging and cross-

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departmental in nature, often extending beyond city departments. This is demanding work and has an impact on the City staff working on these issues.

Despite the challenges there are opportunities for us, as a City, to have a positive impact with time. The encampment protocol is not a solution to homelessness, it continues to be a means to manage the crisis within our City providing some stability and options for people experiencing homelessness, however, continued commitment to more solution focused measures is needed in accompaniment with the protocol.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

N/A

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Report HSC24020/PED24080/PW24030 – Additional Encampment Protocol Considerations