

The City's Encampment Approach and Strategy

Date: May 14, 2024

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Toronto is experiencing a housing and homelessness crisis. Communities across Canada continue to see increases in unsheltered homelessness and encampments since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Encampments are a symptom of the housing crisis, shelter demand that exceeds availability, increasing costs of living, inadequate income supports, and other social crises such as the drug toxicity and mental health crisis.

The City believes that permanent, adequate, affordable, and supportive housing is the solution to homelessness and is committed to advancing the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as set out in the [Toronto Housing Charter](#). Encampments are not a long-term solution to homelessness. While the City continues to work towards permanent housing solutions, it is critical that we continue to support people living in encampments, who are among the most vulnerable in our city.

The purpose of this report is to present the City's strategic approach to encampments that is grounded in a human rights approach while supporting the safety and well-being of people living in encampments and surrounding communities. Key components of this approach include:

- a) Expanding the enhanced housing-focused outreach and support model
- b) Exploring new service models for people in encampments
- c) Enhancing safety in the shelter system for staff and clients
- d) Increasing permanent housing opportunities and shelter system flow

This report also provides an update on the City's implementation of recommendations in the Ombudsman Toronto's interim and final reports on encampments and seeks City Council approval of the attached *City of Toronto Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto*, updated based on extensive engagement with people with lived experience of homelessness in encampments, and City and community stakeholders and partners.

From a human rights-based approach, and consistent with what we heard from extensive stakeholder engagement, addressing the urgent issue of encampments requires a multi-divisional and multi-sectoral approach and the commitment of all levels of government, community, and other stakeholders to invest in comprehensive public, social and health-related supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the updated *City of Toronto Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto* (IDP) in Attachment 3 to this report, and direct City staff to implement the IDP immediately.
2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services to make any necessary clarifications, refinements, minor modifications, technical amendments to the *City of Toronto Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto* (IDP) in Attachment 3 to this report.
3. City Council direct the General Manager Toronto Shelter and Support Services to report back on the development of a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to supporting individuals experiencing homelessness with complex needs, in collaboration with other relevant City Divisions, health care partners and community partners.
4. City Council reiterate its requests to the Government of Canada and Government of Ontario to establish and implement an intergovernmental and cross-departmental strategy for large scale asylum seeker arrivals and the immediate opening of a regional reception centre and interim housing strategy.
5. City Council request the Government of Ontario to fulfill the cost-matching requirement to secure 2024 federal budget funding to address the urgent issue of encampments and unsheltered homelessness.
6. City Council request the Government of Canada and Government of Ontario to provide the City of Toronto with a Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit allocation in 2024/25 of \$54 million to enable 300 households to move out of homelessness each month into permanent housing and relieve pressure on the City's emergency shelter system.
7. City Council request the Government of Canada to create a dedicated Housing Benefit for refugees and asylum claimants, funded by immigration ministries allowing for quick access to housing and preventing homelessness for asylum seekers.
8. City Council request the Government of Ontario to develop a regional approach to homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area including ensuring that local governments can provide adequate and accessible shelter space for their residents.

9. City Council request the Government of Ontario to improve the adequacy of social assistance by increasing social assistance rates so that recipients are better able to meet their basic needs, including the cost of living (and housing) in Toronto.

10. City Council reiterate the Board of Health's request to the Government of Ontario to fund low-barrier crisis stabilization spaces for people with mental health and/or substance use related issues that operate 24 hours per day, seven days per week across the city as part of a full continuum of evidence-based services, treatment and wrap around supports.

11. City Council request the Government of Ontario to provide ongoing and sustainable funding for shelter services to support individuals experiencing homelessness.

12. City Council reiterate its request to the Government of Ontario to expand on its recent commitment to partner with the City of Toronto and create new supportive homes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, to meet the City's *HousingTO Action Plan* target of creating 18,000 new supportive homes by 2030.

13. City Council urge the Government of Canada to establish a National Encampment Response Plan as recommended in the Federal Housing Advocate's February 2024 final report.

EQUITY IMPACT

Toronto's homelessness service system serves a range of equity-deserving groups, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, seniors, low-income households, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, Black people, and refugee claimants, 2SLGBTQ+ people, women, and youth. Ensuring people experiencing homelessness, including those sleeping outdoors and in encampments, have access to safe, high-quality emergency shelter, and access to permanent housing opportunities is an important determinant of health and improves the social and economic status of an individual.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no impacts to the current 2024 Budget.

Funding of \$3,438,723 to implement the enhanced housing-focused outreach and support model at up to three encampment sites per year is included in the City's 2024 approved budget.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as contained in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 13, 14, and 15, 2023, City Council directed the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services and any other appropriate City Divisions, to consider the Court rulings in the Regional Municipality of Waterloo v. Persons Unknown and City of Kingston’s application to Superior Court in November 2023, and the judicial analysis of individuals’ rights under Section 7 the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in the development of the updated Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP), and to report back to Economic and Community Development Committee in the second quarter of 2024 on the updated policy response for the City of Toronto with respect to people living outside, that is accordance with individuals’ Charter rights.

[Agenda Item History – 2023.CC13.8 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

At its meeting on December 13, 14, and 15, 2023, City Council requested the Fire Chief and General Manager, Toronto Fire Services, in consultation with the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration and any other appropriate City Divisions, to report back to Economic and Community Development Committee in 2024, as part of the scheduled report-back to City Council on the updated Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP), on the actions that have been implemented by Toronto Fire Services to address fire safety for people living outdoors, and/or options to further increase fire safety for people living outdoors, in consideration of the recommendations contained in the 2018 Grant Faulkner inquest.

[Agenda Item History – 2023.EC8.8 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

At its meeting on November 8 and 9, 2023, City Council directed the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, CreateTO, the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning and the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building to explore leveraging City-owned land, including development sites, and to report back to City Council in the first quarter of 2024 as part of the Encampment Review Report with an evaluation of opportunities to use City-owned sites for the use of permanent and temporary supportive homes, considering rapid construction techniques including modular and micro-shelter and housing options.

[Agenda Item History – 2023.EC7.7 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

At its meeting on March 29, 30, 31, 2023, City Council adopted CC5.3 “Ombudsman Toronto Report: Investigation into the City’s Processes for Clearing Encampments in 2021”, accepting the report, and directed the City Officials to implement the report’s recommendations. City Council directed the appropriate City staff to report back to City Council in the fourth quarter of 2023 on:

- a. a revised mandate and strategic plan to guide the City’s encampment response that is aligned with both the updated Encampment Interdepartmental Protocol and the realization of the progressive right to housing as outlined in the Toronto Housing Charter;
- b. the composition, leadership and mandate of the inter-divisional Encampment Working Group;

- c. clear procedures required in advance of any issuing of notices of eviction;
- d. minimum time threshold established between an issuing of a notice of eviction and associated procedures to move forward with a clearing; and
- e. policy grounds to authorize any encampment clearings.

[Agenda Item History – 2023.CC5.3 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

At its meeting on July 19, 2022, City Council adopted CC47.2 “Ombudsman Toronto Interim Report: Investigation into the City’s Processes for Clearing Encampments in 2021”, accepting the Interim Report, and directed the City to implement the report’s recommendations.

[Agenda Item History – 2023.CC5.3 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

At its meeting on June 8, 2021, City Council adopted CC34.1 “COVID-19 Response Update: Protecting People Experiencing Homelessness and Ensuring the Safety of the Shelter System”, which included reiterating its commitment to taking a housing first and human rights approach to housing those experiencing homelessness, ensuring City staff implement a response consistent with findings in the Faulkner Inquest specifically as it relates to the health and safety of those living in encampments. At this meeting, City Council also adopted a goal of zero encampments and ending chronic homelessness.

[Agenda Item History – 2021.CC34.1 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

COMMENTS

1. Shelter System Update

Toronto’s shelter system is the largest in Canada, providing more beds per capita than any other Canadian city. The system is a mix of emergency and transitional shelters, 24-hour respite sites and 24-hour drop-ins. These programs serve specific client populations such as adult men, adult women, mixed adult, youth, and families.

The City also provides shelter to address the unique needs of those experiencing homelessness, including couples, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, Indigenous people, seniors, youth, and refugees. Many shelters provide the option of accommodating a service animal or pet and are accessible for individuals with disabilities.

The City also operates low-barrier 24-hour respite sites that provide space for clients who may not otherwise access a shelter program. For individuals who use substances, all City-administered shelters operate using a harm reduction approach and provide access to a continuum of harm reduction services such as on-site counselling, distribution of harm reduction supplies and supervised consumption services. Each day several shelter spaces are held for the Streets to Homes (S2H) and Encampment Office (EO) teams to offer to people living outdoors who may face greater barriers to accessing a shelter space through Central Intake.

Despite the diversity in the shelter system, the City continues to experience unprecedented demand and pressure for shelter services. As of, May 5, 2024, the City is accommodating 12,221 people experiencing homelessness, with 9,958 people in the shelter system, and 2,263 people accommodated outside the shelter system. Toronto is accommodating record levels of demand for emergency shelter.

There continues to be a humanitarian crisis of refugee claimants requiring shelter across the country – particularly acute in Toronto. As of May 5, 2024, the City is providing support to 6,457 refugee claimants, with over 4,795 people inside the system, and 1,662 people outside the shelter system, accounting for 53% of all people provided with accommodation.

Demand for shelter services has increased significantly over the past few years and is projected to continue throughout 2024 for reasons including, but not limited to, insufficient affordable housing supply, increased costs of living, inadequate wage and income supports, and an increase in the number of refugee claimants arriving in the city. Many people remain unable to access shelter beds each night. In 2023, there were, on average, 202 callers per day not matched to a shelter space. Data show these averages have almost doubled since 2022, which had an average of 106 unmatched callers per day.

Entries to homelessness continue to outpace exits to housing. A total of 5,927 people were successfully moved to permanent housing in 2023. Meanwhile, there were 10,183 new entries into homelessness in 2023. This net increase in demand, despite the progress in connecting people to housing, highlights the broad capacity issues facing the City's shelter system.

On April 12, 2024, the federal government released its *Solving the Housing Crisis: Canada's Housing Plan* including an additional \$1.3 billion over four years for the Reaching Home program, \$50 million of which will focus on accelerating community-level reductions in homelessness.

In addition, \$1.1 billion over three years will be provided to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to extend the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP). The current allocation for IHAP for 2024 is \$409 million nationally. The allocation for Toronto is not known at this point. The City of Toronto has budgeted more than \$250 million to support refugee claimant populations in shelters in 2024. It is anticipated that the federal government will support these expenses through the IHAP which is a cost-sharing program between the federal government and municipalities for costs incurred for sheltering asylum claimants. Based on Toronto's projected need due to shelter demand from refugee claimants, Toronto would require more than 50% of this total funding allocation. Without managing the volume of arrivals, the proposed 2024 funding may be insufficient.

The federal budget specifies that funding in 2026-27 will be conditional on provincial and municipal investments in permanent transitional housing solutions for asylum claimants. More intergovernmental coordination on opportunities for permanent transitional housing is needed, including working with partners such as settlement and

support services, as Toronto faces low vacancy rates and high rental costs that can present barriers to moving to housing.

The City continues intergovernmental advocacy for tri-level collaboration to address the current surge of arrivals; and to develop a sustainable, formal intergovernmental strategy for dealing with unplanned and sudden large-scale asylum seeker arrivals.

2. Encampments

Toronto is one among many cities across Canada which continue to see a rise in homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered, including people living in encampments. Demand for shelter services and affordable housing that far exceeds availability is related to the increase in the number of people sleeping outdoors and the growth in the number and size of encampments.

In Toronto, the surge in the number and size of encampments across the city was exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, due to an increase in people being discharged from provincial correctional facilities, reduced capacity in other provincial programs, and fears related to COVID-19 in the shelter system.

The City operates a system of more than 1,500 parks and ravines as shared recreational spaces for the benefit of the community, and a road system of 10,000 streets, totaling 5,937 kilometres and 530 bridges. Although encampment activity is often seasonal, as of May 5, 2024, there were 256 encampments¹ at 131 City owned properties. Of the 256 encampments, there were 190 encampments in parks at 77 locations; 11 parks have 5 or more encampments. The remaining 66 encampments were located on Right of Way locations. There is a risk that encampments will continue to grow in number and size based on projected increased demand for shelter services.

There are a variety of complex and systemic reasons why people live in encampments. Contributing factors include challenges accessing shelter and housing due to limited space and supply, concerns about safety and violence in shelters, perceived restrictive rules in shelters, unmet mental health and substance use needs, desire to maintain autonomy and personal space, and a desire for a sense of belonging to a community. A survey of 72 people with lived experience of encampments conducted by Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) in March 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the top three reasons for staying in encampments were: to have a sense of community, belonging and ability to live with partners, friends and family; a preference over shelters due to greater privacy and control over their daily lives; and loss of housing and no longer being able to stay with family and friends.

Addressing encampments is a complex socio-economic issue that requires a multi-divisional and sectoral approach and the commitment of all levels of government, community, and other stakeholders to invest in comprehensive public, social and health-related supports. The longer people stay outside, the greater the likelihood of poor health outcomes and the more challenging it is to facilitate connections to housing.

¹ **"Encampment"** refers to a structure on a portion of public or private lands that is used as a dwelling, lodging, living quarters or shelter for one or more persons experiencing homelessness and includes supporting structures.

The City welcomes the new focus in the 2024 federal budget and *Solving the Housing Crisis: Canada's Housing Plan* to address the urgent issue of unsheltered homelessness and encampments. The federal budget invests \$250 million over two years, to be cost-matched by provinces and territories, to address encampments and unsheltered homelessness with an emphasis on a human rights-based community action plan guided by a housing first approach to ending encampments. This focus aligns with the City's strategic approach to encampments outlined in this report. More information is needed on the City of Toronto allocation. This report recommends City Council request the Province of Ontario to fulfill the cost-matching requirement of the federal government, leveraging a total of \$500 million nationally, to address the urgent issue of encampments.

3. Implementation of the Ombudsman Toronto Report Recommendations

In September 2021, the Ombudsman Toronto launched an investigation into the City's clearing of encampments at Lamport Stadium, Trinity Bellwoods Park, and Alexandra Park, in response to significant public concerns raised about the City's clearing of encampments during the pandemic. The investigation focused on three key areas: 1) how the City planned encampment clearings, 2) how the City engaged stakeholders about the clearings, and 3) how the City communicated with the public about the clearings.

On July 14, 2022, the Ombudsman Toronto released an interim report [Investigation into the City's Process for Clearing Encampments in 2021](#) containing eight recommendations intended to increase the fairness, transparency, and accountability of the City's response to encampments. On July 19, 2022, City Council accepted the report and directed City staff to implement the recommendations. On March 24, 2023, the Ombudsman Toronto released a final report [Investigation into the City's Clearing of Encampments in 2021](#) with 23 recommendations, in addition to the eight provided in the interim report. On March 29, 2023, City Council accepted the report from Ombudsman Toronto and directed City staff to implement the report's recommendations. Both the interim and final report provided the City with a roadmap to guide its overall encampment approach moving forward.

The City has implemented all eight of the recommendations in the Ombudsman's interim report and 20 out of the 23 recommendations in the final report. Three recommendations are ongoing: one is a technical update to enhance TSSS' Shelter Management Information System related to encampments; and two involve repairing relationships with key community groups and continuing to provide quarterly updates to the Ombudsman. Rebuilding trust and repairing relationships is ongoing and takes time. TSSS has engaged with many community groups to inform the update to the IDP, has formed Community Partner Working Groups for encampment sites in which an enhanced housing-focused outreach and support model is being applied, and provides regular operational communication tools and formats for clients and community partners.

Attachment 1 contains the full list of recommendations directed to the City along with actions undertaken to implement the recommendations including updating the City's Interdepartmental Protocol.

Encampment Response Governance and Oversight

To support a coordinated and effective response to encampments the City established the Encampment Steering Committee and a Working Group. These two groups provide a strategic and operationally focused approach and align with the Ombudsman's recommendations.

An interdivisional Encampment Steering Committee was reconstituted in January 2023. The Steering Committee provides strategic oversight and decision-making on the City's encampment response. The Steering Committee is chaired by the General Manager of TSSS and includes senior executives from across the City. The goal is to support interdivisional collaboration and accountability with a common vision, goal, and resource plan for responding to encampments.

An interdivisional Encampment Working Group was also reconstituted in January 2023 to coordinate the City's response to encampments. The Working Group focuses on operational issues and service delivery coordination and is comprised of interdivisional frontline staff who are tasked with encampment related response. The group leverages best practice approaches including the *City's SafeTO: Community Safety & Well-being Plan* and associated SPIDER and FOCUS Toronto programs. This group includes TSSS (EO and S2H), Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR), Transportation Services (TS), Toronto Fire Services (TFS), Solid Waste Management Services (SWMS), and Corporate Security. Diversity in Divisions/units ensures subject matter expertise and specific considerations to support continual improvement to frontline encampment operations.

The Working Group provides a weekly space for information to be shared among interdivisional staff, including priority updates to support clients' needs and ensure locations impacting public safety are addressed by all relevant Divisions. There is Working Group representation on the Steering Committee to ensure operational issues are brought-forward and decision-making is applied and implemented at the Working Group level.

Encampment Response Coordination

The EO was created in 2020, with the goal of coordinating the City's response to encampments and facilitating access to shelter space for individuals living in encampments.

In August 2023, the EO moved from Toronto Emergency Management (previously the Office of Emergency Management) to TSSS, aligned with the Ombudsman's recommendation. The EO's move to TSSS has enhanced the City's ability to secure accessible shelter space for clients while continuing to address and prioritize encampments. As part of this move, and to ensure greater coordination, a new Outreach and Access section was created with oversight of existing units including the EO, S2H, Central Intake, and the System Oversight Office. While the EO and S2H work collaboratively and complement one another, they have different mandates.

The EO's role is to provide an overarching social services lens to any interdivisional operational activities related to encampments. The office plays a crucial role in facilitating coordination between City Divisions (PFR, TS, SWMS, Toronto Paramedics Services, TFS, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Corporate Security with Corporate Real Estate Management), community partners, and people in encampments. The staff complement has doubled since moving to TSSS, to respond to the growing number of encampments. The EO is funded for 16 FTEs in the 2024 budget and includes staff with expertise in street outreach, community development and policy development.

The S2H program, along with its funded outreach partners, provide 24/7 year-round outreach services to people experiencing homelessness outdoors, including encampments. The dedicated outreach staff actively engage with people in encampments, facilitating referrals to shelters, providing support to access health care, mental health services, harm reduction and income supports, and connecting people to permanent housing with supports. When notified about new encampments, the EO develops action plans alongside S2H. In 2023, 880 people were referred by S2H from encampments into the shelter system and 155 people staying in encampments were assisted by outreach staff to secure permanent housing. In 2023, outreach staff attended encampment locations 5,268 times.

Enhanced Housing-Focused Outreach and Supports

Dufferin Grove Park

After the large encampment clearings that occurred in the spring and summer of 2021, the City shifted its approach to responding to encampments, strengthening its focus on connecting people with housing. On June 8, 2021, City Council directed staff to work with people experiencing homelessness in encampments to develop individual and culturally appropriate housing plans on an accelerated basis regardless of whether the individual accepted a referral to the shelter system.

Key elements of this new approach were relationship building with people in encampments and expediting access to housing and other supports, without the use of enforcement. Dufferin Grove Park was identified as a priority site for this approach in August 2021 due to the encampment's scale, its rapid growth, its proximity to community supports, and opportunities for relationship building between local residents and the City.

The "Dufferin Grove Park approach" is a collaborative, enhanced housing first outreach model implemented in Dufferin Grove Park between August and December 2021, to respond to priority encampment sites. As best practice, this model enhanced existing outreach efforts by having City staff work collaboratively with community partners at the advisory and operational levels, to bring comprehensive social, income and health service supports directly to the park to help reduce service barriers and promote client self-determination. Key elements of this model include:

- Collaborative and integrated approaches
 - A working group was established to streamline implementation and service coordination;

- An onsite Information and Help Centre was established to provide access to supports as needed; and
- Weekly case conference meetings were held to align services from the City and community partners.
- Comprehensive and innovative supports
 - Physical, mental health, and harm reduction care provision was offered onsite, with warm transfers to other levels of care;
 - Mobile provision of social services onsite reduced barriers to services;
 - Dedicated permanent and supportive housing options; and
 - A parallel maintenance and sanitation strategy reduced the overall footprint and impact of the encampment on other uses of the park.

Additionally, an encampment prevention strategy was implemented to help ensure that no new encampments were added to the park and outreach efforts could focus on relationship building with existing clients.

As a result of the approach, 90 individuals had successful outcomes such as referrals to shelter programs, transition to permanent housing or family reunification. Data as of March 2024 indicates that of the 26 people moved to permanent housing only one person has returned to shelter. A total of 101 tents or structures were removed, as all encampment residents left the park with successful outcomes or moved voluntarily.

In response to the Ombudsman’s interim report recommendations, on June 9, 2023, the City released its report [A Housing First approach for encampments: Findings from Dufferin Grove Park](#) identifying key learnings from its work at Dufferin Grove Park. The approach used by the City at Dufferin Grove Park was highlighted as a promising model in the Ombudsman’s Final report. City Council confirmed its support for this approach for responding to encampments in March 2023.

Allan Gardens

The City used a continuous learning and evaluation approach to refine the model used at Dufferin Grove Park at other priority encampments including Allan Gardens.

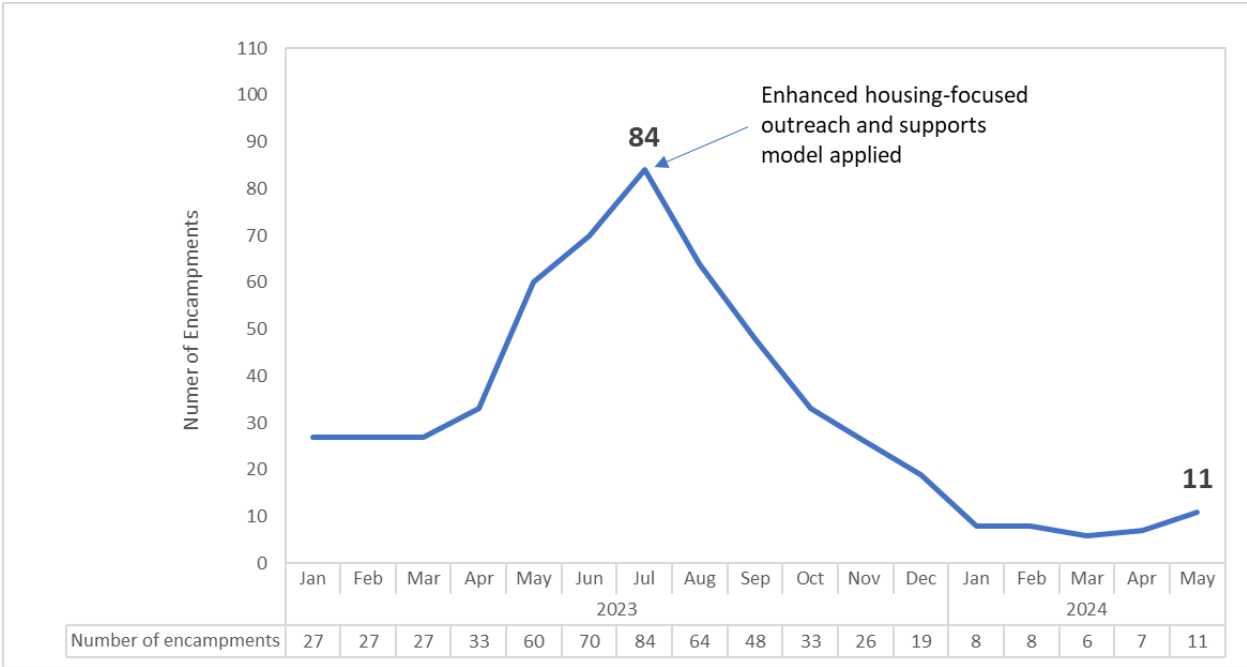
At Allan Gardens, City staff and community outreach partners have worked continuously with individuals in encampments to build relationships, address health and safety needs, and connect people to increased services and supports in shelter and housing (see Appendix 1 for a list of community partners supporting the response). There was focused effort to bring housing, health, mental health, income, and harm reduction supports into the park.

To enhance outreach efforts, the City increased services and supports to the people in the encampment in the summer of 2023. A schedule of ongoing visiting services was developed including physical and mental health care services, harm reduction services, income/identification/tax supports, referrals to shelter space, housing supports, meal programs and daytime drop-ins, fire safety information, survival supplies (water, sleeping bags, weather-appropriate clothing) and waste disposal.

The City also established an Information & Help Centre in the park, using a temporary, modified shipping container. The Centre provides a consistent, on-the-ground presence in the park to facilitate relationship building with individuals in the encampment, advocates, and other interested parties. The Centre serves as a connecting point for staff and community partners to centralize social and health service supports provided, while making referrals to the shelter system, including permanent housing. It also serves as a resource for neighbours and other community members.

The City formed the Allan Gardens Community Working Group, consisting of City staff, neighbouring community organizations and organizations supporting individuals in the park. This group works collaboratively to increase consensus among all stakeholders, with a focus on developing effective solutions.

Figure 1: Number of Encampments in Allan Gardens (January 2023 to May 2024)



All people engaged by staff were offered referral to shelter and assistance with housing. As of May 9, 2024, a total of 97 people have been housed and 314 people referred to the shelter system. There are approximately 11 encampments remaining, which is down from a high of 84 encampments in July 2023 (Figure 1).

Key factors in the City’s success at Allan Gardens include:

- Consistent and ongoing outreach and communication while prioritizing the development of trust and relationship building with people living in encampments;
- Establishing an Information and Help Centre to provide a consistent on-site resource;
- Scheduled service provision including health, harm reduction, income and tax supports and offers of shelter and housing;
- Facilitating access to basic services and supports including potable drinking water, and washrooms, waste disposal and providing survival supplies such as sleeping bags and clothing;

- Dedicating shelter and housing opportunities for people staying in encampments; and
- Establishing a working group to ensure clear, regular, communication and understanding between the City, its partners, and the surrounding community/neighbours.

Through work at both Dufferin Grove Park and Allan Gardens, the City has successfully demonstrated that it is possible to support people in encampments to access shelter and housing that meet their needs and end large and entrenched encampment sites, ensuring that public spaces remain accessible to all residents.

4. Updating the City’s Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP)

In the Ombudsman Toronto report, the Ombudsman identified the importance of updating the *City of Toronto Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP)*, adopted by City Council in 2005, to ensure a coordinated city-wide approach to encampment response and to reflect operational and organizational changes. The Ombudsman also recommended including a “rights-based approach to housing” to support the City’s work responding to encampments.

The Ombudsman further recommended that the work be informed by feedback collected through consultation with people with lived experience in encampments, community organizations that provide services to people impacted by homelessness, and internal and external stakeholders working in the fields of homelessness and human rights.

Stakeholder Engagement Process

The City retained Third Party Public to facilitate extensive engagement with a diversity of stakeholders. Between February 2023 and March 2024, more than 300 stakeholders were engaged including:

- 91 people living in different encampment locations across Toronto through peer-led, place-based engagements
- 2 focus groups with people with lived experience
- 3 sessions with City staff
- 1 meeting with the Toronto Police Services (TPS)
- 21 introductory conversations with key stakeholders including service providers, advocates, Business Improvement Areas (BIA), Residents’ Associations (RA)
- 1 survey of BIAs
- 1 survey of RAs
- 2 meetings with the Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee
- 3 drop-in sessions with service providers and advocates to share process feedback and information from the City
- 2 report-back meetings with BIAs
- 1 report-back meeting with RAs
- 1 report-back meeting with advocates
- 2 report-back meetings with service providers and advocates

- 1 report-back meeting with City staff

In addition, TSSS has made commitments to meaningful engagement with Indigenous partners in its *Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan*. Supporting Indigenous organizations working with people living in encampments to share expertise with the City to develop a human-centred, trauma-informed approach is an action for TSSS in the City's *Reconciliation Action Plan*.

In keeping with these strategic commitments, Nbisiing Consulting was retained to lead the co-creation and delivery of culturally safe engagement with Indigenous partners and people with lived experience including:

- 2 engagement sessions held with Indigenous leaders and service providers
- 1 sharing meeting with fifteen Indigenous people with lived experience of staying in encampments

Input gathered from all engagement sessions was analyzed and compiled into a detailed engagement summary report (Attachment 2).

Stakeholder Engagement: What We Heard

Key themes from the stakeholder engagement included:

- Permanent affordable and supportive housing is the solution to homelessness and encampments
- Encampments are symptomatic of wider system failings, specifically the lack of affordable housing
- People in encampments need access to basic supports while living outside including food, water, hygiene and sanitation facilities, waste collection and sharp disposal as well as materials for keeping clean, dry, and warm in colder weather
- City staff who engage with people living in encampments should work with people in encampments in a way which respects their dignity, appreciates their experiences, including that their tent or structure is their home
- Engagement should be grounded in a housing first approach while providing people with services and supports available on a regular basis
- Transparent, accessible, and plain language communication, along with sufficient notice is needed around situations when enforcement will occur
- Coordination across City Divisions and clear communication of the City's overall approach, including how divisions will work together is key to a successful response
- Encampment response must recognize the distinct rights of Indigenous people, their unique and sacred relationship with the land, and trauma from historical and ongoing colonialism and dispossession from the land, ensuring alignment with the City's *Reconciliation Action Plan*
- Concerns about safety, well-being and security related to encampments – people living in encampments expressed fear of theft and violence, and residents and businesses reported being impacted by safety and sanitation concerns including accumulation of waste and debris, behaviours related to unmet substance use and mental health needs
- All viable alternatives should be explored before enforcement

- Encampment response should not be police-led, and the Toronto Police Service (TPS) should only be involved as a last resort if necessary. This feedback was echoed by the TPS themselves in the engagement sessions.
- The City should look to other jurisdictions for best practices in encampment response

Key feedback from engagement sessions with people living in encampments included:

- Provide clearer and more consistent pathways out of homelessness. Encampment residents were unclear as to how to obtain housing if it were available.
- Explore the creation of a specialized shelter to serve those hardest to house and those who have lived outside for extended periods of time
- Disinterest in accessing traditional shelters because of perceptions that they are too institutional, unsafe, or unable to accommodate their needs (e.g. too far away, they had a partner and/or a pet)
- Access to basic needs is required while broader solutions are developed
- Distrust of City staff, not knowing when they might be displaced or asked to leave
- Provide clearer communication about what City staff are going to do and more up-to-date information about relevant issues (e.g. shelter capacity, housing lists, and encampment clearings)
- More outreach and information on accessing resources and services
- A more dignified approach to engaging with people living in encampments, regarding how staff interact with people and their belongings
- Provide opportunities to contribute to the City's efforts to end homelessness

Review of Key Reports and Jurisdictional Scan

In addition to stakeholder engagement, staff reviewed the following key reports related to a human rights-based approach to encampments, ensuring alignment in the updated IDP with key principles:

- Upholding Dignity and Human Rights: the Federal Housing Advocate's Review of Homeless Encampments – Final Report, 2024
- Homeless Encampments: Municipal Engagement Guide, 2023
- Overview of Encampments Across Canada: A Right to Housing Approach, 2022
- Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Housing: A Literature Review, 2022
- Homeless Encampments Through a Human Rights Lens, 2022
- A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada: A Human Rights Approach, 2020
- Encampments Rights Review, 2020

A review of encampment protocols in other Canadian jurisdictions was also undertaken. Several reviewed cities have a protocol outlining a coordinated approach to encampments. Many have ensured their protocol aligns with the *National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada*, including Hamilton and Winnipeg. Each jurisdiction reviewed emphasized ongoing engagement with people in a dignified way, provision of services and supports to people in place, while working to refer people in encampments to shelter or housing. They also maintain an approach which explores all viable options before encampment removal.

Key Updates to the City's IDP

The *City of Toronto Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto* (IDP), in Attachment 3, has been updated to outline a clear, transparent, and coordinated process to guide City staff in delivering the City's response to encampments on City-owned spaces.

The goal of the City's response is to use a human rights-based approach to support people living in encampments with the ultimate goal of assisting them in accessing indoor space. The City also recognizes its responsibility to ensure that public spaces remain safe and accessible to all residents, including people experiencing homelessness.

In supporting its goals, and before the City considers enforcement, the City will determine if:

- Circumstances in an encampment or encampments pose a public safety or health and safety risk to people living in encampments, other members of the public and/or surrounding communities; or
- People in encampments have been provided with enhanced and intensive supports, particularly people with complex needs, and other reasonable tools and options have been exhausted, and they continue to decline indoor space or decline to meaningfully work on the development of a housing plan.

Key updates to the IDP include:

- Updated guiding principles grounded in a human rights approach.
- Clarity on how City staff will work with people living in encampments, with the goal of supporting people to access indoor spaces.
- Clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each City Division, outlining how the EO as the lead will work with other Divisions to effectively coordinate and deliver the City's response.
- Outlining the process for initiating and conducting enforcement, used as a last resort.
- Clear procedures for encampment communication, with a focus on the health and safety and well-being of people living in encampments and surrounding communities.
- Encampment prevention provisions to ensure public spaces are restored and accessible to all.
- Commitment to meaningful participation of people with lived experience, service providers and community partners as part of the ongoing implementation.
- Recognizing the knowledge and experience of, and working collaboratively with, Indigenous communities to utilize culturally based approaches to support Indigenous people living in encampments.

The IDP aligns with other key City strategies to advance community safety and well-being including the City's *SafeTO: A Community Safety and Well-Being Plan* and the *Our Health Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto* in its shift away from an enforcement-focused approach to one that is people-centred and trauma-informed.

A priority action in the City's *SafeTO Plan* is embedding a human rights-based approach into policy development and service planning across the City.

The City also consulted with the Maytree Foundation, whose mandate is to advance systemic solutions to social and economic issues through a human rights approach, to ground the IDP in a human rights approach to encampments. In addition, the City's Legal Services Division was consulted in the development of the IDP to ensure consideration of the Court rulings in the *Regional Municipality of Waterloo v. Persons Unknown* and City of Kingston's application to Superior Court in November 2023, and the judicial analysis of individuals' rights under Section 7 the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. City Divisions involved in encampment response were consulted in the development of the IDP through the engagement sessions and regular meetings with the Encampment Steering Committee.

The IDP aligns with the recently released federal housing plan and investment of \$250 million through the federal budget 2024 to address encampments through the creation of a human rights-based community action plan guided by a housing first approach to ending homelessness.

The IDP in attachment 3 will be implemented immediately upon receiving approval from City Council, and operational policies will be updated to support the implementation. TSSS will work with other City Divisions to support the training and capacity building of City staff involved in responding to encampments. The City will collaborate with subject matter experts to ensure a practical understanding of a human rights approach, cultural sensitivities, and understanding of the needs of people in encampments. Further, the City will increase its capacity to assess the health and justice needs of encampment residents and work to create access to the most appropriate services.

The protocol will need to evolve and adapt to emerging issues and trends. The IDP will be maintained by TSSS with a commitment to ongoing monitoring and periodic review. An evaluation of its implementation will be conducted. This will be based on ongoing feedback and meaningful participation of City staff, people living in encampments, community service providers, and Indigenous people with lived experience and service providers.

5. Addressing Fire Safety for People in Encampments

Prioritizing the safety of people living in encampments as well as surrounding communities is a key focus of the City's response to encampments. In December 2023, City Council requested TFS, in consultation with TSSS and other appropriate City Divisions, to report back on actions that have been implemented by TFS to address fire safety for people living outdoors, and/or options to further increase fire safety, in consideration of the recommendations contained in the 2018 Grant Faulkner inquest.

TFS engages directly with people living in encampments, providing fire safety information, including how to prevent a fire from occurring, and what to do in the case of a fire. In 2020, TFS allocated 20% of the total TFS Public Education staffing complement to focus on actively engaging with encampment residents on all aspects of

fire safety education. This dedicated team engages in response to the unique and significant fire safety risks associated with encampments and living outdoors. In 2022, the team began collecting detailed data on fire safety activities with encampment residents (see Table 1 for a summary of activities).

Table 1: TFS Public Education with People Living Outside

Criteria	2022	2023
Number of site visits	815	620
Number of engagements with encampment occupants on fire safety	1,543	1,848
Number of hazardous items removed (propane/gasoline)	121	242
Number of post-incident fire education responses	21	29

In 2023, the team engaged with 1,848 people across 620 encampment site visits. If a hazardous fire safety item is identified during a visit, such as propane or gasoline on site that poses an immediate threat to life safety, the team will take the necessary steps to ensure the risk is mitigated and have the item removed for proper disposal. In 2023, more than 200 hazardous items were removed from encampments sites, a 100% increase from 2022.

When a fire at an encampment site does occur, staff will attend where necessary in the following days to provide fire safety advice to the people staying at the site. In 2023, there were 29 post-fire follow-up visits completed.

The 2018 Coroners’ inquest into the death of Mr. Grant Faulkner resulted in 35 recommendations from the Coroner’s Jury. Recommendation 21 was addressed to the City:

Revise its existing policies to allow the provision of “survival equipment and/or supplies (e.g. sleeping bags, fire retardant blankets, safe heat sources) and/or safety information to individuals who stay outside rather than accessing shelter/low-barrier overnight services. While finding appropriate housing is always a high priority, there must be enough flexibility to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

Currently, there is no safe heating source available for use in tents or other makeshift outdoor shelters. Sleeping bags and blankets are provided by outreach teams and S2H.

In 2020, Toronto experienced a 246% increase in the number of emergency fire incidents in encampment sites. The five-year summary of TFS fire responses to encampment sites across the city are provided below in Table 2.

Table 2: TFS Emergency Fire Responses in Encampment Sites 2019-2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of fire incidents	62	215	218	216	249
Number of uncontrolled fires*	29	113	130	101	145

*Classified as 01, 02 or 03 incidents.

Despite the focused and proactive fire safety education efforts, TFS continues to respond to an increasing number of fires at encampment sites, including 145 uncontrolled fires in 2023, representing a 43% increase over 2022 (Table 2). Two fatalities and two serious injuries have occurred because of fires in encampments in 2023. All were investigated by both TFS and the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal.

6. The City’s Encampment Approach and Strategy

In March 2023, City Council requested City staff to report back on a revised mandate and strategic plan to guide the City’s encampment response that is aligned with both the updated IDP and the realization of the progressive right to adequate housing as outlined in the *Toronto Housing Charter*.

The goal of the City’s strategic approach to encampments is to advance the City’s commitment to furthering the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing while continuing to support individuals living in encampments to meet their identified shelter and housing needs. The approach also aims to support the safety of people in encampments and surrounding communities, ensuring that encampments do not become entrenched, and that public spaces remain safe and accessible to all residents.

This approach includes four key components:

- a) Expanding the enhanced housing-focused outreach and support model
- b) Exploring new service models for people in encampments
- c) Enhancing safety in the shelter system for staff and clients
- d) Increasing permanent housing opportunities and shelter system flow

Figure 2: The City’s Encampment Approach and Strategy



A. Expanding the Enhanced Housing-Focused Outreach and Support Model

The City's approach to supporting people in encampments prioritizes their needs, well-being, and safety, through rapport and relationship building. Supporting people while they are living in encampments reduces harm for people living in encampments in the interim and is an important component of the City's human rights-based approach to encampments.

The City's S2H outreach team and partner agencies conduct outreach to proactively connect with people living outdoors, 24 hours per day, seven days a week, year-round. At encampment sites such as Dufferin Grove Park and Allan Gardens and recently Clarence Square, the City has applied an enhanced housing-focused outreach and support model. In collaboration with community outreach partners, there is focused effort to bring enhanced housing, health, mental health, income, and harm reduction supports to public spaces.

Given the City's success, staff will expand this enhanced outreach model to other encampment sites where determined appropriate and within TSSS' current approved budget.

The cost of the Allan Gardens response was approximately \$1.7 million for the 6-month period of June 26 to December 31, 2023. Of this, \$1.1 million was for operational costs associated with staffing, social services, and security from TSSS and other key Divisions including TFS, PFR and Corporate Security; and \$624,098 for costs required to enhance services associated with community safety teams and the Information and Help Centre, including the hydro and water costs of operation. Funding of \$3,438,723 to implement the enhanced housing-focused outreach and support model is included in the City's 2024 approved budget. This funding could support an enhanced response for up to three encampment sites annually.

In addition to sufficient resources, the following must be present for this approach to be successful:

- Dedicated and available housing and shelter options;
- Dedicated staff from various City Divisions, local community partners, resident groups, and volunteers;
- Onsite community supports to provide critical services; and
- Sufficient physical space in the park/public space to co-locate an intensive level of resources, as well as proximity to services.

Staff will consider a variety of factors to determine which encampment will be prioritized for this approach including but not limited to, the size of the encampment, length of time since the encampment was established, degree of vulnerability of people living in the encampment, availability of resources, and impacts on local residents and surrounding community. The General Manager of TSSS, in consultation with the Encampment Steering Committee, plays a key role in determining priority encampments for this enhanced response.

Encampment prevention plays a crucial role in the City's response to encampments. The most effective means of encampment prevention is the City's efforts to increase permanent deeply affordable and supportive housing with a range of support services to help people live independently.

The City may implement prevention and restoration measures for a period of time to manage encampment growth or prevent the establishment of new encampments at identified locations to ensure that public spaces are restored and accessible to all. Measures may include fencing, re-seeding, and landscaping as well as animating public spaces. In these circumstances the City will provide information and signage may be posted at a park or public spaces advising that prevention and restoration measures are being taken.

B. Exploring New Service Models for People in Encampments

Permanent affordable and supportive housing is the solution to homelessness. While the City's priority is to support people in encampments to access indoor space, not all people staying outdoors are able or willing to accept traditional shelter services for various complex and systemic reasons.

In November 2023, City Council directed relevant City Divisions to explore leveraging City-owned land, including development sites with an evaluation of opportunities to use City-owned sites for the use of permanent and temporary supportive homes, considering rapid construction techniques including modular and micro shelter and housing options.

This work is underway as part of the implementation of the [Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy](#) (HSCIS), approved by City Council in November 2023. The HSCIS was developed to proactively inform capital spending decisions to promote recovery and stability in the City's shelter system and address the unprecedented demands for shelter beds. This includes work underway to increase the number of permanent and long-term shelter spaces in the City's base shelter system by 1,600 spaces across 20 new shelter sites (approximately 80 beds per site) over the next 10 years (2024-2033) to replace COVID-19 hotels, moderately grow the shelter system, and increase the stability of the City's shelter system.

As outlined in [EC9.4 Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy: Real Estate Strategy and Lease Extensions](#), TSSS, CREM and CreateTO are undertaking a real estate review to identify potential sites for new shelters, with the initial real estate review focusing on the identification of vacant City-owned properties, suitable sites for infill development, or sites with existing uses that can be easily relocated. The real estate review of City-owned properties is being conducted in coordination with the *HousingTO Action Plan* to ensure integration of shelter and affordable housing targets across the city. It is expected that a significant portion of shelters in the first five years of the HSCIS will be delivered by renovating existing City buildings, developing City-owned lands, or leveraging real estate from other levels of governments. The City is also engaging with other levels of government and public agencies to explore opportunities for partnerships and leveraging public owned real estate assets for both affordable housing and shelter infrastructure.

Through the HSCIS, TSSS staff are exploring new service models, infrastructure forms and sites, to address the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to, lower barrier models for people living in encampments and/or with long periods of living outdoors.

Lower barrier models such as 24-hour respite sites, 24-hour women's drop-in services and day-time drop-in programs are already part of Toronto's homelessness service system. Micro shelters (sometimes referred to as tiny shelters) are an approach being explored and tested in several communities across Canada and the United States, as an alternative service model for people in encampments who may be less likely to access traditional shelter services.

Jurisdictional Scan

To respond to City Council direction, a scan was completed of approaches and service models for supporting people in encampments in Canadian and select United States cities, including Halifax, Nova Scotia; London, Ontario; Hamilton, Ontario; Peterborough, Ontario; Kingston, Ontario; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Waterloo, Ontario; Kitchener, Ontario; Ottawa, Ontario and Vancouver, Washington State. The scan built on a comprehensive jurisdictional scan conducted by the City of Hamilton on encampment protocols, sanctioned encampments, and operating models. The Hamilton jurisdictional scan also included Brantford, Niagara Region, St. Catharines, Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Edmonton, Fredericton, Prince George, Vancouver, and Victoria, and jurisdictions in the United States such as Portland, Chicago, Tacoma, San Jose, Oakland, and Denver.

In August 2023, the City of Hamilton approved an Encampment Protocol that applies a people-centered, housing first approach emphasizing relationship building and ongoing communication and transparency with people living in encampments, with offers of shelter and housing as they become available. The Protocol permits encampments in clusters of no more than five tents in certain locations, and there must be at least 50 meters separating the encampment or cluster from other encampments or clusters of shelters. Further, to balance public and private interests, certain restrictions were put in place, including but not limited to encampments being at least 100 metres from schools, playgrounds, pools, and spray pads; and at least 50 metres from sports fields, courts, baseball diamonds, beaches, and ponds.

As part of this report, Hamilton City staff explored but did not recommend sanctioned encampments, which would have involved the City establishing three to five sites where 20 to 50 tents could be set up, including proper sanitation and services. This decision was due to costs associated with developing a full serviced and managed encampment site model, mixed support from public and stakeholder consultations, unclear outcomes regarding pathways to housing, and limited resources.

Halifax is the only reviewed city in Canada which has designated sites in select public parks/spaces for encampments. In June 2022, Halifax Regional Council approved an approach of designating four parks/locations in Halifax and Dartmouth for people experiencing homelessness to camp, with certain restrictions, as a stopgap measure

until there were sufficient shelter spaces available. More sites were added in October 2023. People experiencing homelessness camping in designated spaces are expected to follow municipal regulations including noise by-laws and a ban on fires. Additionally, encampments must be at least 50 meters away from schools, daycares, playgrounds, or cemeteries. In February 2024, Halifax Regional Municipality decided to close five of the designated sites, citing sufficient shelter spaces available for people living outdoors. As of March 2024, four sites are still designated for encampments. A staff report in April 2024 recommends opening more designated sites as the four sites are over capacity.

Several cities are using micro shelters as an alternative service model to support people in encampments, particularly those who may be less likely to access traditional shelter services. Micro shelters are small, prefabricated, structures, and usually equipped with electricity, insulation, heating, and cooling. They can be quickly assembled, providing more rapid accommodation and tailored supports and services to people while housing opportunities become available. They are also mobile (not drivable), allowing them to be moved. They are often paired with an existing or modular support structure with provisions for washroom, showering and kitchen facilities.

In 2020, A Better Tent City opened in Kitchener, providing micro shelters to approximately 50 people. The micro shelters were built on land owned by the City of Kitchener and the Waterloo Region District School board. In April 2023, the Region of Waterloo opened a separate micro shelter community to provide people staying in encampments with a more enhanced support and service structure. This model includes different infrastructure than A Better Tent City such as using steel for the shelters, fencing and the provision of more regular on-site supports. The community includes 50 standalone micro shelters, each equipped with electricity, heating, and air conditioning, along with support buildings with necessary plumbing. A four-month interim assessment has found a positive impact for people with the highest needs. Most people staying in the micro shelters have reported that they prefer them over encampments. They have also noted increased feelings of safety and that the service model has assisted them in recovery. Several people have also moved into permanent housing.

In November 2023, the City of Peterborough opened 50 transitional micro shelters and in August 2023, Hamilton City Council approved a micro shelter pilot program. Work is underway to identify a suitable location for the Hamilton community. In October 2023, the government of Nova Scotia announced plans to purchase 200 micro shelters for use across the province. Many of these are planned for the Halifax area, with the intent of connecting people living in encampments with these tiny shelters.

In the state of Washington, the City of Vancouver has opened four micro shelter communities to date (referred to as 'Safe Stay Communities'). Each Safe Stay Community has approximately 20 modular shelters that can accommodate up to 40 residents and provides onsite restrooms and showers for residents. Safe Stay Communities are temporary shelter communities offering residents greater access to services, increased stability, and safe, healthy, and dignified living conditions to support transitions out of homelessness. A non-profit operator provides 24/7 onsite management and services. As of August 31, 2023, the Safe Stay Communities have served 186 people. Preliminary assessments have shown positive outcomes: 48 people have found work and 73 people have moved into stable housing.

Key Elements of Service Models for People in Encampments

Based on learnings from other communities, from people with lived experience, and other stakeholders, new service models are needed that provide a safer alternative to encampments for people who may be less likely to access traditional shelter systems and have lived outdoors for extended periods of time.

Key elements and principles of these models include:

- Supporting the autonomy, dignity, safety, and privacy of clients
- Fostering a sense of community and belonging
- Addressing barriers to access including low barrier intake processes and the ability to accommodate couples and people with pets
- A strong focus on building trust and capacity, ensuring stability and progress towards housing
- Higher levels of services and support, including harm reduction, physical and mental health supports, justice supports as well as other social supports
- Adequate staffing for intensive case management
- Staff training in trauma-informed care, de-escalation, conflict mediation, harm reduction, applying restorative justice approaches and responding to violence and service restrictions
- Consideration of programs for people with histories of violence and service restrictions
- Ensuring culturally appropriate supports and spaces to meet the diverse needs of groups overrepresented in encampments
- Supporting the meaningful and active participation of clients in decision-making processes that impact them
- Consideration of geographic location to facilitate access to transit and maintain connections to communities, family, and social and other support systems

Staff will continue to explore and monitor how to apply these key elements and principles as part of ongoing work to implement the HSCIS to better support people living in encampments.

C. Enhancing Safety in the Shelter System for Staff and Clients

In addition to prioritizing the safety and well-being of people living in encampments, TSSS is committed to continuously improving shelter safety for service users and recognizes this as a key component of the City's strategic approach to encampments.

In 2021, TSSS reached out to researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) to lead research on shelter safety. The intent was to develop evidence and recommendations that would support improvements in Toronto's shelter system. The study was conducted in partnership with several community homelessness service providers. Funding for this study was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, City of Toronto, and Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The two-year study examined factors that contribute to physical and psychological safety in emergency shelters for staff and service users, as well as the perceived causes and consequences of violence and service restrictions among people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Further, organizational approaches for managing and mitigating risk, including service restrictions practices and outcomes, were explored.

Overall, the study concluded that violence and service restrictions are serious issues in Toronto's shelter system. These problems interact with other critical social issues, including the rise in unsheltered homelessness, the affordable housing crisis, a worsening toxic drug supply, and an insufficient supply of mental health services and housing-based supports.

The study proposed twenty-two recommendations to advance safety in the shelter system for people experiencing homelessness and staff. Recommendations focus on the following key areas: reviewing and improving service restriction data, processes and policies; developing specialized programs to support people with extensive histories of violence and service restrictions; intergovernmental advocacy for mental health supports and crisis intervention in shelter; and strengthening and improving training for frontline shelter staff.

The [final report](#) and full set of recommendations from the CAMH study was released on April 30, 2024 and is being used by TSSS to inform service improvements, updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards and the 24-Hour Respite Site Standards and will support the City's priority to develop a Shelter Safety Action Plan to increase safety for clients and staff in the shelter system. Staff will be reporting on the development of a Shelter Safety and Action Plan at the Economic and Community Development Committee in Q4 2024.

The action plan will be informed by other initiatives underway to enhance safety in the shelter system including:

- Updating the Toronto Shelter Standards to enhance requirements for training, health and safety practices, and incorporating an anti-Black racism lens to improve experiences of Black people accessing shelter services
- Launching a Behavioural Risk Alert Safety System in the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) to enable increased information sharing about clients with a history of violent behaviour with the goal of supporting shelter staff in proactive safety planning
- Facilitating access to health and mental health services across the homelessness service system through several key health partners, including CAMH, Inner City Health Associates, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Services, LOFT Community Services, The Neighbourhood Group, and other partners

These actions and initiatives support the City Council approved *Homelessness Solutions Service Plan's* key priority to enhance the safety and quality of shelters.

D. Increasing Permanent Housing Opportunities and Shelter System Flow

A critical component of the City's strategic approach to encampments is the need for permanent deeply affordable and supportive housing with a range of supports to help people live independently and with dignity. This was heard by an overwhelming number of stakeholders and partners the City spoke with.

As set out in the [HousingTO Action Plan](#), including its updated targets in [EX9.3 – Generational Transformation of Toronto's Housing System to Urgently Build More Affordable Homes](#), and the [Homelessness Solutions Service Plan](#), by increasing available supportive and affordable housing opportunities and reducing the length of time that people spend in shelter, existing shelter capacity will be freed up to be used for its originally intended purpose of short-term, emergency shelter. Concurrent with enhancements to the City's approach to encampments as outlined in this report, staff will continue to prioritize the funding and delivery of new rent-geared-to-income, supportive, affordable, and rental homes that are needed to meet the City's housing targets.

In May 2022, City Council adopted the 24-Month [Housing Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) for 2023-2024 aimed at creating 4,000 new affordable and supportive housing opportunities prioritizing people experiencing homelessness. This plan built on success delivering new supportive housing opportunities and housing benefits through a similar plan in 2021-2022, and set new enhanced targets including:

- 2,500 new supportive housing opportunities through acquisitions, modular housing, re-purposing existing stock, and investments in operating costs for support services; and
- 1,500 affordable housing opportunities through housing benefits, including the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB).

Federal capital funding received through the Rapid Housing Initiative – Phase 3 (as reported to City Council in December 2023) will contribute to the City reaching these goals, however, falls short of what is required to meet the 24-Month plan target. Staff estimate funding for an additional 1,300 new supportive homes is needed immediately to reach this target, with the remainder of the new supportive housing opportunities to be delivered through the Rapid Rehousing Initiative with Toronto Community Housing Corporation and Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation.

Additional allocations of funding through the COHB program have been critical to meeting 24-Month Plan targets, and this program has become the leading pathway out of homelessness in Toronto. In 2023 and 2024, the City already exceeded the target of providing 1,500 housing benefits, having secured over \$38 million to provide a housing benefit to 3,298 households. In December 2023, City Council re-iterated its requests to the Government of Canada and Government of Ontario to urgently scale up investments in the COHB program and commit to providing at least 3,100 net new allocations per year in Toronto. The City's COHB allocation for the 2024-2025 fiscal year and anticipated number of associated households supported to find permanent housing is still outstanding at the time of submission of this report.

To support this Council direction, staff continue with intergovernmental efforts to advocate for provincial and federal funding, including:

- Increasing COHB funding by \$36 million annually to sustain the 2,300 estimated households enrolled in the program through the Province and City's additional COHB investment in 2023/24;
- Providing the City with a COHB allocation in 2024/25 of \$54 million to enable 300 households to move out of homelessness each month into permanent housing and relieve pressure on the City's emergency shelter system; and
- Creating a dedicated Housing Benefit for refugees and asylum claimants, funded by immigration ministries allowing for quick access to housing and preventing homelessness for asylum seekers.

Despite successes in delivering new supportive housing and the COHB program, since mid-2022, there were almost no exits from the shelter system without the support of a housing benefit or rent-geared-to income housing. The extremely low rates of social assistance do not reflect the actual cost of living in Toronto. Toronto's shelter system has great difficulty connecting shelter residents who rely on social assistance benefits to housing opportunities without significant additional financial supports. Increasing social assistance rates to reflect the cost of living, and housing, in Toronto remains a priority of intergovernmental engagement that would have a significant impact on the ability of thousands of Toronto residents to find a home they can afford.

New deeply affordable homes with wrap-around supports are critical to providing housing stability for people experiencing chronic homelessness, including those living in encampments. Beyond the City's 24-Month plan, significant and sustainable federal and provincial investments in Toronto's housing system are needed to respond to the housing crisis and realize the City's targets, as updated and outlined in EX9.3 – Generational Transformation of Toronto's Housing System to Urgently Build More Affordable Homes. City staff will continue to advance these ambitious housing plans and prioritize engagement and advocacy with other levels of government to secure the funding needed to realize these goals.

7. Multi-Sectoral Coordination for People with Complex Needs

The City is committed to support people experiencing homelessness including those living in encampments, with complex mental health and/or substance use issues, and/or those repeatedly refusing service. TSSS is already applying an enhanced outreach and support approach in coordination with multiple City Divisions and community service providers in its work to respond to encampments.

Building on this work, a formal coordinated multi-sector approach that prioritizes the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness will be developed to provide the appropriate supports and services to address their needs. By bringing together representation from various organizations and sectors such as Toronto Public Health, CAMH, homelessness service and health care providers, and other community organizations, the City will leverage resources such as indoor spaces, specialized services such as mental health and harm reduction supports), build on existing efforts and partnerships, and address service gaps and identify opportunities for enhanced coordination. Additional insights would support this undertaking including understanding

respective budgets and resource requirements, harmonizing data collection and management systems, and a comprehensive needs assessment through the City's Streets Needs Assessment (fall 2024). Through this process the City would seek to build consensus, garner buy in, and develop a multi-sector case management approach that prioritizes compassion, resource efficiency, and coordination.

CONCLUSION

The City's strategic approach to encampments includes a commitment to advancing the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing, while supporting people in encampments where they are at and working with them to meet their needs.

The goal is to establish stability and trust with people living in encampments and provide support through ongoing outreach and connections to shelter and housing, over enforcement. The approach recognizes the need to ensure that all residents have equal opportunity to thrive, and that adequate housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building healthy, sustainable communities. It prioritizes transparency and accountability around how the City will respond to encampments and work with people in encampments in a dignified way, treating them with empathy and compassion as it would for any other resident.

It is recognized that this approach will need to be flexible and adaptable. The City is committed to working with people with lived experience, stakeholders, and partners to evaluate the success of this approach and exploring new approaches for supporting people in encampments. As it does for all residents, the City will continue to develop ongoing opportunities for meaningful engagement with people with lived experience, including expanding advisory groups, community engagement opportunities such as place-based meetings with encampment residents, service user surveys and feedback, and the 2024 Street Needs Assessment survey of people experiencing homelessness. In addition, the City's Housing Rights Advisory Committee may provide a mechanism for strategic engagement to ensure that the City's response is grounded in a human rights-based approach.

While the City continues to provide a variety of services and supports to people experiencing homelessness, sustained commitments, and ongoing investments from all levels of governments in areas such as affordable and supportive housing, poverty reduction, harm reduction, and mental health, are urgently needed. These actions are critical to enabling a human rights approach and facilitating the City's efforts to supporting people in encampments.

Appendix 1: Community Partners Supporting Allan Gardens Encampment Response



Community Partners:

1. Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
2. Native Men's Residence
3. Dixon Hall
4. Sherbourne Health Centre
5. LOFT Community Services, MDOT (Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team) program
6. St. Luke's Church
7. Inner City Health Associates
8. Fife House
9. Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness
10. The Neighbourhood Group
11. Toronto Metropolitan University (Social Innovation)

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Ombudsman Toronto's Recommendations and City Actions

Attachment 2: Third Party Public Engagement Report: City of Toronto Update of the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP)

Attachment 3: City of Toronto Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto