




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members City Council
DATE:	April 27, 2023
SUBJECT:	Encampment Coordination Update – April 2023 (City wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Angela Burden General Manager Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

BACKGROUND:

On March 31, 2022, City Council approved that an Encampment Coordination Team be created as a pilot to the end of 2022 and all reports related to encampment coordination and response in Hamilton be brought forward to the General Issues Committee for discussion and decisions.

The pilot included Parks, Municipal Law Enforcement and Housing Services divisions, supported by Hamilton Police Services; the team worked together to provide an integrated response to address public complaints and respond to the needs of unsheltered individuals. The team was resourced to enforce the Parks By-law seven days a week, within a 72-hour timeframe of notices being issued.

On February 8, 2023, Council approved extension of the pilot until the end of April 2023, as well as staffing resources to support encampment response through a housing-first approach. Continuation of these resources were approved through the 2024 budget process.

The Encampment Coordination Response Team (CRT) was re-established on February 15, 2023 and includes staff from Housing-focused Street Outreach (HFSO), Municipal Law Enforcement (MLE), Parks and Hamilton Police Services (HPS). Additionally, the Hamilton Police Services' Social Navigator Program staff and other staff from the Crisis Outreach & Support Team (COAST) attend meetings and provide support as required.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

As directed by Council, staff have engaged stakeholders and are currently working on the development of a new encampment protocol, which will be brought forward to General Issues Committee in May. Once Council approves a new encampment protocol, resources associated with the current response coordination will be reallocated to the new protocol.

INFORMATION:

Current Encampment Response Coordination Efforts

Since re-establishment of the Coordinated Encampment Response Team in February 2023 under a housing-first approach, morning meetings take place with Housing Focused Street Outreach (HFSO), Municipal Law Enforcement (MLE), Parks and Hamilton Police Services (HPS) to coordinate and strategize around encampment response and addresses any new sites or concerns raised.

As a first step, Housing-focused Street Outreach staff engage with people living within an encampment to better understand their needs and connect them with internal and community supports, including housing-focused case management; referrals into the emergency shelter system; referrals to health agencies, social assistance supports, and specialized outreach supports; as well as any other relevant supports available that could improve their health and well-being.

All complaints and concerns received by either Municipal Law Enforcement or Parks are redirected to Housing-focused Street Outreach (i.e. unsheltered@hamilton.ca) to triage.

- Housing-focused Street Outreach visit a site before City staff from other divisions. If concerns are urgent, there is immediate escalation to Municipal Law Enforcement for same-day and immediate resolution as required. For example, if a tent is located on a roadway and poses a threat to health, safety and/or well-being. Housing-focused Street Outreach engagement with unsheltered individuals takes time, and these efforts occur for non-urgent situations prior to any engagement through Municipal Law Enforcement.
- As part of the response, Parks staff provide or coordinate waste disposal support at existing encampment sites and remove debris from encampments when they are no longer occupied. Litter collection includes pick up of drug paraphernalia and is safely collected and disposed of by staff or contractors, or residents of encampments are provided with safe disposal options for their use.
- Outside of the same day/urgent notification of issues, Municipal Law Enforcement is made aware of ongoing concerns during the morning meetings. If, following the best efforts of the Housing-focused Street Outreach team to connect encampment residents with appropriate supports and referrals, an encampment site persists, and

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

where reasonable shelter alternatives are available, Municipal Law Enforcement will attend the site to issue a notice to vacate. The notice for compliance period may vary depending on each circumstance and immediate safety risk.

- When a notice is issued, Municipal Law Enforcement endeavours to follow the 72-hour timeframe for enforcement. However, as noted at the time of Council's resource approval, MLE has fewer resources allocated to the response and so achieving this target is not always feasible with current resources.
- Hamilton Police Services are made aware of ongoing and immediate concerns as they arise as well as during the morning meetings. HPS officers attend encampments as a support to Municipal Law Enforcement's enforcement efforts, and to support the safety of Parks and Housing-focused Street Outreach staff as needed. It is important to note that Hamilton Police Services do not take direction from City staff and function in a support role.
- Shelter capacity and the lack of housing alternatives for unsheltered individuals remains a daily pressure. Many unsheltered individuals who are engaged by Housing-focused Street Outreach are not interested in emergency shelter as a solution, even when a shelter bed is available. During the pilot, while encampment residents were moved as per the Parks By-law and within the 72-hour timeframe, and voluntary compliance was achieved, the majority of unsheltered individuals moved to another encampment site and were not housed by either the emergency shelter system or permanent housing.
- This reality has made the implementation of a housing-first approach challenging as it relates to enforcement of the Parks By-law with respect to encampment sites.

Future Updates

Staff will provide Council with monthly updates with respect to the Encampment Coordination Teams activities. Future updates will also include monthly data reporting. An update for May 2022 will be provided the first week of June, and monthly thereafter.

Please direct any inquiries to Danielle Blake, Manager, Housing Focused Street Outreach at (905) 546-2424 ext. 3731 or by email at Danielle.Blake@hamilton.ca.