

ENHANCED ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE

A HUMAN RIGHTS - BASED COMMUNITY
ACTION PLAN FOR THUNDER BAY



A Human Rights-Based Approach to Encampments

In April 2023, Council adopted a human-rights based approach, spearheading a broader movement among Ontario municipalities to address the needs of encampment residents with dignity and respect.

This commitment aligns with recommendations from the Federal Housing Advocate's final report and positions Thunder Bay to benefit from significant encampment response funding. The 2024 federal Solving the Housing Crisis: Canada's Housing Plan earmarks \$250 million, to be cost-matched provincially, for a total of \$500 million towards encampment responses. Eligibility to receive funds is contingent on adopting human rights-based community action plans.

The Plan aligns with a human rights-based approach to encampments by centering around core human rights principles as defined by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate's final report and other human rights guidance documents. The Plan also enhances Thunder Bay's capacity to secure funding from other orders of government for encampment response. Human rights principles are integrated via the following key elements:

Recognition of Encampment Residents as Rights Holders

Encampment residents are recognized as rights holders. The Plan understands encampments as a symptom of systemic housing failures and an assertion of individuals' right to adequate housing. This principle is put into practice by integrating encampment residents into decision-making processes that affect their lives and upholding their right to shelter in the absence of truly accessible indoor sheltering options.



Meaningful Engagement and Participation

The Plan upholds the principle of meaningful and effective participation by establishing a Lived and Living Experience Advisory Committee. This committee provides a formal platform for individuals with lived and living experience to have their voices heard and integrated into the Plan's future development and implementation.

Prohibition of Forced Evictions

The Plan prohibits forced evictions of encampment residents, without providing access to viable indoor alternatives that meet their individual needs. This is operationalized through the identification of designated encampment sites and the implementation of a temporary mini cabin village model that offers immediate, safer, and supportive indoor sheltering options while long-term housing options are pursued.

Dignified Access to Services

The Plan prioritizes public health and safety by providing dignified access to basic services such as sanitation, clean water, and waste management. This is achieved through enhanced cleanup and sanitation services and coordinated community partner response at designated encampment sites.

Respect for Indigenous Rights

The Plan acknowledges the over-representation of Indigenous peoples living in encampments and respects the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples. This acknowledgement prioritizes engagement with Indigenous leaders and representative organizations.



Ten-Part Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan

This Plan outlines ten main goals and objectives that would solidify a more cohesive response to addressing unsheltered homelessness in the community. It will require an all-of-community collective impact approach, including leadership from City Council and City Administration, in its development and implementation. Administration believes that by bringing the patchwork quilt of initiatives together, it will enhance our response efforts, in turn improving the health and safety of encampments, providing a pathway into services and housing, and reducing strain on community partners, encampment residents and the public.

1. Continued Advocacy to Provincial and Federal Governments to Address Homelessness

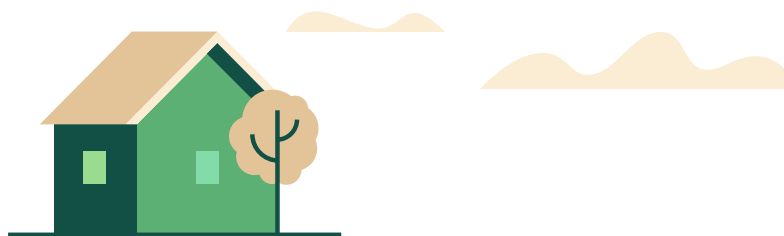
Objective: Sustained pressure on other orders of government to provide resources and make systemic changes that address housing insecurity and homelessness.

Continued advocacy to Provincial and Federal governments is essential to secure the long-term funding, systemic changes, and resources needed to effectively address homelessness. These other orders of government have the fiscal capacity and legislative power to implement systemic solutions, such as affordable housing programs, mental health services, and income support, that municipalities alone cannot provide. By maintaining ongoing dialogue and pressure, the municipality keeps homelessness as a top priority on the broader political agenda and strengthens partnerships that can deliver lasting, large-scale impact.

2. Garner Community Partner Commitment for 360-Support to Encampment Residents

Objective: A collaborative, multi-agency support system is in place for individuals in encampments.

The Plan focuses on bringing together municipal departments, community partners, and individuals with lived and living experience to work collaboratively. This comprehensive approach ensures that the City's efforts are not fragmented and that individuals in encampments receive holistic, 360-degree support – from healthcare and food to housing and employment services. A key focus of this work will include implementing data sharing agreements amongst all partners involved at all levels of the response, including front-line and system planning, to support evaluation and immediate, interim, and long-term efforts.



3. Implement Enhanced Cleanup and Sanitation Support

Objective: Health and safety risks associated with encampments are mitigated by meeting public health standards with regular, coordinated garbage collection and adequate sanitary conditions.

Encampments, especially those without proper sanitation and services, can pose public health and safety risks. The Plan prioritizes risk mitigation by enhancing sanitation efforts and garbage removal, thereby reducing the likelihood of infectious disease outbreaks, and environmental damage, rodent and pest infestations. This provides dignity to encampment residents and better public health and safety to both encampment residents and the broader community.

4. Develop and Implement a Temporary Village to Support Up to 100 Units

Objective: Temporary indoor sheltering units with comprehensive wrap-around services are provided as a Housing First approach to encampments.

Temporary indoor sheltering units with comprehensive wrap-around services offer a Housing First approach that prioritizes stable housing as the foundation for addressing homelessness. These units provide immediate, secure shelter while offering access to essential services such as hygiene facilities, healthcare, mental health support, and employment assistance. This approach not only improves residents' quality of life but also addresses the root causes

of homelessness, helping individuals transition from temporary shelter to long-term housing. By stabilizing people in a supportive environment, the Housing First model reduces the need for reactive measures and leads to more sustainable outcomes.

5. Identify Options for Designated Encampment Locations within Urban Cores

Objective: In collaboration with community partners, people with lived and living experience, and Indigenous leaders and representative organizations, and in accordance with the Distance Guidelines, up to three designated encampment areas with essential services are identified, reducing the strain on community partners and Administration, and leading to improved outcomes for encampment residents.

Designated encampment areas support the efficient delivery of essential services like outreach, sanitation, and healthcare. This approach reduces the strain on community partners who would otherwise need to support individuals across multiple, unregulated locations. It also simplifies Administration by centralizing resources, making it easier to monitor conditions and support compliance. For encampment residents, these designated areas offer reliable access to critical services, improving health and well-being while fostering a more stable and supportive environment.

6. Review Municipal By-Laws and Assess Public Space Use By-Law Implementation

Objective: Drawing on a review of other municipal by-laws, assess the development and implementation of a public space use by-law that includes regulations on sheltering.

As municipal responses to encampments evolve across Ontario, by-laws regulating use of public spaces, which include encampment specific regulations, are being implemented in some communities. A review of such by-laws and legal implications would allow Administration to assess and consider the development and implementation of a similar by-law. The by-law would clearly establish and define how public spaces are to be used by all community members, including people living in encampments. This review may also lead Administration to consider the development and implementation of by-laws and policies related to accelerating non-market rental housing development and tenancy protections.

7. Establish an Encampment Response Team to Support Compliance

Objective: A specialized team manages encampment response, supports compliance, and provides connection to support services for encampment residents.

A specialized team dedicated to managing encampments ensures the municipality can more effectively respond to community complaints, maintain safety, and coordinate sanitation services like garbage collection and waste

management. This focused team enables quicker, more organized responses to issues that arise, ensuring encampments are maintained in a safer and hygienic manner. By centralizing oversight, the team helps reduce the strain on other municipal departments and provides a structured, consistent approach to managing encampments while addressing community concerns in a timely and efficient way. The team would also lead the Lived and Living Experience Advisory Committee.

8. Launch a Lived and Living Experience Advisory Committee to Guide Development and Implementation of an Action Plan

Objective: The input of individuals with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness will be at the heart of decision-making processes.

Incorporating the input of individuals with lived and living experience of unsheltered homelessness ensures that efforts and decisions are grounded in the realities and needs of those directly affected. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into the challenges faced in accessing services, navigating systems, and overcoming barriers to stable housing. By integrating their voices in decision-making, more effective, humane, and responsive solutions that better address the root causes of unsheltered homelessness and improve the outcomes of implemented strategies are developed and implemented.

9. Develop and Implement a Communication and Engagement Plan

Objective: Key stakeholders, the public, community partners, and encampment residents are informed of the City's unsheltered homelessness and encampment strategies, fostering buy-in and engagement.

A key aspect of the Plan is fostering understanding and engagement. By transparently communicating the City's approach and allowing space for input from the public and community partners, the City can build trust with a diversity of stakeholders. A robust communication plan ensures that misinformation is minimized, and that the entire community understands the steps being taken to manage unsheltered homelessness.

10. Support Long-Term Housing for All Strategies Led by the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration (TBDSSAB) and Other Partners

Objective: Contribute to and enhance long-term housing strategies to provide permanent solutions for homelessness.

While encampments are a symptom of the housing and homelessness crisis, the Plan emphasizes both temporary solutions (such as the creation of a temporary village) and alignment with long-term housing strategies. By addressing both the immediate needs and systemic causes of unsheltered homelessness, the Plan ensures that the City is not only reacting to the crisis but also working towards its resolve.



For more information:

thunderbay.ca/enhancedencampmentresponse

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