

Engagement Report

March 2024

City of Toronto Update of the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces (IDP)

Summary of engagement feedback received from February 2023 to March 2024

Prepared for the Toronto Shelter and Support Services at the City of Toronto by Third Party Public Inc, in partnership with Nbisiing Consulting Inc.



Ontario and Canada were built upon the treaties negotiated with First Nations, and we all share the benefits and obligations of those treaties. We are all Treaty People.

We acknowledge that Toronto is on the traditional lands of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Acknowledgements

The feedback reflected in this report is a result of the extensive advice, time, and effort that over 270 people from a range of interests contributed through their participation in the engagement process as part of the City's update of the Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces held between February 2023 and March 2024. Our Third Party Public team, in collaboration with Nbsiing Consulting, extends a big thanks to all participants for their generosity and willingness to share their lived experience, knowledge and expertise to help inform this work.

Note to Reader

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the key themes of feedback shared by participants, highlighting areas of common ground and acknowledging the range of perspectives offered. It is not the purpose of this report to serve as a verbatim and complete transcript of all discussions; prioritize one perspective over the others; or invalidate perspectives, issues, and opportunities that are not captured here. We encourage you to reach out to homeless.support@toronto.ca if you have any questions about this report.

It is also important to note that this report does not assess the merit or accuracy of any of the perspectives shared during the engagement process, nor does it indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of the City of Toronto.

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Executive Summary

Following the Ombudsman Toronto recommendations, the City of Toronto retained an independent facilitation team — Third Party Public and Nbisiing Consulting — to implement an engagement process to inform the City’s work to update its *Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces* (IDP).

Over the past 13 months, from February of 2023 until March of 2024, the engagement team held 134 engagement interactions in various formats and of various sizes, including in-person and online one-on-one interviews, small group discussions, focus groups, working sessions, written submissions, place-based engagements, surveys, trainings, and report back sessions. Over 270 individuals representing people with lived knowledge and experience of living in encampments or being unhoused; community partners, advocates, and service providers; as well as business, resident, and community groups shared their stories, perspectives, and experiences during the engagement process. A separate but integrated engagement process was also initiated with Indigenous people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments, community partners and service providers to understand opportunities for co-development of this work.

The objective of these engagements was to help the City gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and impacts of the City’s current approach to responding to encampments and find opportunities for improvement that align with the Ombudsman’s recommendations, the City’s mandate, values, and available resources.

Despite the difficult and often personal nature of conversations, previous negative experiences with City-led processes, and broken trust, many participants were generous with their time and input into this engagement process. While participants shared many different experiences and opinions about encampments, feedback themes that were shared across all audiences include:

1. **The City’s response to encampments needs to be improved** – there needs to be better outcomes for unhoused people.
2. **It is important to recognize the context in which the City needs to respond to encampments** – challenged with worsening housing, mental health, and opioid crises, with lacking resources for essential services and supports.
3. **Opportunities for improvement** include bringing clarity to the City’s priorities, roles and responsibilities; creating a shared understanding through public education campaigns and staff trainings about what the human rights approach means in the context of responding to encampments; bringing consistency to the pathway to housing; improving communication and bringing transparency to decision-making and resource allocation; and improving coordination and collaboration to facilitate opportunities for creative solution-making to address complex issues of encampments together.
4. **The success of the updated approach will continue to depend on all levels of government working together** to address the housing crisis and provide appropriate funding needed for both long-term and immediate solutions.

This report is structured to highlight where the common ground exists (captured in the Shared Key Themes of Feedback across All Audiences section) and to acknowledge the important perspectives and a range of opinions within each audience (captured in the Highlights of Audience-specific Feedback). This report is based on the verbal and written feedback received during the engagement process. This feedback was summarized in individual summaries and distributed for participant review prior to being finalized. The key themes of feedback were also shared in draft with each audience at the report-back sessions before being included in this report.

Overview and Background

In July 2022, Ombudsman Toronto issued an Interim Investigation Report into the City's Clearings of Encampments in 2021. The final report followed in March 2023. The two reports contained a total of 31 recommendations to update the City's approach to encampments, including updating the City's *Interdepartmental Service Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces* (IDP). Adopted in 2005, it is one of the City's primary documents outlining its approach to a coordinated city-wide response to encampments. The City of Toronto accepted all of the Ombudsman's recommendations and committed to undertaking their implementation with quarterly updates to the Ombudsman on the City's progress.

As a direct response to recommendations 3 and 4 of the Interim Report, the City of Toronto retained an independent facilitation team – Third Party Public in partnership with Nbisising Consulting – to help explore and implement engagement opportunities to help inform the City's work to update the IDP.

The engagement process was designed and continuously refined:

- to create a process for many different perspectives, expertise, and advice to come in, including people with lived knowledge and experience of living in encampments, community partners, service providers, and advocates, internal City staff from various City divisions responsible for implementing the IDP, as well as business, resident, and community groups;
- to understand where there is common ground in the shared experiences, challenges, and opportunities to improve the City's response to encampments, and where important differences of opinion exist;
- to explore conditions for a successful process and participation, particularly with those reporting low trust and high tensions in relationships with the City; and
- to stay flexible to meet evolving project needs and demanding schedules of those working in the sector.

Dialogues with Indigenous people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments, community partners and service providers were also held to explore a path of co-development for the response to encampments.

The objective of these engagements was to help the City gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and impacts of the City's current approach to responding to encampments and find opportunities for improvement that align with the Ombudsman's recommendations, the City's mandate, values, and available resources. At the writing of this report, the City has confirmed that the feedback received through this engagement process has been helpful and has directly informed the draft proposed update to the IDP, which will be presented in the Staff Report to the Economic and Community Development Committee in April 2024 and to City Council in May 2024. Many participants hope and desire to see more engagement opportunities related to the implementation of the IDP in the future.

Engagement Process

The engagement process was held between February 2023 and March 2024 and was divided into two rounds:

Round 1: Understanding perspective and key issues. The purpose of the first round of engagement was to gain an understanding of key issues, experiences, and interests, and to determine factors for successful engagement with those who are interested in helping the City update its approach to responding to encampments. Round 1 included meetings with City staff, Toronto Police Service, and Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC); one-on-one introductory conversations with key community partners, advocates, service providers, resident and business associations; consultation of encampment residents and people with lived experience through on-site peer-led engagement and focus groups (see methodology on the next page for details on peer recruitment, training, and debriefing, and approach for engaging encampment residents and people with lived experience); and surveys for Business Improvement Areas and Resident Associations.

Indigenous engagement was a key pillar of the IDP update. It was led by an Indigenous facilitator, Bob Goulais of Nbisiing Consulting. The process started with seeking advice from Elders, Indigenous Service Providers, and community members on how to best approach working together in a good way and how to best engage Indigenous people with lived experience. Based on the advice received, the City and the facilitation team had a follow-up meeting with Indigenous agencies and service providers and a sharing meeting with Indigenous people with lived experience. Honoraria for participation and hot meals were provided.

Round 2: Report back on what we heard. Round 2 focused on sharing what we have heard from a range of audiences engaged. Participants were asked if the shared key messages resonated with their experiences, if there was anything major missing or off-base, and if they had any other insights or advice for the City.

134 engagement interactions were facilitated over the last 13 months, which included 20 meetings and focus groups, 21 one-on-one conversations, 2 surveys, and a 9-day engagement at encampment sites.

All feedback received in Round 1 and Round 2 were documented in individual meeting summaries and synthesized in this engagement report.

Engagements Activities from February 2023 to March 2024			
#	Engagement Interactions	Dates	Number of Participants
ROUND 1 – Understanding Perspectives and Key Issues			
1	3 Meetings with internal City staff	February 4, March 1, and March 22, 2023	27 participants from different divisions
2	1 Meeting with Toronto Police Service	August 15, 2023	21 participants from different divisions
3	21 Introductory conversations with key stakeholders, including service providers, advocates, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), and Resident Associations (RAs)	September to December 2023	36 participants

4	Peer-led engagement with people with lived experience (at encampment sites)	October 24 to November 10, 2023	91 participants from 19 sites across the city (40 sites visited)
5	2 Focus groups with people with lived experience	November 29, 2023 and December 6, 2023	6 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 participants on November 29 3 participants on December 6
6	1 Survey for BIAs	November 3 to November 17, 2023	11 participants
7	1 Survey for RAs	November 20 to December 8, 2023	36 participants
8	1 Introductory meeting with Indigenous service providers	November 30, 2023	5 participants
9	1 Meeting with Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC)	January 24, 2024	23 participants
10	1 Sharing Meeting with Indigenous People with Lived Experience and Knowledge	February 15, 2024	14 participants
ROUND 2 – Report Back on What We Heard			
1	1 Meeting with City staff	October 17, 2023	11 participants
2	3 Drop-in information sessions with service providers and advocates to share process feedback and information from the City	February 8 and February 9, 2024	4 participants
3	1 Meeting with Indigenous service providers	February 20, 2024	4 participants
4	2 Meetings with BIAs	February 21 and February 28, 2024	27 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24 participants on February 21 3 participants on February 28
5	1 Meeting with RAs	February 22, 2024	19 participants
6	1 Meeting with advocates	February 23, 2024	1 participant
7	2 Meetings with service providers and advocates	February 28 and March 6, 2024	19 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 participants on February 28 3 participants on March 6

134 Total Engagement Interactions

350 Total Participants
(including participants who attended multiple sessions)

272 Total Unique Participants

Methodology for engaging encampment residents and people with lived experience

Hearing directly from people living in encampments was central to all engagement efforts undertaken to help inform the City's work to update its protocol for responding to encampments. Through research and introductory conversations with advocates and service providers, Third Party Public sought feedback on a peer-led engagement approach and received suggestions and advice that were directly integrated into the broader strategy for engaging with people with lived experience. This feedback is captured at the end of this section.

The advice ranged from how to pay peer facilitators (peers) to how to support them in leading the engagement work. To confirm the emerging strategy, Third Party Public held an introductory session with potential peers to hear their feedback on the proposed approach and to understand if they would be interested in being part of such a process. Overall, peers provided positive feedback on the approach, suggested further refinements, and expressed interest in participating.

Recruitment and Criteria

With the engagement strategy confirmed, Third Party Public then started a recruitment strategy to hire peers for engagement. Peers were recruited from the service providers and advocates that Third Party Public had already spoken with during the initial conversations. Two qualification screens were applied:

Primary screen:

- Do they have lived experience or knowledge of living in encampments? *Favoured response: yes*
- Are they currently housed? *Favoured response: yes – to minimize potential safety and security risks for peers*
- Are they interested in doing place-based engagements; are they comfortable going to encampments and talking to encampment residents? *Favoured response: yes*
- Can they commit to doing the work, including attending the preparation and debrief sessions (estimated 5 full business days over three weeks)? *Favoured response: yes*
- Are they over the age of eighteen? *Favoured response: yes*

Secondary screen:

- Knowledge/experience of different encampment areas in the city, and
- Representation from a range of ages, genders, abilities, languages spoken, and ethnicities.

Scope of work and remuneration

Six peers were hired. Peers were paid \$50 per hour of work, which included: a preparation session, multiple 4-hour engagement shifts at encampments, debrief sessions after each engagement shift, a final debrief session to review and discuss the draft key themes of feedback, and a focus group session to share their own stories. Peers were paid in cash at the end of each engagement shift or focus group session. Additionally, peers were provided with PRESTO cards to travel to the designated meeting locations, and a hot lunch for all in-person briefing, training, and focus group sessions.

Training

Before beginning engagement on the ground, Third Party Public held a training session to brief the peers about the project, and how to engage. The purpose of the training session was to equip peers with the necessary project information and a variety of tactics to facilitate conversations, as well as to confirm and refine the

engagement approach as necessary based on their experience and understanding of encampments. The agenda topics included:

- **Project briefing.** Third Party Public included a briefing on the Ombudsman’s report, the City’s work on the draft IDP and Third Party Public’s role in engagement.
- **How to step out of the box to engage.** This part emphasized to peers that while engaging and listening to encampment residents’ experiences, it was important to not insert their own biases or opinions and remain neutral. Peers were also notified there would be another engagement opportunity (through a focus group) to give their own feedback and experience.
- **How to remain safe.** The conversation centred around ensuring the peers felt safe to go to encampments, especially the ones they were familiar with, and to establish a safe word in case a conversation or a situation was making a peer or a support note-taker feel unsafe. It also established that engagement had to be done in teams of two or more, with at least two teams at larger engagement sites.
- **How to refine the engagement approach.** Throughout the training session and after each engagement shift, peers were encouraged to give the team advice or suggestions to refine the engagement approach based on their experiences.

Planning for engagement on the ground

Third Party Public planned for the engagement on the ground following the advice that the approach to planning needs to be flexible. The team was advised that encampment residents could be hard to locate (when looking in remote locations), could be in a non-speaking mood, could not want to go outside their tents (especially in colder weather or rain), had different sleep cycles, and could be untrusting of the teams coming in. With flexibility in mind, planning for encampment engagement included the following:

- **Mapping the sites.** The main objective here was to ensure the team had a large geographical coverage of encampments of different sizes and locations in Downtown Toronto, Etobicoke, Scarborough, East York, and North York. Sites were chosen based on the City’s information on active encampments, internet and place-based research, and peer knowledge and experience of encampments.
- **Safety protocol.** It was important that peers, support note-takers, and people in encampments felt safe while they were in conversations. Peers worked in pairs with facilitators from Third Party Public as note-takers and chose the sites for engagement. Peers had a safe word with their pair, that let the Third Party Public team know if the conversation or location felt unsafe to the peer, which would then end the conversation.
- **Schedule of engagement.** Third Party Public developed a schedule for engagement activities at encampments, which included two shifts per day over the course of three weeks and a suggested itinerary of engagements for each shift. The schedule also included the teams that were to go out together, comprised of one peer and one Third Party Public member. The schedule was co-created with peers at the preparation sessions and the upcoming shifts were confirmed at the end of each shift.
- **Engagement supports and materials.** Each team that went out took the following to give out to encampment residents: cash as thanks for the encampment residents’ time, hand and foot warmers, socks, individually packaged snacks (granola bars, trail mix), water, cigarettes, and donuts.
- **Safe locations for storing payments for participation.** Cash payments for participation were dispensed in individual envelopes. The teams made sure to not walk around with a significant amount of cash and collected more envelopes from a safe location nearby when needed.

Engagement with Encampment Residents

Using the advice from the initial conversations with advocates and service providers, research, and peer experience, the Third Party Public team designed the engagement approach for encampment residents. A total of 91 people were engaged in 19 out of 40 encampment sites visited over the course of 9 days. Important to these conversations was being flexible and following the lead of both peers and encampment residents. The following were components of the engagement plan:

- **Discussion questions.** The following were the sample questions to help peers guide the discussion with encampment residents:
 1. Understanding why encampment:
 - a. What are the things that made set up your tent here?
 - b. How long since you had your place/lived indoors?
 - c. Where were you before and why did you leave?
 - d. What are the benefits of living in encampments vs other options?
 2. Understanding challenges and needs
 - a. What's the hardest part about living in a tent in the summer? In the winter?
 3. Relationship/experience with the City
 - a. Are there any City workers / City services that you had good experiences with? Bad experiences with?
 - b. What are some things that the City can do better? Is there anything the City is doing that's helpful / appreciated?
 4. Advice for the City
 - a. If you could give three suggestions for the City on what they could do better — what would you tell them? What would you want them to know?
- **Safety.** Along with peer safety, it was important that engagement participants felt safe and able to have discussions. Before starting the conversation, peers would explain that if at any moment they felt unsafe, uncomfortable, or unable to continue the discussion, they could end the discussion and still get the payment. Conversations lasted as long as the encampment residents felt comfortable.
- **Recordings and permissions.** Peers asked participants for their permission to record conversations (for writing purposes), and for the name they like to be referred to.
- **Starting the conversation.** To help start the conversation in a good way, peers offered cigarettes, snacks, water, and other materials to make people more comfortable.
- **Payment.** Engagement participants were offered \$20 in cash for their participation, which on average lasted about 15-25 minutes. Payments for participation were offered regardless of the completion of the engagement.

Debriefing with Peers

- After each engagement shift, the teams would do quick debriefs on what they heard, how the engagement felt in general, and what could be improved in the upcoming shifts. Once the engagement on the ground was finished, the team held a debrief session with all peers to go over key themes of feedback to be included in the summary report of feedback from people with lived experience and this final engagement report.





Locations Visited with People Engaged		
Encampment Location	Dates	People Engaged
1. Bellevue Square Park	October 24, 2023	7
2. Randy Padmore Park	October 24, 2023	3
3. Sonya Parkette	October 24, 2023	5
4. Alexandra Park	October 25, 2023	5
5. Gardiner and Lower Spadina	October 25, 2023	8
6. Clarence Square Park	October 25, 2023	17
7. Marilyn Bell Park	October 26, 2023	3
8. Lansdowne and Dundas	October 26, 2023	1
9. High Park	October 31, 2023	2
10. Marie Curtis Park	October 31, 2023	1
11. William Kitchen	November 1, 2023	2
12. 705 Progress	November 1, 2023	1
13. 10 Falstaff	November 2, 2023	2
14. Downsview Park and Lawn Bowl	November 2, 2023	7
15. Chalkfarm Park	November 2, 2023	2
16. Charles Sauriol Conservation Area	November 2, 2023	1
17. Allan Gardens	November 3, 2023	19
18. Cherry Beach	November 9, 2023	3
19. Riverdale Park East	November 10, 2023	2
Total People Engaged		91

Locations Visited with No Answer/Declined Interview/Abandoned
1. Albert Crossland Park Wading Pool
2. Bathurst-Wilson Parkette
3. Beaumonde Heights
4. Coronation Park
5. Dufferin Grove Park
6. Earl Bales Park
7. Gattineau Hydro Corridor Trail
8. Humber Arboretum
9. Lawrence Park Ravine
10. MacGregor Playground
11. Martin Goodman Trail
12. Nordheimer Ravine
13. Riverdale Park West
14. Sadler Parkette
15. Scarborough Bluffs Park
16. Scarborough Heights Park
17. Stanley Park
18. Thistletown Park
19. West Highland Creek
20. West Humber Parkland
21. West Lodge Park

Focus Groups with People with Lived Experience

It was important for peers to remain neutral when engaging with encampment residents, as their role was to hold space for others to share their stories. Peers noted it was important for them to share their stories as well, and as a result two focus groups for peers and other recently housed people with lived experience were held. Six people participated in the two focus groups and shared their stories. To ensure the participants felt safe and comfortable, the team set up the following:

1. **An informal agenda.** Similar to engaging encampment residents, the focus group discussion was guided by a set of questions in an informal and friendly manner. Participants had the ability to skip questions or bring different relevant topics of conversation.
2. **Encouragement to self-regulate.** Participants were encouraged to self-regulate and participate in a way that worked for them – decide how personal or how general they wanted to be with their feedback, take the breaks they needed when they needed, and leave the room or stop participating if the conversations were hard.
3. **Support person.** Participants were also encouraged to bring in a support person with them if they felt they needed someone familiar next to them to get through sharing their experiences. Those who could not stay until the end of the focus group had an individual follow-up to ensure they had the necessary support and services in place.
4. **Honoraria.** Participants received honoraria of \$50 for their participation in a two-hour focus group. A hot meal was provided.

Advice on Engaging With People With Lived Experience

As mentioned in the previous pages, the Third Party Public team has proactively sought advice from frontline support workers, service providers, and people who have experienced homelessness on how to create safe and meaningful engagement opportunities for people with lived knowledge of encampments. The following is the advice that was shared with us during the introductory conversations:

1. The peer-facilitation approach is a good idea. It is important that peers lead the initiative to ensure better reception and more meaningful outcomes.
2. It is important to include people who are experiencing hidden homelessness and are not as visible. It will take longer to connect with outreach workers with these connections to these people, but it will be more meaningful.
3. Be flexible and adapt to the situations based on what's happening in the encampment or around it, the weather, and other factors you may not plan for but will need to take into consideration.
4. Incentives must be appropriate – e.g., cash payments not to affect any existing financial aid supports, minimum \$25/hour, food, and transportation fees covered to encourage participation.
5. Hold sessions in locations familiar and comfortable to encampment residents, such as encampments or nearby services that encampment residents have access to.
6. Ensure that peer facilitators feel safe to go to specific encampments, as some may have histories and relationships that may put the engagement team at risk.
7. Offering basic needs like food can help form initial connections and become the first step to start building a relationship for people with lived experience to participate in this engagement.
8. Engagement and conversation with people with lived experience cannot be extractive and must allow for their needs and wants. This includes:
 - allowing for people to have representatives with them;
 - meeting people where they are, in the specific encampment/park they are in;
 - allowing for them to take their breaks;
 - paying them a living wage for their time and expertise;
 - covering the cost of transit;
 - ensuring the meetings are short, and have appropriate breaks;
 - being flexible with time and understanding some may not arrive or may arrive late; and
 - not holding meetings on important dates (e.g., cheque days).
9. It is important to remember that there is a high risk for both the encampment residents and the peers of being re-traumatized. It is important to ensure that everyone is well aware of such risks and that proper supports and systems are in place for all process participants.

Shared Key Themes of Feedback Across All Audiences

This section captures key themes of feedback shared across all audiences during the period of this engagement process. The purpose of this section is to reveal where the common ground exists in terms of shared experiences, relevant issues, and perceived opportunities related to updating the City’s approach to responding to encampments, while acknowledging that important tensions continue to persist. This section should be read together with audience-specific key themes of feedback captured further in this report.

Understanding the context

1. **More and more people face homelessness.** Encampments are the result of systems and policy failure. They are a symptom of much larger systemic problems, including the housing crisis, the mental health crisis, and the opioid crisis. Many participants said that they see more encampments and more people living in them or sleeping rough, and many said they felt the homelessness crisis is only going to get worse in the foreseeable future.
2. **There is not enough housing and shelter space for people to go to.** It is extremely difficult to find space indoors; there are simply not enough places for people living in encampments to go. Many reported not being able to find any indoor spaces for themselves, their clients, or someone they knew. Shelter operators and housing providers reported being at or over capacity and having to turn people away.
3. **The housing options and shelter spaces are often not an option for many.** Many emphasized that existing rules, policies, and processes often set people up for failure. The examples ranged from restrictive shelter rules to poor living conditions of social housing, to barriers to applying for housing benefits, to difficult-to-meet rental requirements.
4. **The lack of housing in areas where people live results in displacement and further marginalization.** Without social ties, community support, and safety networks, people become more vulnerable to “falling further through the cracks.”
5. **There is a growing need and limited resources to better support people in encampments.** There is not enough funding for essential and life-saving services, including drop-in and respite centres where people can go for meals, showers, and rest, as well as direct supports for complex mental health illnesses, addictions care, and infectious disease treatment. Unstable limited funding and lack of resources negatively impact staff and clients. People working in the sector have a high turnover rate due to burnout and mental fatigue. People experiencing homelessness said the lack of housing and resources makes them go from feeling “forgotten” to feeling despair.

Understanding encampments

1. **Conditions for survival in encampments are becoming more dire.** During the summer, it gets so hot and humid, that people suffer from dehydration and malodour. In winter, people struggle to stay warm and dry and resort to unsafe fire practices to stay alive. Some parks are infested with rats, and some encampments overflow with garbage and flammable debris. Survival in more extreme conditions and sleep deprivation contribute to greater mental health and addictions crises.

2. **It is important to recognize that the location of encampments is strategic.** Encampments are often located near supports and services and in areas with less enforcement / policing. Others choose to be in more secluded areas for more privacy or to stay away from people using substances.
3. **Even though encampments may be a safer option for some, they are still unsafe and inadequate for people to live in.** Many said theft in encampments is a big concern. Many have reported having been attacked or assaulted while living in or visiting an encampment. Many have also noted dangerous illegal activities that take place in encampments.
4. **It is also important to understand there is good in encampments as well.** Encampment communities have the social supports that many need to survive, such as peer support, overdose reversal, creativity, people exploring careers, and having space and a community to heal from trauma.

Key challenges with the City's current response to encampments

1. **The City's intention, values, and priorities in responding to encampments are unclear.** In general, participants said they did not know what the City was trying to do in responding to encampments. Internally, City staff discussed the lack of clear direction on how to prioritize and make decisions when faced with competing policies, City Council directions, and divisional mandates. Externally, participants wondered about the primary goal of the City's response to encampments – whether it is to provide support or to enforce. Many have also noted that it is unclear how the City makes decisions about which encampments get a priority response with available indoor spaces and other resources.
2. **It is unclear what a human rights approach means in the context of responding to encampments.** Although it was generally agreed that a vulnerability lens or a trauma-informed approach is needed in responding to encampments, there was a difference of opinions shared around whose rights need to be prioritized and who is considered vulnerable. Some argued that everyone's rights are equally important and need to be considered as such. Others emphasized the need to prioritize the rights of the most vulnerable, with some referring to people living in encampments and others referring to children unable to use parks safely. Many have asked what a human rights approach means in the context of encampments.
3. **The pathway to housing is unclear and inconsistent.** There is no one way to get indoors, which undermines fair and equitable access to housing for all. City staff discussed different housing tracks to shelter and housing spaces and the lack of a shared cross-divisional risk and needs assessment approach to enable clear and consistent resource allocation. External participants said it was nearly impossible to get a shelter space through the Central Intake or get housing with a case manager outside of "hot spots" in the city. Many said that it was common knowledge that to get housing people had to go to specific encampments or to set up tents in more visible areas to attract political attention.
4. **Political interference puts undue pressure on resource allocation.** Many said that they felt that some Toronto residents can exert more political power than others, and it is often the political will that influences the City's response to encampments. Participants noted that some areas in the city have encampments residents housed and encampments cleared in no time, while other encampments continue going unaddressed. City staff noted that political pressure often creates a sense of emergency to respond to non-emergency situations.
5. **It is unclear who does what, when, and how as part of the process of responding to encampments.** There is a general lack of information about who is involved in responding to encampments and what their responsibilities are. For example, some discussed a general misconception that it is the Toronto Police Service that enforces encampment-related by-laws and clears the sites. While some participants named specific divisions in providing their feedback, most use the term "City" in referencing actions of a specific City division or function. Encampment residents also noted that they generally do not know how any encounter

with City employees would go as their experiences have been inconsistent with different City employees. Resident Associations and Business Improvement Areas said they did not know who to call or where they could get information on what to do in case of encampments.

6. **Lack of clear and consistent communication about encampments contributes to frustration and lack of trust in the sector.** Many participants have discussed examples where the lack of accurate information or any response from the City has caused and escalated tensions and contributed to the deterioration of trust. Many said they feel unheard with no clear means of communication. Examples included:
 - lack of access to relevant information about encampments internally and externally, and to encampment residents;
 - no meaningful two-way communication, where information is only shared with the City one-way – “goes into a black hole” with no response or any follow-up;
 - communication with people in encampments is often formal, impersonal, lacks timelines, and options for the next steps;
 - spread of disinformation to portray different parties in a negative light, especially in social media; and
 - no formal mechanisms for City staff to respond to any misinformation.
7. **Many feel unsafe.** The notion of feeling unsafe came up almost in every discussion.
 - Encampment residents said they generally feel distrustful towards the City employees and onlookers, as they live in constant fear of being uprooted, and many have also spoken about theft and violence at encampment sites.
 - Representatives from the Resident Associations and Business Improvement Areas said their members often feel unsafe around encampments due to open drug use and discarded needles, people going through a mental health crisis without any support, inappropriate loud impaired behaviour, fire hazards, illegal activity, etc.
 - Frontline City and non-City staff feel unsafe to do their work due to external aggression and instances of local residents organizing to police encampments.
8. **The response is inconsistent with the City’s Reconciliation Action Plan.** Many noted the conflict between the displacement of Indigenous individuals from land through enforcement and the City’s commitment to *Truth and Reconciliation* and the *City’s Reconciliation Action Plan*. Some noted that the lack of such alignment is morally distressing for City and non-City frontline staff.

Areas of opportunity and suggestions for the updated IDP

1. **Recognize and use all opportunities to earn trust and mend relationships with others in the sector.** Many solutions and ideas offered by participants related to the City earning trust and mending relationships were about meaningful engagement, open and honest communication and public education, and creative collaborative solutions.
2. **The updated protocol needs to provide clarity about the overall approach, roles, and responsibilities.** Suggestions included:
 - Define commonly used key terms, such as “encampment”, “community safety and well-being”, etc. Look at existing City policy documents, such as *SafeTO*, to align definitions.
 - There needs to be a clear explanation of “the human rights approach to encampments”, and specifically how this approach is applied when staff face limitations in rights, resources, or responsibilities; and how it would be aligned with competing policies, City Council directions, or by-laws.

- IDP needs to provide clarity around roles and responsibilities – who is involved and how – internally and externally. Many external participants noted that they see roles for their organizations in helping improve coordination and information sharing.
3. **Train leadership and frontline staff at the City to ensure there is a cross-divisional agreement on key concepts, and everyone follows the same principles in making decisions and informing approach to relevant work.** Many have also spoken about the importance of training frontline staff to ensure consistent, meaningful, trauma-informed engagement with clients, including those in crises.
 4. **The updated protocol needs to bring transparency and consistency to resource allocation and a pathway to housing.** Many spoke about the need for more transparent and equitable access to housing and resource allocation. Participants urge the City to bring clarity to who makes what kind of decisions and how. Many wanted to see the political pressure be removed from affecting the response to encampments. City staff offered specific solutions for bringing consistency to assessing risks and client needs, improving internal processes, and data sharing.
 5. **The updated protocol needs to provide communication protocols for sharing appropriate and accurate information about encampments with the public.** Suggestions included creating:
 - two-way communication channels to ask questions, lodge concerns and complaints, and provide comments;
 - updating the City’s website with clear step-by-step information about the general approach to responding to encampments;
 - easily accessible and easily shareable public information on what to do if you see an encampment, how to access resources, and who to get in touch with at the City; and
 - regular public updates around encampments in the city and the City’s response – what is being done on the ground, with other levels of government, how others can help, etc.
 6. **Improve communication around options to move from encampments.** Such communication needs to happen before any notices have to be issued. The communication needs to be informal, using accessible language, with information on housing options, including pictures, location, type of housing, number of people living there, and nearby services. Formal notices need to include specific dates and times and allow a reasonable timeline for encampment residents to make a choice and prepare for the move and for outreach workers to make a follow-up plan and not “lose” their clients.
 7. **Improve coordination and facilitate more effective, creative solutions.** Generally, participants wanted to see more collaboration in addressing encampments for more effective outcomes and better coordination and distribution of resources.
 - Some noted that they wanted to see more collaborative response planning tables and liaison committees with different community partners at the table, including Resident Associations and BIAs.
 - Some discussed the importance of collaboration in providing direct response on the ground and better coordination of services and resource distribution. Some noted that many partnerships and collaborations already exist and should be further integrated into the City’s response (e.g., some BIAs are partnering with service providers, service providers collaborate and coordinate with each other to not duplicate services and cover greater areas, etc.).
 - Others emphasized the importance of coordination at the post-response stage once clients are placed indoors. Coordination and sharing of information are critical for a client-centred approach to help clients with housing stability.

- Some discussed the need for collaboration to explore creative solutions to ensure survival at encampments – e.g., multi-sectorial teams to provide specialized care at encampments, and Toronto Fire-approved warming solutions for tents during winters.
8. **The success of the updated approach will continue to depend on inter- and intra-governmental collaboration and alignment and the ability to respond to people’s immediate needs.** Sustainable solutions require cross-divisional collaboration and an inter-governmental approach. The focus needs to continue to be on building more housing to be able to respond to immediate needs with a careful plan to get people inside. All levels of government need to contribute to ensure the provision of necessary life-saving services. Many ideas for exploring different housing options and service delivery provisions were offered by participants, including engaging encampment residents in exploring and delivering housing solutions.
9. **The updated approach needs to be clear about pathways to necessary supports and services,** with a focus on:
- hubs for people to go to during the day for meals, showers, and rest;
 - direct mobile low-barrier services provided at encampments, including addictions care, mental health support and infectious disease treatment, as well as ID clinics, tax services, income supports, disability application supports, and terminal illness housing priority application supports; and
 - supports, particularly related to mental health and addictions, as well as life skills and employment, to help the newly housed transition to living indoors, and get and maintain stable housing.
10. **The updated approach to responding to encampments should follow the City’s *Reconciliation Action Plan*.** It should be co-created with Indigenous partners with the right knowledge and relationships, following the Meeting in the Middle Strategy for co-development. It needs to recognize the impact of colonization and the systems that were designed to disempower Indigenous peoples. It should be grounded in the understanding of the Anishinaabe connection to the land, the Sacred Fire, and the role of Elders. The updated protocol needs to prioritize resources and cultural safety for Indigenous people.
11. **IDP needs to make the case that information and education is a better use of resources than enforcement.** There is a need for public education campaigns:
- to change the narrative from blaming people to recognizing systems’ failure;
 - to be able to have honest conversations about the impacts of encampments on people living in encampments, people working at encampments and working around encampments.
 - to change general attitude towards encampments – that not every encampment is an emergency to respond to, that often aggressive behaviours are masked by untreated mental health illnesses and require intervention and support and not criminalization; and that harsh survival conditions contribute to the mental health and addictions crises;
 - to deepen public understanding of why people set up encampments and that sheltering does not work for everyone for many reasons – trauma, health needs, and rules that set people up for failure, and that it is not a permanent solution;
 - to highlight that providing supports at encampments is a step in the right direction but it is not the ultimate goal; to emphasize that the City’s goal is to house people, but the resources are often not available to do so; and that it is not enough just to house people; supports to help them transition and find housing stability are key; and
 - that Toronto is not the only city that faces the homelessness crisis; that it is everybody’s responsibility to address this crisis – the federal and the provincial governments, cities, and all members of communities in and around encampments; and that without working together there will be urban decay.

What participants thought was missing at the report-back sessions

These key themes were shared with each audience in draft at the report-back sessions in February and March of 2024 before being included in this final report. In general, those who participated in the report-back sessions said that these themes made sense and resonated with their experiences. Some offered important additions and further advice, including:

1. **The report back of what was heard does not include the intersectionality lens** of different experiences based on race, age, gender, or their belonging to the 2SLGBTQ+ community;
2. **Concrete, actionable next steps and engagement opportunities** to help test and refine the updated approach; and
3. **What the City is learning from other jurisdictions.**

Highlights of Audience-Specific Feedback

The following pages summarize the feedback from the following audiences:

1. People with lived experience and knowledge of encampments
2. Indigenous people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments
3. Service Providers and Advocates
4. Indigenous Service Providers and Agencies
5. Business Improvement Areas
6. Resident Associations
7. City of Toronto staff
8. Toronto Police Service

Please note that the numbering of the points on the following pages is used for ease of reference only and does not signify the level of priority or importance.

1. Feedback from People with Lived Experience and Knowledge of Encampments

The points below summarize feedback shared by **people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments**. They are based on the feedback received through the peer-led engagement at encampment sites and at the two focus groups with people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments.

Understanding encampment residents' stories

- 1. Most encampment residents reported that they are homeless because there are no other viable options available to them.** Living outside is the end of the line. Most said that they did not choose nor want to live outside, but a range of external, systemic, and personal factors had forced them into these circumstances, and many would be happy to have a stable home. Many emphasized that their situations were complex, and that homelessness could not be reduced to a single reason. Listed below are some of the factors that people mentioned led to their homelessness:
 - collapsed support systems (death of parents/spouses, failed/abusive/toxic relationships, and issues with/loss of any other available support systems (e.g., extended relatives or friends);
 - mental health issues, substance use, and trauma;
 - disability (unable to survive on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), no accessible housing for those with mobility challenges);
 - evictions, rent increases, and unaffordable housing;
 - financial issues;
 - difficulty transitioning back after incarceration – difficulty in finding homes and jobs;
 - lack of available permanent and temporary housing options, including shelter hotel closing;
 - unsuitable shelter or community housing conditions (e.g., rats, bed bugs, unsanitary conditions);
 - shelter rules are a barrier and set people up to fail; and
 - getting involved in tough situations.
- 2. Encampment residents said they often set up tents at the locations that:**
 - provide them with a sense of safety (note that some said they may feel safer and more peaceful on their own and others with other people around);
 - allow them to remain connected to familiar environments;
 - allow them to access essential services (e.g., places to get food, hygiene facilities, social services, transit, others);
 - would increase their chances of getting housed by the City – “If you want to be housed, you should stay in the park where the City doesn’t want you to be an eye sore”;
 - allow them to avoid confrontations with the City staff (a reason some stay in smaller, more solitary encampments); and
 - allow them to avoid shame and stigma.

Encampment residents' needs, challenges and what works about living outside

Below is a summary of the **needs and challenges** of encampment residents.

- 1. Being warm and dry, especially in the winter.** The cold is the biggest challenge most encampment residents identified. Winters are dangerous and challenging to survive. They said insulated tents, adequate sleeping

bags, and warm clothing are difficult to procure. Fuel for generators is expensive, so encampment residents may resort to using other combustible materials to keep themselves warm, even if these pose fire hazards.

2. **Access to food and water.** Many have reported that accessing food and water to survive is a daily challenge, especially since encampment residents don't have access to a kitchen, food storage, and clean drinking water. They said that in the summer, it's more difficult to maintain and store food. Often, larger downtown encampments have more access to food because there are more organizations providing support, whereas individuals outside the downtown core need to make a more concerted effort to get food.
3. **Keeping themselves and their belongings safe.** Theft, especially phones and IDs, is a big concern for encampment residents. Some said they are scared to leave their tents unattended for fear of their belongings being taken away, including during encampment clearings. Some have also shared fears for their physical and mental safety due to experiences of verbal threats or physical violence.
4. **Access to washroom and running water.** Many encampment residents identified maintaining personal hygiene as a challenge as there is often no convenient access to washrooms or facilities with running water, especially in the winter. For women especially, having all-gendered bathroom facilities is a source of discomfort.
5. **Combating pests and maintaining sanitary conditions.** Another big challenge that many encampment residents shared is the lack of sanitary conditions in encampments, including poor waste management, lack of food storage, or the sheer fact of being outside, rats, and bugs.
6. **Uncomfortable conditions.** Many participants noted that having an adequate night of sleep is difficult for encampment residents due to harsh weather conditions, hard surfaces, rats, and a lack of sound barriers.
7. **Lack of privacy.** Many encampment residents noted that due to the lack of doors and locks, it was difficult to have any privacy. Some said that they are dealing with people, including other encampment residents, City staff or community members invading their space and privacy.
8. **Stigma and shame.** Encampment residents said they are constantly being observed by the public. This makes them feel shame and embarrassment for being homeless and leads them to set up their tents in secluded areas, away from people and accessible resources and supports.
9. **Not knowing where and how to access available resources.** Some encampment residents said that they are not aware of where and how to access the system of resources that are currently available.
10. **Unable to access mental health supports.** Encampment residents said that "the psychological effects of being homeless are unexplainable – you don't know where you're going to eat, you don't know where you're going to stay, you're cold, and sometimes you don't know people." Some also said that going to people who are supposed to help and not receiving the help is hard.
11. **Difficulty getting work and obtaining the necessary documentation.** Some participants said that it is often difficult to obtain documents and other resources, like a phone number or an address, to apply for jobs or keep up to date with their case managers. Additionally, some noted that it was also a challenge to hold onto the documents and IDs living in encampments.
12. **Keeping themselves healthy,** especially if they have health conditions and they don't have access to medication or medical supplies.

Below is a summary of **what encampment residents said works about living outside**. While this section focused on what makes outdoor life work for them, it is important to remember that many emphasized that living outdoors was not their preferred situation and it was the lack of available, appropriate, accessible indoor options that kept them living in a tent. Many of these points were shared not to make a point about the general benefits of outdoor life, rather they were made in relation to the participants' experience of the shelter system.

1. **Freedom to make their own decisions about their life.** Participants said they lived in encampments because they could retain a level of autonomy over their lives that was not possible with other options. Living in encampments allows them to be with their significant other, keep their pets, come and go without restrictions, and come back to their space and still have a spot.
2. **Privacy and personal space.** Participants said that living in a tent allows them to have a space of their own where belongings can be stored and their privacy can be maintained. Many have talked about their ability to control access to their living space in encampments, which is not possible in the traditional shelter system. Having their personal living space also allows them to reduce altercations with other residents and keep their food and medication safe.
3. **A sense of community with other encampment residents.** Many encampment residents talked about how people in encampments kept each other alive by looking after each other. Many said they continue to stay in touch with their friends, even after they have been housed. People have also said that settling in the existing encampment makes them feel that the risk of being cleared is reduced.
4. **Access and connection to nature.** Some encampment residents said they appreciated the quiet and felt a sense of calm with their connection to the outdoors.
5. **People in the surrounding community can be nice to encampment residents.** Participants said that they had experienced nice encounters with the surrounding community, with some community members giving out supplies like clothing and food to encampment residents.

Experience with the City

Encampment residents shared a range of experiences and feelings towards the City, including negative, positive, and neutral experiences. A summary of these experiences is included below.

Negative experiences

1. **Broken system.** Encampment residents said that the housing and homelessness support systems are broken. They said that they don't understand why there are vacant housing spaces in the city, but there is also a 10-year waitlist to get into housing. They also said that the pathways out of homelessness feel unclear, inconsistent, unattainable, and disappointing due to the extremely long wait times, lack of responsiveness and support from the City, and lack of clarity on how people are prioritized for housing and services. Some said they feel "forgotten" by outreach workers with little to no follow-up.
2. **Abuse of power, disrespectful treatment, and intimidation from City staff and police.** Some encampment residents recounted examples of City staff abusing their power, taking advantage of the unhoused, being rude, belittling them and treating them and their belongings without respect (e.g., destroying their tents and property), being not forthcoming with relevant information (e.g., waiting for people to leave to clear their belongings), harassing and intimidating them to get information about drug dealers, and physically abusing them. These encounters often occurred with shelter staff, police, and during encampment clearings. Encampment residents said that these interactions damaged the trust between the unhoused people and the City and contributed to the growing animosity towards the City.
3. **Lack of trust with City staff.** Encampment residents said that the lack of trust was due to the lack of communication, consistency, and a sense of chaos or anxiety when City staff arrive at an encampment. They said they were unsure if City staff was there to help or to remove their belongings. It is important to note that this lack of trust varied between individuals and City divisions.

Positive experiences

1. **Kindness of City staff.** Some encampment residents said City staff were kind, polite, and genuinely cared to provide supports and worked hard to get people housing. They said that they appreciated and understood that staff were doing the best they could to help and understood their efforts were hindered by the system itself and the limited resources available to offer them.
2. **Connection to resources.** Some encampment residents said that relationships with City staff are important because they serve as a connection to the resources needed to survive and exit homelessness. City staff support encampment residents with housing connections, shelter connections, renewing expired and replacing lost/stolen IDs, providing survival necessities, and helping with filing taxes.

Neutral experiences

1. **Staying out of their way.** Many encampment residents felt neutral about the City and City staff. They said they had little or no relationships with City staff. Some said they would have welcomed more interactions with the City to access more resources, while others were trying to avoid those interactions due to the lack of trust.

Advice for the City

1. **Prioritize investments in housing.** Explore different options, including:
 - Reallocating the money the City uses to put people in temporary housing by buying or repurposing properties to be permanent housing for encampment residents.
 - Creating mixed-income housing, as segregation of people is part of the problem.
 - Creating a designated place for encampments with small modular housing could create a more orderly and organized environment. It could be a lot easier to support people and provide basic utilities like porta-potties and running water if it's in designated places.
 - Granting land plots and allowing people to build homes that they can own.
2. **Provide clear and consistent pathways out of homelessness and improve communication with encampment residents.** Transparency about the housing process and more clarity and communication around the purpose of interactions would be a helpful first step. Participants noted that it would be helpful if the City outreach staff had shareable information about resources with them (e.g., information about warming centres before the cold weather arrives). Also, many participants talked about the need for proper notice when by-laws are not being followed; this includes providing advance notice and clear information that identifies a date and time of the removal, clear and easy-to-understand information about the issue, and options available to encampment residents.
3. **Provide necessities.** Some participants emphasized that while the City continues to work on broader systems-level plans to end homelessness, it is important to keep in mind that encampment residents are trying to survive living outside every day. Providing necessities like food, running water for hygiene and drinking, shelter supplies like insulated tents and sleeping bags, thick socks, mittens, hand and feet warmers, tarps to protect them from the rain, supplies that could keep the site clean, and access to washrooms and showers are critical. When providing access to support facilities, make sure to reduce the wait time/lines. Also, consider providing charging points so people can charge their phones. It is very challenging for encampment residents to function without an active phone and access to the internet because it makes it hard to connect with government services and resources. They said that if you can't have access to an active phone and internet, you can't have access to life.

4. **Engage with encampment residents with a dignified approach and respect their private belongings.** Encampment residents would like City staff to exercise more compassion when interacting with encampment residents, especially when it comes to their belongings. They said that shelter and City staff need to recognize that although they may not be able to see the value in people’s belongings, their belongings are valuable to them, not just for sentimental reasons, but because things could be traded, and it could keep a person safe in the “street economy”. Throwing away encampment resident’s belongings can mean throwing away their way of life and survival.
5. **Train City staff and police to treat people with dignity, empathy, and respect.** This includes training on how to interact with encampment residents in a more compassionate and dignified way, as well as how to interact with people with mental health issues and substance use issues.
6. **Include encampment residents in the process of responding to homelessness and encampments.** Encampment residents said it is important for them to have a seat at the table of decision-making as they have real-life experience and understanding of what it’s like to live outside. They said that it is important for the City to “centre their voices” and make the engagement accessible to encampment residents by meeting people in their encampments or outreach agencies they already engage with, having flexibility around timing and understanding their different needs, and providing honoraria as compensation for their time. Others advised the City to hire people with lived experience to engage with unsheltered people to prioritize their needs.
7. **Have more frequent touchpoints, but make sure to respect people’s privacy.** Encampment residents said it is important to have more frequent outreach with staff that can give them information about resources. It is especially hard for the newly unhoused as they don’t know where to find resources and facilities that would help them survive outdoors. These frequent touchpoints should be done in a respectful manner so people don’t feel like the City is invading their privacy.
8. **Provide more outreach, services, peer support, health check-ins, and easier access to services in areas outside of downtown.** Most services are downtown, but some people want to live in the suburbs where they are more familiar with the environment or have connections.
9. **Provide job supports and apprenticeships.** Encampment residents said it is difficult to get a job if they don’t have a permanent place to stay, especially without access to necessities like water, shower, and heat.
10. **When people are released from prison, provide supports and resources** so people don’t end up being in a cycle of homelessness and incarceration.
11. **Fix the Central Intake.** The current Central Intake system does not work. People feel like it’s a full-time job having to reach out to 311 to get to the Central Intake or to get access to resources. Consider providing a call-back option or queue management.
12. **Provide continuous support after getting people housed** to keep people housed.
13. **Prioritize supporting Canadians.** Some encampment residents said that the government is not prioritizing supporting Canadians. They said that they have lived in Canada and paid their taxes and dues to the country, but now that they need help, they are not getting it. There was a perception that refugees and immigrants were taking the space in the shelter and housing systems and that they were being left outdoors as a result. They said that they understand that the refugees are coming to Canada for help, but they said that the government should also help them because they are Canadians who need help.
14. **Addressing homelessness should not be just the City’s responsibility.** Housing people require money, and the City doesn’t have the money. It should also be the responsibility of the Province and the Federal governments.
15. **Less generalization.** Provide more individualized supports instead of general supports because people have different needs.

2. Feedback from Indigenous People with Lived Experience and Knowledge of Encampments

The points below summarize feedback shared by **Indigenous people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments**. They are based on the feedback received at the Sharing Meeting with people with lived experience and knowledge of encampments and homelessness.

The situation

1. **Encampments are a reflection of the housing crisis**, and it's only going to get worse as housing is extremely limited and expensive, and nothing is changing. Participants also said that there are legitimate loopholes, like renovictions, that systematically push people out of their rental homes, creating a lot of fear and tension. People are on edge and are being inundated with the suffering they are seeing and experiencing.
2. **The reality that unhoused Indigenous people experience is hard to see.** Participants said their people are dying, being human trafficked, and many have been ostracized when they do not embrace the harm reduction model. Substance use programs are also being cancelled because they are becoming too expensive to sustain, which will result in many more people dying.
3. **The lack of housing and funding for Indigenous peoples does not align with the goals of *Truth and Reconciliation*.** Participants said that commitments and allocations of funding and housing for Indigenous people are shameful when looked at through the lens of *Truth and Reconciliation*. They said it is extremely difficult to find housing, and when you find housing, it is very expensive, and landlords will only accept you if you have COHB (Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit). They said that a lot needs to be done to provide adequate and affordable housing.
4. **Homelessness is very expensive, and the resources spent on the criminalization and surveillance of homeless people could be better spent on housing people.** Participants expressed a lack of trust with the police, with several sharing experiences with City staff and police going to tents and taking unhoused people's belongings and not allowing them to get their tents and belongings back, which then results in people having to start from square one. They said there needs to be a better allocation of resources as a fraction of the money spent on police, clearing of encampments, and security personnel hired to watch unhoused people in the parks are resources that could be used to create housing.
5. **Not allowing tents to go up results in women living on the streets** because they don't know where to go, and they don't feel safe going to shelters. This then creates an unsafe situation because it is not safe for Indigenous women to be alone on the streets, which is connected to the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.
6. **Homeless youth have a difficult time getting housing because of how the City prioritizes who gets housing first.** Participants said that you would have to be dying on the street or abused to get adequate support. Youth and young couples would then have to stay homeless because they want to stay together. They said that youth would appreciate the City bringing back the hotel program because they had housing workers from Native Child and Family Services providing supports.
7. **Participants said that they appreciate the conversation, but they feel like people experiencing homelessness are not being heard because conversations like this have happened many times.**

Advice for the City

1. **The City's response to encampments needs to be based on truth and people's realities.** Participants said that they experience two worlds – one with what they are told and the other with what is really happening – and the reality is that they live in a world where Indigenous people continue to be displaced and disrespected by the system. They said that there is a systemic genocide against Indigenous people because they are seeing people die all the time.
2. **Create policies to prioritize housing Indigenous peoples first, especially Indigenous elders, and house them quickly.** Participants said that Indigenous people are getting overlooked in encampments, which has been a problem for a very long time. They said that even though Indigenous people are a minority, they have the highest percentage of being unhoused. They also said that it is a shame that non-Indigenous people get to be housed first before an Indigenous person, especially an elder. They said that places like Native Men's Residence (Na-Me-Res) used to only take in Indigenous people, but now they have to take everyone, which leaves little room for Indigenous people who need help. Participants said that one way to help house Indigenous people quickly is by simplifying the steps to access housing.
3. **Enable cultural safety and honour, see, and respect Indigenous people.** Participants said there is no safe spot in the city for Indigenous communities to go and be heard. If safe spaces are created, they cannot be performative or be considered one-off. They feel the City creates policies that are going to cause further harm. The City needs to co-create policies with an Indigenous lens. This is consistent with the City's *Reconciliation Action Plan*.
4. **"Land Back" – Empower people to have a community through designated housing and land.** Participants said they want to get their land back and shared different ways that housing could be provided to Indigenous people, including allocating a plot of land and creating Indigenous-specific housing or designated modular homes where they can have Sacred Fire, water access, and space to take care of each other.
5. **Provide necessities for people's survival if there are no adequate housing options to offer.** Participants said that food is medicine and providing food like sandwiches would help unhoused people get by. Sleeping bags, socks, and places to have hot showers are also important in helping unhoused people stay warm and clean. Participants said that giving food and supplies should not be seen as enabling or encouraging homelessness as these basic provisions are critical for people's survival.
6. **Create jobs for unhoused people by involving them in the clean-up of parks.** For example, instead of having City staff clean up parks, pay unhoused people to clean up the parks — creating jobs like this would be a big help in getting unhoused people back on their feet.
7. **Aftercare and having a solid support system are critical in keeping people housed.** Participants said that it is important to be mindful that people in encampments are dealing with addictions and institutionalism, so it could take them a long time to get used to being housed.
8. **Addressing homelessness needs to be looked at holistically to connect all the relevant factors that result in people being homeless.** An example shared was that youth in shelters are kicked out of shelters if they don't go to school. However, this is an issue for suicidal kids as they could end up relapsing if they are forced to go back to school right away.
9. **Involve Indigenous people in solution-making** as they have champions in their community who know a lot of ways to help their communities.
10. **Staff at Indigenous agencies need to get paid better to help with staff retention**, especially staff who have established a lot of trust and relationships with people in the community, including unhoused people.

3. Feedback from Service Providers and Advocates

The points below summarize feedback shared by **service providers and advocates**. They are based on the feedback received during one-on-one introductory conversations, meeting with the Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC), and report-back meetings.

Understanding the context

1. **The conversation about operational protocol to respond to encampments needs to be linked to funding, resources, and policy, and cannot happen in isolation.**
2. **The housing crisis is getting worse every year.** Homelessness is the result of many years of failed housing policies. The rate of people being unhoused is much faster than the housing the City is providing currently. It is becoming harder to access housing – the rents are increasing and the rental requirements are becoming more stringent, and the ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) of \$600 is not enough to share a room and afford food and medicine.
3. **There is more pressure on and not enough resources for key supports and services**, including complex health, mental health, and addictions care, as well as a coordinated system of care to allow for housing stability.
4. **There is a responsibility to understand the historical context of encampments** in Toronto and the City's response to it. Good resources to reference include: "[From Tent City to Housing](#)" – the process and report on how Woodgreen Community Services worked as the third-party coordinator of housing; and the documentary "[Shelter from the Storm](#)", particularly the scene where Tent City residents were meeting with then Councillor Layton.
5. **The City should work with the massive amount of information and studies available**, including a 2007 study by Sylvia Novac "[A revolving door?](#)" that looks at incarceration and homelessness – something the City has been ignoring since the 60s.

Understanding encampments

1. **It is important to remember that most of the people staying in encampments do not have a choice.** Some may choose to stay because this is what they feel they can handle at that moment emotionally and/or financially, but many do not have access to indoor spaces and more often access to indoor spaces that are appropriate for their needs.
2. **Conditions for survival for unhoused people are becoming more dire; there are more deaths on the streets, and more people are in a state of despair.** During the summer, it gets so hot and humid that people suffer from dehydration and malodour. In winter, people struggle to stay alive and have to burn hand sanitizers or bring dangerous propane stoves to keep themselves from freezing. Some parks like Allan Gardens are infested with rats. Survival in more extreme conditions contributes to greater mental health and substance use crises. Chronic sleep deprivation due to over-policing for unhoused folks is another factor that contributes to the public mental health crisis.
3. **It is important to recognize that the location of primary encampment spots** – Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra Park, Lamport Stadium, Bellevue Square Park, and the ones outside of Downtown – **is strategic**. They are in close proximity to accessible services and less enforcement / policing.
4. **Although encampments are inadequate for people to live in, it is also important to understand that there is also good in encampments.** Encampment communities have the social supports that many need to survive, such as peer support, overdose reversal, creativity, people exploring careers, and providing space

and community for people healing from trauma. Additionally, encampments are a way for people to stay in one place for a long time.

Key Challenges

1. **The City's intention for this work is unclear.** Many highlighted that it was not clear what the “response” to encampments is, particularly given that the City Council adopted a “zero encampments” goal with not enough housing to send people to. Some participants pointed out other conflicting City policies, such as “housing readiness” and “housing first”. Many emphasized the importance of the updated protocol to bring clarity to the City’s mission in responding to encampments.
2. **Lack of shelter space, housing, and other resources is challenging for clients and staff.** Many noted their experiences of not being able to find any space indoors for their clients and spoke about the toll the lack of resources has on both the clients and the outreach staff. It is difficult for staff to stay motivated to continue doing the work with no positive outcomes. Many clients feel upset, some become agitated, and lose trust in working with outreach staff. Many spoke about the need for more outreach workers, drop-in centres, and critical resources that help people stay alive before and after they are housed.
3. **Problems with the existing shelter systems contribute to encampment challenges.** While some noted that it is important to recognize that there are good shelters in the city, many spoke about unsafe and inadequate shelter conditions as one of the reasons why people do not want to go inside. A number of stories were shared about sexual and physical assault, undignified treatment of shelter residents, increased risk of COVID-19, and inability to store personal survival gear. Some participants have also reported the problematic assumption that people should just take what’s available while being cut off from their social ties and necessary supports and services. It is also broadly known that April to November is the “camping season”, as fewer emergency shelters, respite sites, and other programs are available during warmer months of the year.
4. **There is no transparency around pathways to shelter and housing.** Many shared that there was no uniform way to get people inside and that only specific, more visible encampments in the city seemed to get priority shelter spaces and resources. Many also noted that it was nearly impossible to get a shelter space through the Central Intake (and most referred to 311 to connect to the Central Intake). Many have also noted that shelter space was prioritized over encampments that were flagged by Councillors or received a lot of negative attention from local homeowners. The unclear and uncertain pathway to housing contributes to the erosion of trust in the City and causes people to set up tents where they would get attention.
5. **Trust in the City is broken.** Many reported a general sense of lack of trust toward the City. Many different elements were cited as either the reason or a contributing factor to the deterioration of trust and relationships with the City, including:
 - Lack of clarity and communication around who does what at the City and why;
 - Lack of transparency around decision-making;
 - The City’s generally guarded approach to sharing information and lack of communication about its actions;
 - Examples of lack of coordination between different divisions responding to the same encampment;
 - Examples of lack of meaningful engagement with encampment residents and incidents of disrespectful treatment;
 - Examples of the seeming lack of the City’s willingness to work with others (e.g., lack of referrals, discontinuation of invitations to collaboration tables, etc.); and
 - Examples of misleading public messaging and language from the City (e.g., positive language used to mask problematic lack of adequate services, referring to shelter spaces as “housing”, etc.).

It is important to note that many participants also noted that many City staff are excellent at doing their jobs and they are valued and trusted partners in the field.

Opportunities for Improvement

1. **Clarify the intention behind the response to encampments.** The City’s mandate of just getting people indoors may have worked two decades ago but now it doesn’t work. With no resources to offer, the mandate of Streets to Homes needs to refocus from “How can I help you find a place?” to “What can we do for you at the moment? Consider replacing “response” with “support”.
2. **Mending relationships and earning trust starts with the City.** It’s up to the City to start fostering goodwill and mending broken relationships. Some of the suggestions for the City related to taking proactive steps included:
 - bringing transparency to decision-making related to the homelessness sector;
 - opening lines of communication and being responsive to key issues raised by community partners, City-funded and non-funded service providers, advocates, and encampment residents;
 - facilitating opportunities for creative, collaborative solutions (e.g., sharing housing and other resource databases, SPIDER-like (Specialized Program for Inter-Divisional Enhanced Responsiveness to Vulnerability) coordination tables, public education opportunities, creative solutions to stay warm and minimize fire risks, etc.); and
 - For this work in particular, it was suggested that a collaboration of a trusted bureaucrat and a trusted community service provider(s) to oversee the response to encampments would be critical to any success. This approach was successful in supporting and housing Tent City residents over 20 years ago.
3. **Prioritize building meaningful relationships with clients.** Meaningful engagement takes time, and it is key to building relationships; meaningful relationships must be at the centre of the outreach function. Focusing on meaningful relationships is especially important because many people experiencing homelessness and living in encampments, have had their trust broken by the City. There are highly skilled City outreach workers who are great at what they do, but that is not true for all of them. Client wellness needs to be prioritized. More and better trainings are needed to:
 - ensure all client engagements are trauma-informed and are rooted in empathy;
 - equip every outreach worker with the necessary skills to respond to critical situations – overdoses, mental health crises, conflicts, etc.; and
 - prevent unnecessary police involvement and criminalization.
4. **Provide better communication with encampment residents about their options.** Communication has gotten better, but it is still not sufficient. Sometimes notices still do not have clear dates and don’t provide any timelines due to weather conditions and other factors. Often people feel coerced by the City into making choices since they risk losing their tents and possessions if they don’t move within the given limited, and often unreasonable, time. There needs to be more advance notice, in a more accessible language, with information on housing options, including pictures, location, type, number of people living there, and nearby services. Notices need to allow enough time for outreach workers to make a follow-up plan and not “lose” their clients.
5. **Ground the response in an individualized client-centred approach.** It is important to understand the demographics and recognize that each person’s situation and needs differ. A case-by-case approach is needed for an individualized plan that best responds to the needs of the clients. This approach should be supported with a variety of dedicated resources easily accessible at encampments.

6. **When it comes to supports, focus on drop-in centres, direct services, and transitional supports for housing stability.** A successful response to encampments needs:
 - hubs for people to go to during the day for meals, showers, and rest;
 - direct mobile low-barrier services provided at encampments, including addictions care, mental health support and infectious disease treatment; as well as ID clinics, tax services, income supports, disability application supports, and terminal illness housing priority application supports; and
 - supports, particularly related to mental health and addictions, as well as life skills and employment, to help the newly housed transition to living indoors and get and maintain stable housing.
7. **Consider creating a specialized shelter with a client placement strategy to serve those who are hardest-to-house** and experience unique challenges living outside. Such a shelter would have 24-hour specialized care and recognize the need of the residents to maintain their existing social networks. Explore putting accountability systems in place following restorative justice practices – with human connection, formal interventions, and access to supports and services.
8. **Engage people living in encampments to be part of co-designing housing solutions.** Where possible, the residents should be involved in the decision-making. That philosophy worked well in StreetCity – an experimental housing project in Toronto’s Downtown East side. Engaging residents from the beginning played a critical role in creating and successfully maintaining StreetCity.
9. **There needs to be pressure on all levels of government.** Whatever the protocol, there needs to be an intergovernmental approach. Other levels of government must contribute. Success depends on the availability of resources and housing. All types of housing are needed, particularly multi-tenant units and modular housing, and we all should continue lobbying governments to build more housing. Opportunities for decentralizing and reconfiguring funding and resourcing from City-led initiatives should also be explored.

Regarding a Human Rights Approach

1. Defining the human rights approach should not be left just to one division. The City’s Housing Rights Advisory Committee should help with this.
2. Human rights have no set of rules, but principles, and it is important to meet the standards of those principles as a foundation for collaboration and accountability. People are willing to collaborate with the City again if the City comes to the table in good faith with respect to human rights to housing, which is already the strategy in the City of Toronto’s *Housing Charter*.
3. Human rights can be used as an accountability mechanism when dealing with housing; consider it as a “carrot” not as a “stick”. The City can use human rights to build trust and calm down tensions, like extending an olive branch for collaboration.
4. The rights-based approach laid out in the *National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada* is a good starting point – and it is important to bring clarity to what resources the City has to implement a rights-based approach.
5. There needs to be clarity on what the City is legally bound to do based on the Waterloo case. Every human being has a right to dignified living and a right to choose. If such housing option is available, the government has the responsibility to make every effort to provide and support that person.
6. For a human rights approach to succeed, it’s important to reveal the systems’ failures and break-down, and change the narrative from that of punishing people living in encampments to creating safety for all (e.g., where it is not either “safety of children” or “safety of encampment residents”, but rather safety for the most vulnerable will bring safety for all). There is currently a lot of stigma and anger which is making these conversations difficult.

Regarding the Dufferin Grove Park Model

1. The Dufferin Grove Model comes close to "[A Path Forward](#)" policy recommendations (co-written by people living in encampments, service providers and advocates in 2021). However, it may not be feasible to scale to the same level of concentration of resources across the city.
2. Dufferin Grove showed that grassroots creative coordination of getting people housed worked. Coordination works, different organizations stepped up, and services were brought to people. The word got around in the community and people started coming to Dufferin Grove strategically to get access to housing and services.
3. There needs to be clarity around how success is defined and measured, and the standard for success should be high. For example, the number of people referred and housed is not enough to infer success; the number of people who are staying housed over longer periods would be a better indicator.

Process Advice

1. It is up to the City to show goodwill and start the process right – the good faith offered need to be there.
2. The City will need to take concrete actions and commit to policy changes that would be meaningful to people on the ground before further discussions can occur, including:
 - Stop encampment evictions at least for the duration of this work; it is difficult to see how the City can genuinely try to engage people on the human rights approach while clearing the encampments.
 - Garner political will to recognize and address the problematic *Zero Encampment* policy.
 - This work should be accompanied by large systemic changes that address the core issues and needs of the people, including housing options.
3. For any trust in the process, tangible, basic needs of unhoused people should be met upfront before any conversations take place. These include access to food and water, access to washrooms, showers, and health supplies like N95 masks.
4. There also needs to be a moratorium on evictions at least for the duration of the consultation period.
5. The pathway from encampments to housing needs to be clear at the end of this process.
6. For accountability, the consultation process should be made as public as possible, with considerations for the safety of those currently unhoused.
7. Observers from both the federal and the provincial levels should be invited to the consultations for accountability, particularly the Federal Housing Advocate. It is important for them to get to know about the situation in Toronto first-hand.

4. Feedback from Indigenous Agencies and Service Providers

The points below summarize feedback shared by **Indigenous agencies and service providers**. They are based on the feedback received at the introductory meeting and the follow-up meeting with Indigenous agencies and service providers.

Important considerations and themes to explore together as part of this work

1. **People living outside need long-term sustainable solutions and timely access to resources.** Sustainable solutions need to include easier access to housing benefits, including the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, and a range of housing options to live with dignity and access to essential resources and life skills that are vital for survival.
2. **A key factor for a successful response to encampments is ensuring newly housed people still have their community to rely on.** Part of sustainable solutions is instilling a sense of community in encampments, where encampment residents can step into leadership roles and feel supported by their own. Often this sense of cohesiveness is jeopardized depending on the housing type.
3. **Resources need to be prioritized and readily available for Indigenous people living in encampments.** It is important to recognize that people face many barriers living outside, and resources are vital for people's survival. The Central Intake is not helpful – it may take hours and then the call drops. More resources are lost due to budget cuts. Indigenous service providers are asked to extend supports to non-Indigenous people, which means those services may not be readily available to Indigenous people.
4. **There should be an emphasis on the continuum of care and creating culturally safe spaces for Indigenous people,** particularly women, youth, elders, and LGBTQ2S+ communities.
5. **Calling the police and getting the tents removed should be an absolute, last resort.** There should be every effort put in place to prevent clearings without people receiving housing. There needs to be a comprehensive examination of the production of invisible harms and escalation of risks resulting from clearings, a detailed look into the make-up of the clearings, and advanced communication and coordination with service providers and communities about any upcoming clearings.
6. **Trust and transparency are key to this work.** Responding to encampments needs to start with the understanding of the Anishinaabe connection to the land and the intergenerational impacts of colonization. There should be clarity around roles, responsibilities, and honest conversations about reasons for, and impacts of clearing actions and the trauma it perpetuates. It is important to separate service providers and front-line workers from City employees posting about clearings so as not to compromise their helpful role in providing supports and not to be misperceived as collaborators of the colonial system. The use of “culturally appropriate” in the City's response mustn't be taken as permission for the City to evict Indigenous people from encampments. It needs to be clear that the purpose of this work and these meetings are to provide guidance, advice, and support on how to address encampments in a good way, and it is not about “clearing the camps together”.
7. **Look into providing a variety of short- to medium-term housing solutions.** Transitional housing provides a great opportunity for people to get back on their feet and have a physical address to collect government support and get on the waiting list for subsidized housing while having access to running water and heat. Modular housing is another option and has worked in other cities.
8. **Look into all sources of funding** and consider partnering with large corporations to see what they could do to help address encampments.

How to best work together so the process is meaningful and co-developed

1. **Start with the right relationships and use the established Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy to keep the dialogue open.** It is important that this engagement is approached not from a bureaucratic standpoint but with the advice and guidance of those who have the right relationships and direct knowledge to support unhoused people. Meeting in the Middle was co-created by Toronto Shelter & Support Services, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, and the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board. It lays out commitments and a framework for co-development.
2. **Invite representatives of other City divisions to be part of the solution.** Long-term sustainable solutions require cross-divisional collaboration and agreement.
3. **Reach out to different members of the community with lived experience with proper honoraria and support.** Keep participants informed and the dialogue open.
4. **Learn from other jurisdictions and recent relevant reports,** including the recently released report from the Federal Housing Advocate "[Upholding dignity and human rights: the Federal Housing Advocate's review of homeless encampments](#)." The report identifies actions that have been successful in the past, such as transitional housing (e.g., tiny homes) and ending the practice of forced evictions. It also provides good advice from the Indigenous point of view.
5. **Participants expressed gratitude for the efforts and work that City staff is doing with Indigenous organizations in Toronto.**

5. Feedback from Business Improvement Areas

The points below summarize feedback shared by **Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)**. They are based on the introductory conversations with BIAs and the report-back meetings.

Experience with encampments

Challenges BIAs experience with encampments

- BIAs feel that they are left to deal with encampments, even if they do not have the capacity or the expertise to do so.** Many participating BIAs said that they receive concerns related to encampments from their members. While some BIAs have taken proactive steps of doing encampment outreach, tracking and reporting encampments to the City, most BIAs indicated that they lack the necessary structure, capacity, training, or resources to deal with encampments.
- Safety is a big concern.** Many BIAs reported having experienced safety issues related to small business theft and break-ins, fire risks due to propane tanks being used, drug use, people experiencing mental health crises, sexual assaults, violence, and aggressive behaviour toward residents and visitors. Participants said local businesses are being impacted because shoppers are not happy or are scared to visit stores with encampments nearby. Others noted that it's important to remember that safety is also an issue for people living in encampments.
- Cleanliness issues and significant buildup of litter,** including rotting food and people defecating in front of private properties or in private buildings' washrooms, making the area look unsafe and unappealing to people who work, live, or visit.
- Lack of information, no clear communication, and slow or no response from the City.** One of the biggest challenges BIAs experience related to encampments is that the City doesn't share the City's approach to responding to encampments, and resources and information on what to do and who to contact when encampments occur. They also said it takes a long time for the City to respond to BIAs, with some saying that the reporting of the encampment-related data to the City is a bit of a "black box" with no acknowledgement or response. Other BIAs said they are left to resolve urgent health and safety issues on their own (e.g., cleaning of fecal matter) as reporting to 311 could take days for the issue to be addressed. Many BIAs said they feel like the City does not do anything to address encampments, nor hears businesses' concerns.
- Lack of clarity in the City's response protocols.** It's unclear when the by-law is enforced (i.e., not allowing setting up of encampments), and under what circumstances.
- Impact on the activation and animation that BIAs do in the community.** Encampments deter people from visiting community events. BIAs are forced to spend more money to hire more security, coordinate community event relocation, and constantly fix assets due to vandalism and theft.
- The negative impact of working in internal and external silos.** Participating BIAs said that the City and community organizations want to do the right thing and help vulnerable people, but there are no clear ways to communicate and coordinate, and everyone works in fragments. The horizontal and vertical silos among different City divisions and within staff from the same divisions are problematic as it results in issues in resource allocation. It also prevents building a shared understanding that encampments affect everybody if they are not addressed properly. Not seeing it from a shared lens could result in urban decline (e.g., businesses and residents leaving the city, which would impact the economy, and worsening frustrations could lead to extreme violence).

Positive experience with encampments

1. **While most BIAs said that they do not have any positive experience with encampments, a few emphasized that not everyone in encampments causes issues and it's important to share and highlight the positive stories.** Some BIAs noted that many encampment residents are great community partners. For example, the positive relationships BIAs built with encampment residents have allowed BIAs to address encampment issues with the support of encampment residents, without needing to go to the Encampment Office.
2. **Encampments have created collective care and a positive sense of community.** Some BIAs noted that they provide donations and supports to their neighbouring encampment residents.
3. **Interaction with encampments reveals systems' failure.** Some BIAs said that experiences with encampments help raise awareness of the system issues and how those who are already marginalized “are on the receiving end” of the systems' failure.

Thoughts on the City's current response to encampments

What the City is doing well

1. **The City outreach and referrals to available resources.**
2. **Posting notices and clearing of encampments.**
3. **Some City Councillors Offices' ability to push the City staff** to help BIAs with encampment issues.

What the City needs to improve

1. **Reconsider the City's definition of encampments to ensure the updated approach also applies to people sleeping rough.** The traditional definition of encampments refers to a structure, but there are situations where people are sleeping outside or in a TTC shelter for days with no response from the City.
2. **Improve how the City responds to encampments, with some suggesting that adequate housing be provided first before discussions about clearing happen, and others suggesting a faster and stronger approach to encampments.** Some participants said the removal of encampments should be done in a kinder way, with adequate notice, housing options and treatment provided. Others would like encampments to be removed quickly. One participant suggested the City make it mandatory for people to accept shelter referrals, and if referrals are not accepted, encampment residents should be considered trespassing in parks.
3. **Provide more housing options.** There are not enough services and permanent housing or shelter space to offer encampment residents. Provide more opportunities for transitional housing and shelter spots to help encampment residents transition out of encampments.
4. **Provide more supports for health and well-being** including offering more mental health supports, substance use recovery, rehab and detox facilities, installing garbage bins and doing more garbage pick-ups, providing safe disposal of substances (e.g., needles), and providing porta-potties and weekly servicing of porta-potties.
5. **Improve coordination and address duplication of services between the City and external organizations like BIAs and community organizations.** There is an over-saturation of services and support on some encampment sites. Though it is done in the name of goodwill, the lack of coordination often overwhelms encampment residents and results in inefficient use of the collective resources of the City, BIAs, and service providers. The lack of coordination often results in:
 - inefficient resource distribution, with some sites being overserviced and some underserviced;
 - competing with the City's Streets to Homes staff for shelter referrals; and
 - inability to provide continuous client support, especially for those who are going from encampment to encampment, because there's no central system for client management.

Advice and suggestions to the City

1. **Transparent and timely communication about the encampment response process and updates.** Consider having weekly updates and regular checkpoints with the Toronto Shelter & Support Services, and other relevant City divisions. The City's step-by-step encampment response process should be posted on the City's website, so people know what to expect. Also consider having a more organized reporting system showing response status (e.g., if an outreach worker has visited, if resources have been offered, and if notice has been posted), so BIAs are not reporting blindly.
2. **Create information flyers containing all resources** available for BIAs to circulate to their member businesses. It should include information on who BIAs can contact in the City when an encampment is set up or when issues arise (e.g., overdose, fire, waste collection, etc.). BIAs should not need to reach out to Councillors or the police to get a response and action from City staff.
3. **When encampments are cleared (i.e., every resident accepts the indoor shelter space), clearly communicate the next steps and action plan on what will be done to clean and fix the space and prevent new tents from coming.** The City should not just monitor the site and wait for tents to come back. Creating clear next steps with timelines should be shared publicly and with BIAs so there is community awareness.
4. **The approach to responding to encampments needs to be multi-pronged.** The City needs to look at all the different pieces and see the broader issues more holistically. The response cannot be about just providing supports, it needs to move people along the next best possible option, so people are not stuck in encampments. The City should also look beyond reactive approaches and look into preventative measures.
5. **Track and measure outcomes.** Track whether the City's actions are resulting in encampment residents being permanently housed. Follow up with people once they are housed to see what's working well.
6. **Self-determination of encampment residents and hearing directly from them are important as there are concerns about people who speak for encampment residents.** Participants shared concerns with non-encampment residents who speak for encampment residents and idealize living in encampments. There are some who would tell encampment residents to not leave the encampments or to not accept the service or housing offered. Their intent may be well-intentioned, but the outcomes are counterproductive.
7. **The refugee crisis is an important part of the homelessness context.** Participants said that about half of the occupants in the shelter system are refugees, which then creates resource limitations for encampment residents. It is also not good that refugees are coming to Canada and living outside due to a lack of housing.
8. **Do not reinvent the wheel to solve encampment issues – tap into what other jurisdictions are doing to find solutions.** Although local context is important, the City can also look elsewhere for their solutions. Doing it the "Toronto way" may mean a longer process of getting things done.

Role that BIAs could have in the updated approach to responding to encampments

The sentiment was split on whether BIAs should have a role in providing a response to encampments.

1. Most of those who said that BIAs should have a role said the primary role of BIAs could be in **notifying the City when there is an encampment in their area, and when there are health and safety concerns that need City action**, like maintenance/clean-up. For BIAs who do encampment outreach and have partnered with service providers to help with encampment frontline support, they would like to **be seen as a partner and not as a competition** when providing supports at encampments.
2. Those who said BIAs should not have a role said **housing should not be a BIA issue and the City should not download City functions to a volunteer board**. BIA staff are not trained, do not feel safe, nor have the resources to interact with encampment residents. It's not the BIAs job to educate members on what to do. It is the City's job to inform BIAs what resources are in place and what steps to follow.

6. Feedback from Resident Associations

The points below summarize feedback shared by **Resident Associations (RAs)**. They are based on the Resident Association survey and the report-back meeting.

Experience with encampments

- 1. Encampments are a growing concern for Resident Associations. Many participants reported feeling unsafe around encampments.** Participating Resident Associations reported that the concerns they receive from their members relate to inappropriate, aggressive, or violent behaviour, theft, drug use and unsafe needle disposal, noise, and fire hazards. Some noted that encampments are right outside of their windows – within earshot, where they are not able to sleep because of people in encampments partying, fighting, or experiencing mental health crisis. Others noted the accumulation of waste and flammable debris which led to dangerous fires in encampments and deaths. Finally, participants noted that many started avoiding parks with encampments for walks due to incidents of unprovoked assault, as well as for children to play due to incidents of indecent exposure and drug use, or for community activities and events.
- 2. While many reported no positive experiences with encampments, some noted community solidarity, collaboration, and increased awareness of homelessness.** Residents have been pushed to engage with local organizations, City staff and community leaders to find ways the community can support encampment residents.
- 3. Some noted the importance of encampments in providing encampment residents with community support and networks.** Some people who get housed return to their previous encampments because of the network of support they have there. When people are housed, they shouldn't be taken away from the community and neighbourhood they know. Social networks and community support help minimize the risks of outsiders taking advantage of vulnerable unhoused people.
- 4. Some raised concerns for the well-being of those living in tents and the limited adequate housing options available to offer them.** Some respondents expressed a desire to help and support encampment residents while the City finds permanent housing solutions.

Thoughts on the City's current response to encampments

- 1. The current approach to encampment is not working; many residents feel frustrated, unheard, and abandoned.** The situation is endangering both encampment residents and neighbours around them. In general, those who live close to some encampments feel like they have been left to manage all impacts of encampments on their own, including policing and providing frontline support to people who are not well and need immediate help.
- 2. It is not clear what the current approach to responding to encampments is and it is difficult to find information about it.** Many participants noted that they had not heard of the IDP and did not know what the approach is, where to get this information, and who to call at the City. It was not clear whether the City policy was to enforce by-laws or let people live in encampments. Some were also curious if the City could stop encampments from growing in size and what the City could do if someone refused to go inside and behaved in a way that posed a risk to themselves and others.
- 3. It is unclear how the City makes decisions about which encampments get a priority response and which do not.** Some participants shared their observations that it is the encampments in the wealthier neighbourhoods with those who can exert more political power that see the City responding to encampments, allocating resources, and enforcing by-laws, whereas poorer neighbourhoods with lots of seniors do not get the same level of attention.
- 4. Lack of communication and collaboration from the City about encampments is a major problem.** Many participants emphasized how disappointing and discouraging their experience has been trying to communicate with City staff and elected officials about encampments, where no information and often no response of any kind is provided. Although some noted that their current or previous Councillors were excellent in providing responses, a more general sentiment was that some Councillors were non-responsive.

Similarly, participants noted the frustrating experience with 311, which usually takes a long time to get through just to be sent to a different place to try for more information or services.

5. **Some highlighted that they commend City staff who treat encampment residents with dignity and compassion and turn up quickly to help encampment residents.** They said the rest of the City staff should continue to treat people with dignity.

Advice and suggestions for the City

1. **All encampments need to have an immediate response with support** such as housing, mental health services, and outreach without delay. The City should be doing more in providing housing and wrap-around services to encampment residents to prevent re-encampment.
2. **There should be more inter-governmental collaboration.** The Federal government has the money, the Province makes the rules, but the Cities are the ones who have to deal with the issues. Governments should work together to come up with a more concrete plan to provide housing solutions.
3. **There needs to be communication and coordination between the City, elected officials, the community, and encampment residents to discuss and address encampments effectively** as there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution and because generally people do not know what to do when they see an encampment in their neighbourhoods. Create an easily accessible resident booklet on what steps to take in case of an encampment, who to call, and how to access services.
4. **Explore different housing options for faster long-term and short-term housing solutions,** like tiny homes or enhanced shelters, where washrooms and garbage pick-up are provided.
5. **The City should learn from other jurisdictions.** There need to be specific policies and regulations around encampments to help bring balance to the surrounding communities. For example, Hamilton developed policies that regulate the encampment size, and allowable proximity to schools and playgrounds.
6. **It is important not to trump over the rights of children and other vulnerable members of Toronto communities in prioritizing the rights of encampment residents.** There needs to be clarity on how the human rights approach would reconcile such conflict.
7. **It needs to be clear that encampments cannot be a permanent solution to the housing crises.** Even with all the necessary supports and services provided at encampment sites, encampments are still unsafe and often serve as spots for illegal and dangerous activities and they do not solve the root causes of homelessness.
8. **Prioritize social and health services over policing** to promote achieving positive outcomes through community support and assistance. Continue and expand the work of the Streets to Homes outreach team and prioritize allocating additional funding for mental health crisis response teams and focus on preventative measures to tackle the root causes of homelessness.

Role the RAs could have in the updated approach to responding to encampments

1. **When asked if Resident Associations should have a role in responding to encampments, the majority of respondents said yes. Those who said RAs should have a role said their role should primarily be a conduit for information and communication.** Resident Associations see themselves as a unique source of real-time information, providing insights into encampments and acting as liaisons between residents and the City. Some participants said they should be considered as important stakeholders in addressing encampments. Others noted their role could go beyond reporting and help with the coordination of local resources. Those who said no said there is already enormous pressure on volunteer groups and that responding to encampments is the responsibility of the government.

7. Feedback from City of Toronto staff

The points below summarize key feedback themes shared by **City of Toronto staff** from Toronto Shelter and Support Services, Streets to Homes, Encampment Office (Toronto Emergency Management), Social Development, Finance & Administration, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Transportation Services, Solid Waste Management, Toronto Fire Services, Toronto Public Health, Housing Secretariat, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Corporate Security, and Strategic Public & Employee Communications. They are based on the feedback received at the working sessions and report-back meeting with City staff.

Key Challenges

- 1. Competing priorities and mandates of diverse internal and external stakeholders and budgetary constraints present a significant challenge in finding common ground and achieving effective solutions.** Often City staff are faced with competing and often conflicting sets of internal City priorities, including balancing the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness with the divisional mandates to uphold laws, regulations, and existing City standards (e.g., ensuring safe, unobstructed use of public sidewalks or public access to City parks, maintain public access to public spaces, etc.). City staff working to respond to encampments often feel that they are caught in a hard place to “make everyone happy”.
- 2. There was a range of perspectives shared on what the human rights approach means and how to balance the rights of everyone impacted by encampments.** While there was general agreement on the need to apply a “vulnerability lens” and be trauma-informed in the approach to encampments, there were multiple perspectives shared on whether the approach to rights should be based on equality or equity – who should be considered vulnerable and whose rights need to be prioritized if at all.
- 3. Inconsistent decision-making among different divisions about how risks are assessed and how clients get indoors undermines a fair and equitable process across all systems.** The lack of consistent protocols often results in “other” pathways for people to access indoor spaces. For example, there is a centralized waiting list for social housing, however the City has the ability to prioritize housing resources for people in encampments. Doing so undermines opportunities for others and makes people come into parks for the services that should be readily available across the system.
- 4. Political pressure impacts resource allocation.** Political pressure often creates a sense of urgency to respond to non-emergency situations. Such pressures create undue impact on decision-making and resource allocation, negatively impacting actual emergencies.
- 5. Some staff on the ground feel unsafe in their working environments.** Some staff working on the ground recounted numerous examples of harassment, doxing, aggressive behaviour, and being “demonized” on social media. It was noted that frontline staff reported being hesitant to conduct on-the-ground routines due to tensions fueled by misinformation.
- 6. Lack of housing options and limited resources are a big challenge in providing meaningful responses to encampment residents.** The response on the ground is just a small part of big systemic problems; a symptom of the many crises the City faces, including crises related to housing, mental health, and substance use. There are often not enough opportunities to provide a meaningful, immediate response or to secure long-term sustainable solutions for clients due to the lack of housing options (including in areas where people live), not enough shelter spaces, and limited resources.
- 7. Lack of clarity around coordination and information sharing with the non-frontline City staff.** Some non-frontline staff said they were not clear about what steps to take when they become or should become aware of encampments in their line of work.

8. **Lack of clear two-way communication with external stakeholders often causes and escalates tensions.** For example, sharing information when someone has been housed and left their belonging by choice could have prevented escalated encounters between City staff and advocates for those experiencing homelessness. Staff noted that they do not have clear means or a recourse to respond and share accurate information with communities.
9. **There is a disconnect between the City's commitment to the *Reconciliation Action Plan* and the mandates of City staff to clear encampments.** The conflict of the displacement of Indigenous individuals from land in the city and the workaround *Truth and Reconciliation* can be morally distressing to City staff. Meaningful engagement and relationship-building with Indigenous communities, such as sitting down with Elders and building trust, can help redefine how working with encampments looks like and may require a shift in the City's views and mandates.
10. **Frontline staff often experience burnout and mental health fatigue.** Some staff noted that they often feel moral tension when they do not agree that clearing is the best solution. The feeling of being unable to effectively support clients, moral tensions, lack of trust with communities, and the lack of clarity about the City's priorities and decision-making makes it difficult to stay in the job and the sector.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. **Facilitate change in the organizational culture to be more focused on creativity and innovation across services and divisions.** Staff responding to encampments need to be able to engage creatively in complex problem-solving, while driving forward their divisional mandates, especially in contentious situations with communities in and around encampments. Examples of success included Toronto Fire's proactive sharing of information/education on fire risks and working together with encampment residents to minimize those risks.
2. **Explore solutions for fair and equitable resource allocation and consistent assessment of needs and risks.** Explore opportunities for a shared transparent resource allocation system. Resource allocation needs to be based on a consistent risk and needs assessment method on the spectrum from prevention to intervention, to emergency response, to recovery.
3. **There is a need for a shared understanding and cross-divisional agreement on key concepts, including what a human-rights approach means when it comes to addressing the encampments.** It needs to be clear where the definition of a human rights approach comes from; its authority in Canadian legislation and City policies; how the approach relates to all the work the City does and how the City Council makes decisions; how this approach is applied when staff face limitations in rights, resources, or responsibilities; and how it would be aligned with competing policies, City Council directions, or by-laws.
4. **There needs to be clarity around roles and responsibilities and how everyone stays connected.** The updated IDP needs to bring clarity to who is involved and in what capacity. There need to be mechanisms that connect leadership, policy, and operation teams on a regular basis to ensure the IDP works and stays relevant. It is also extremely important to keep Streets to Homes separated from enforcement to not jeopardize their relationships with the clients.
5. **There needs to be better data sharing and process mapping** to understand where encampments are, what resources are being allocated to them, which divisions are servicing the same place, and who is doing what. (e.g., success stories with using the app Fulcrum).
6. **Improve communication.** Meaningful communication needs to be two-way. The process for giving feedback and lodging complaints should be fixed with a meaningful follow-up response. Special attention should be paid to 311 complaints for valuable info on issues that could be addressed through improved public communication. Explore creating a team dedicated to bridging communication gaps internally and externally through effective and purposeful ongoing engagement.

7. **Promote staff training and safe working environment.** There needs to be acknowledgement that not everyone doing the coordination, or the frontline work is equipped with proper knowledge and expertise to respond to encampments. Proficiency in responding to people in crises needs to be cultivated through staff training, while also providing safety and well-being guidelines. It was also noted that the safety and well-being of frontline staff is a significant employer's responsibility under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.
8. **Harm reduction cannot be a footnote – IDP needs to be clear about pathways to necessary supports and services.** Connection to appropriate supports is extremely important for better health outcomes and from a community safety perspective as well. Ways to improve coordination between services should be explored and specific suggestions have been shared.
9. **IDP needs to make the case that information and education is a better use of resources than enforcement.** There is a need for a public education campaign:
 - To change the general attitude towards encampments – that not every encampment is an emergency to respond to;
 - To deepen public understanding of why people set up encampments and that sheltering does not work for everyone for many reasons – trauma, health needs, and rules that set people up for failure, and that it is not a permanent solution;
 - To highlight that providing supports at encampments is a step in the right direction but it is not the ultimate goal;
 - To emphasize that the City's goal is to house people, but the resources are not always available to do so;
 - To raise awareness that it is not enough just to house people; supports to help them transition and find housing stability are key;
 - That Toronto is not the only city that faces the homelessness crisis; and that it is everybody's responsibility to address this crisis – the federal and the provincial governments, cities, and all members of communities in and around encampments.
10. **Partnerships and community engagement are extremely valuable in this line of work.** Updating the IDP is an opportunity to earn trust and mend relationships through transparency and consistency. It is important for the City to recognize the value, experience, and expertise that everyone in and around encampments brings to the table. It is the advocates that push for positive change and improvements, it is the service providers that play a critical role in addressing the needs of people in encampments; it is the communities around encampments that often help those in need. Engage in open and honest conversations about the impacts of policies and government decisions, being transparent about the lack of services, resources, and housing for those experiencing homelessness, and what the City can do is a crucial first step towards addressing the issue effectively.

Reflection on what made the Dufferin Grove Park Approach a Success

City staff and service providers reflected on what made the Dufferin Grove Park approach a success. Shared thoughts included:

1. **Building relationships and focusing on kindness** – it started with the recognition that people who lived there were members of the community who had just as much of a right to that space as other community members.
2. **Availability of concentrated resources** for individualized and culturally appropriate housing plan (e.g., real housing solutions, not shelter or warming center solutions).
3. **No attached timeline** which allowed to work with individuals in a more meaningful personalized way and allowed City staff to be more creative (e.g., nobody was posting you will be evicted in 14 days).
4. **Cross-divisional collaboration** to support the needs of the clients – e.g., ID clinics.
5. **No new tents were allowed.** It's important to remember that the security was stopping people from setting up new tents.
6. **Learn from success and failures.** It is important to look at both the success and failures of Dufferin Grove to continue refining best practices.

8. Feedback from Toronto Police Service

The points below summarize feedback shared by **Toronto Police Service (TPS) staff**. They are based on the feedback received at the meeting with the Toronto Police Service.

Key Challenges

1. **The City's response to encampments is unclear.** It is unclear how the City addresses encampments when there is no available housing to offer to people, how the City addresses addictions in encampments, and what the plan is to prevent newly housed people from going back to encampments. It is also unclear what the general plan is for those who refuse to go to shelters or who have been barred from all shelter programs in the city.
2. **It is often a public perception that it is TPS that addresses encampments.** Despite messaging from Councillors that encampments are not a police issue, TPS continues to receive complaints to respond to encampments.
3. **TPS staff is often deployed to address situations that the City's Corporate Security should be addressing.** Often Corporate Security is contracted out to private security companies where the training is insufficient to appropriately deal with issues in encampments, which results in TPS needing to attend to issues at encampments.
4. **Often there is confusion about who exactly the trespass notice is for.** The name of the person trespassing is not provided, or sometimes the person served with the notice is not present on the site which creates confusion.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. **Be upfront about the City's tolerance for encampments and what it means in terms of by-laws.** The City should provide clarity around what is acceptable in terms of encampment size and risks, and when relevant by-laws need to be enforced.
2. **The larger the encampments, the more difficult they are to manage.** The larger encampments attract more attention and add different layers of complexity to responding to them. The size of encampments needs to be managed.
3. **There needs to be clarity through the City's public statement that responding to encampments is not a police-led enforcement action,** but a City-led approach driven by public health concerns.
4. **Increase public awareness and communication of the actions taken by the City to address the encampments.** The public wants to know what the City is doing to address encampments. Such information will help with misconceptions and misinformation and could potentially increase public support. Such public messages could be shared by elected officials with their constituents.
5. **Look at what other cities in North America are doing.** It is not a Toronto-only problem; learn from the success of others.
6. **Consider sharing appropriate data with TPS** to ensure that if TPS needs to be involved they have all the relevant information for a better, more effective response.

Attachments



Attachment 1: Participating Organizations

Listed below are the organizations the participants were affiliated with. Note that some participants did not identify the organizations they are affiliated with.

City of Toronto

Encampment Office (at the time of participation was part of the Toronto Emergency Management)
Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) – Streets to Homes and Encampment Office
Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS)
Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PFR)
Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC)
Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA)
Toronto Fire Services
Toronto Police Services (TPS)
Toronto Public Health (TPH)

Service Providers and Advocates

Agincourt Community Services Association
Albion Neighbourhood Services
Church of St Stephen-in-the-Fields
Editors of Displacement City
FIFE House
Fred Victor
Good Sheppard Non-Profit Home
Haven Toronto
Homes First
Interfaith Coalition
Inner City Health Associates (ICHA)
LOFT Community Service
Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT)
Salvation Army Gateway Outreach Team
Street Clinical Outreach for Unsheltered-Torontonians
Toronto Drop-In Network (TDIN)
The 519
The Shift
The Neighbourhood Group (TNG)
Yonge Street Mission

Indigenous Service Providers

Anishnawbe Health Unit Toronto
ENAGB
Na-Me-Res
Native Women Resource Centre
The Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts
Toronto & York Region Métis Council

Business Improvement Areas

Bloor by the Park BIA
Bloor Yorkville BIA
Bloor West Village BIA
Bloorcourt BIA
Cabbagetown BIA
Chinatown BIA
Church-Wellesley BIA
Downtown Yonge BIA
Financial District BIA
Hillcrest Village BIA
Liberty Village BIA
Ossington BIA
Riverside BIA
St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA
The Junction BIA
Toronto Downtown West BIA
Upper Village BIA
Waterfront BIA
Yonge North York BIA

Resident Associations

ABC Residents Association
Allan Gardens District Residents Association
Bay Cloverhill Community Association
Beach Triangle Residents Association
Beaconsfield Village Residents Association
Bellevue Square Park Residents Association
Bloor Street East Neighbourhood Association
Cabbagetown Residents Association
Church Wellesley Neighborhood Association

Don Mills Residents Inc.
Downsview Lands Community Voice Association
East Waterfront Community Association
Friends of Randy Padmore Park
Federation of South Toronto Residents Association
Garment District Neighbourhood Association
Garden District Residents Association
Grange Community Association
Harbord Village Residents Association
Kensington Market Action Committee
Leaside Residents Association
McGill Granby Village Residents Association
Palmerston Area Residents Association
Parkdale Residents Association
Roncesvalles Macdonell Residents Association
Silverview Community Association
St Lawrence Market Neighbourhood Association
Wellington Place Neighbourhood Association
Willowdale Residents Association
Winchester Park Residents Association (WPRA)
Wynford – Concord segment of Don Mills Residents
Inc.
York Quay Residents Association