



Ombudsman
Toronto

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Ombudsman Toronto

Interim Report

Investigation into the City's Process
for Clearing Encampments in 2021

Introduction

- In the spring and summer of 2021, the City of Toronto cleared people who had been living in encampments in Lamport Stadium Park, Trinity Bellwoods Park, and Alexandra Park.
- Significant public interest and concern developed about the way the City was responding to encampments.
- The impact of these events echoes to this day, and public concern about the City's response to encampments remains strong.

Our Investigation

- We looked at three issues:
 - How the City planned the clearings
 - How the City engaged stakeholders about the clearings
 - How the City communicated with the public about the clearings.

Our Interim Report

- The interim report looks at the coordination of the City's response
 - Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP)
 - Encampment Office
- The report identifies fairness issues that we believe the City should address as an immediate priority

What We Heard

- We received complaints from people who were upset about the clearings and concerned that the City's actions had eroded the public's trust.
- We also heard from people who supported the City's clearings and expressed concern about their ability to use public parks.
- Encampment residents told us that the clearings meant the loss of their home, their community, and their support system.
- Community groups said the clearings have increased the vulnerability of unhoused people, and we heard the clearings hurt the City's work with community groups on other important.

What We Found: The IDP

- Outdated and Inconsistent Protocol
 - The protocol that should guide City's encampment response is outdated and not consistently followed by staff.
 - The City knows, but has no detailed plan to guide this work, suggesting inconsistency and lack of transparency.
 - We did not see any plans outlining how and when the City would hold consultations with the community in order to fully understand the issue.

What We Found: Encampment Office

- Unclear and Under-Resourced Encampment Office
 - The City does not have a clear or defined mandate guiding the Encampment Office's work.
 - The Encampment Office is under-resourced, which impairs the Office's ability to take a larger, systemic view of its encampments response.

Some of our Recommendations

- The City should:
 - **Immediately develop a detailed plan outlining how it will update the IDP**, including project milestones and timelines, and commit adequate staff resources to ensure the timely completion of the update.
 - **Hold public consultations to receive feedback** from the community, including people with lived experiences being unhoused, and ensure their feedback informs the updates to the IDP.

Some of our Recommendations (cont.)

- The City should also:
 - **Define the role and mandate of the Encampment Office**, including its responsibilities as part of the City's response to encampments, and share this information with the public
 - **Assess the resource and expertise needs of the Encampment Office** to ensure it can effectively carry out its duties

The Impact

- Clearing encampments is extremely disruptive and in some cases traumatizing to the people living in them. The City owes a particularly high duty of fairness to those residents, who are among the most vulnerable in Toronto.
- **The recommendations from this interim report will:**
 - Increase the fairness, transparency, and accountability of the City's response to encampments in City parks.
 - Help ensure people living in encampments are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

The City's Response

- The City has agreed to implement all recommendations.
- The City will provide an update on its implementation of the recommendations by the end of the fourth quarter.

Final Report

- We will bring our Final Investigation Report to City Council at the earliest opportunity once Council resumes.
- Our final report will include further information and recommendations on how the City planned, engaged stakeholders, and communicated with the public about the clearings.



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