

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: September 9, 2024
To: Mayor and Council
From: John Ritz, Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor
Kim McElroy, Director of Social Services
Report Number: COU24-101
Attachments: 1. Presentation – Encampments: A Homelessness Crisis;
2. AMO Homeless Encampments in Ontario: A Municipal Perspective
Position Paper

Title: Updated Coordinated Strategy for Public Land Encampments

Objective: To provide the Mayor and Council an update on the City’s updated coordinated encampment strategy for the City of Stratford in response to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario’s (AMO) position paper “Homeless Encampments in Ontario: A Municipal Perspective.”

Background: On February 14, 2022, the City adopted a Coordinated Response for Those Unsheltered (SOC22-003). Included in this report was the City’s approach to encampments.

On July 2, 2024, AMO released a position paper “Homeless Encampments in Ontario: A Municipal Perspective”. This prompted a review of the City of Stratford’s Coordinated Response.

The AMO report highlights key points including:

- Encampments in municipalities are the result of a lack of intergovernmental cooperation and a lack of supply of affordable housing.
- Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada where social housing is a municipal responsibility, versus a provincial one. Because of this, Ontario municipalities must be flexible to respond to increasingly complex homelessness issues while ensuring the safety and vibrancy of the community for all residents.
- Concrete solutions are needed immediately which requires collaboration from the provincial and federal governments.

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) the City of Stratford is the lead agency responsible for supporting households experiencing homelessness as well as housing stability supports within the City of Stratford. Over the past years, visible homelessness encampments within the City of Stratford have been observed, and a coordinated response to address emerging concerns facing those living unsheltered was needed. According to the local By-Name List (BNL) the number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness within the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and Perth County as of June 30, 2024, was 39.

Analysis: The Social Services Department has been working diligently to update its coordinated response to homelessness with a focus on public encampments. There is a distinction between publicly owned lands and privately owned lands.

Private landowners are responsible for their own property in accordance with City of Stratford Municipal By-laws, the Ontario Building Code, Building Code Act, Ontario Fire Code, and the Fire Protection and Prevention Act.

Provisions already exist for private property landowners to have people removed from their property if they wish. Private landowners are strongly encouraged to walk their land and contact the non-emergency police phone number for enforcement of the Trespass to Property Act or other applicable enforcement legislation.

The continued goal is to end chronic homelessness. This response will continually evolve based on demonstrated need, preferred practices, and new information. The intention is to meet individuals where they are at and assist them in the best possible way for their individual circumstances.

To properly update this strategy, many sources of information were researched including the attached resources.

The Encampment Strategy for the City of Stratford uses an assessment tool to assess risk at an encampment through a tiered response. Tier 1 is used for encampments that are abandoned up to a Tier 4 depending on the severity of health and safety risks present.

It is guided by several key principles:

- Services are voluntary and consistently offered.
- Multiple sectors and systems will collaborate to address encampments and share responsibility.
- Intensive and persistent outreach and engagement will be practiced prior to the use of enforcement, clearance, or criminalization.
- All individuals can be housed, with the right housing model and service supports.
- To the greatest extent practicable, individual choices about where and how to live will be honored.

- Where appropriate, client driven housing stability supports will be offered to those eligible and in need.

The Encampment Response Team, a highly collaborative multi-sector team, meets bi-weekly to discuss and evaluate encampments.

The City of Stratford recognizes that homelessness is an ever-evolving issue, and the strategy will continuously change to meet demonstrated need, and preferred practices that will benefit our community. The strategy intends to balance the needs, the protection of dignity, and right to privacy of the most vulnerable in the community while maintaining community safety, health, order, and safe and enjoyable parks, playgrounds, and green spaces for all residents.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

There are no additional explicit financial impacts with adopting this strategy in 2024, though there will be impacts to the current workplans of staff to address these issues if and as they arise, which are not quantifiable at this time.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

The 2025 draft budget includes \$120,000 to address encampments. There are no additional explicit financial impacts with adopting this strategy, though there will be staffing impacts associated for encampment clean ups on public property by staff in other departments as required.

Legal considerations:

There are no legal considerations because of this report.

Insurance considerations:

There are no insurance considerations because of this report.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Build Housing Stability

This revised strategy aligns with Council's priority by rapidly re-housing unsheltered individuals.

Work Together For Greater Impact

This revised strategy aligns with Council's goal to end chronic homelessness.

Intentionally Change to Support the Future

This revised strategy aligns with Council's goal to end chronic homelessness.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Equity and Local Economy

Creating safe, equitable places to live and work which support local prosperity and international fair trade.

Culture and Community

Nurturing local identity and heritage, empowering communities and promoting a culture of sustainable living.

Land and Nature

Protecting and restoring land for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Updated Coordinated Strategy for Public Land Encampments" (COU24-101), be received for information.

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Recommended by: Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer