

## Small-scale Sanctioned Encampments

### RECOMMENDATION

1. That the July 4, 2022, Community Services report CS01347, be received for information.
2. That Attachment 2 of the July 4, 2022, Community Services report CS01347 remain private pursuant to sections 24 (advice from officials) and 27 (privileged information) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

### Report Purpose

#### Information Only

Council is being provided options to support the safety and well-being of people experiencing homelessness, including funding requirements, to pilot three small-scale sanctioned encampments.

### Previous Council/Committee Action

At the June 20, 2022, City Council meeting, the following motion passed:

That Administration provide a report outlining options, including funding requirements, to pilot one or more small-scale sanctioned encampments this summer 2022 as one strategy to support the safety and well-being of people experiencing homelessness and reduce impacts to surrounding businesses and communities.

### Executive Summary

- As of June 20, 2022, the Homeward Trust's By Name List indicated that 1285 people are either accessing emergency shelters or sleeping rough.
- Small scale sanctioned encampments are a possible option to provide shelter to those experiencing homelessness.
- The cost to provide three small scale sanctioned encampments from early August to October 31, 2022, is approximately \$2 million.
- Administration does not recommend moving forward with a sanctioned encampment due to time constraints to operationalize and deactivate before winter, significant operational costs, lack of opportunity to do this work in partnership with neighbourhoods and potential regulatory approvals.

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## REPORT

### Background

At the April 25, 2022, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, Administration presented a Homelessness and Encampment Response Strategy (CS01225) that identified a number of actions being put in place to mitigate the expected growth of encampments and unsheltered homelessness this summer. At that time, Administration did not recommend the use of large-scale sanctioned encampments as part of the encampment response for 2022 due to examples in other jurisdictions that have used sanctioned encampments as a tool to minimize the impacts of unsheltered sleeping but have run into difficulty managing: safety risks (including inclement weather, conflict and predatory behaviour), sanitation (garbage removal, portable toilets, and litter cleanup), costs and challenges with neighbours due to spillover effects from the encampment. However, Council has asked Administration to consider whether a smaller scale, disbursed sanctioned encampment approach is merited to help address unmet needs.

The response to increasing homelessness over the past two years has resulted in the City of Edmonton providing funding for services that have not typically been funded by the City in order to respond to emerging and pressing needs. For Summer 2022 the following services are being funded:

- Extended operational hours for day shelter services at Bissell Centre.
- Mobile drug poisoning response teams in Downtown and Chinatown, through Boyle Street Community Services and Boyle McCauley Health Centre.
- Increased access to public washrooms with attendants throughout Edmonton.
- Multidisciplinary teams to improve safety and access to services for vulnerable people, such as the Community Outreach Transit Team, a collaboration between the City and Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.
- Temporary funding to sustain additional bridge housing units through 2022.

### Sanctioned Encampment Approach

A sanctioned encampment approach is an intentional, interim solution to address the immediate conditions of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Ways in which a jurisdiction can sanction encampments include:

- Legally permitting encampments through bylaw change or temporary permit on public land or privately owned property, only in designated locations.
- Establishing rules that govern the size, location, or duration of encampments.
- Supporting management of encampments through a public agency or non-profit organization.
- Providing infrastructure and public services — such as washrooms and potable water, common spaces for eating and meeting, showers, lockers for storing belongings, and meal services — provided by the municipality and/or non-profit organizations and volunteers.

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- Providing case management, including assistance applying for transitional or permanent housing and other benefits.

To ensure alignment with the City of Edmonton's Community Safety and Well Being goals, a funded sanctioned encampment pilot would strive to:

- Increase the likelihood of connecting clients to services and housing by allowing them to remain in one place and having on-site services available;
- Increase the safety and security of individuals in the sanctioned encampment, with the presence of onsite medical and security staff;
- Reduce the potential impacts associated with encampments, such as litter and needle debris, by having the site contained and easily accessible to cleaning crews;
- Be complementary to community efforts to address homelessness that Edmonton is facing.

If a pilot was directed by Council, a comprehensive evaluation plan will be developed to determine the success of the sanctioned encampment pilot and the achievement of the above goals. Evaluation findings would be provided to Council and could inform future decisions on the use of sanctioned encampments.

### Small-Scale Sanctioned Encampment Implementation

To assist with answering this motion, Administration invited Boyle Street Community Services to submit a cost estimate for preparing three small-scale encampment sites for opening by the beginning of August through October 31. The pilot project would focus on a small number of tents at three sites (accommodating up to 20 people per site), with wrap-around supports offered. Street Outreach Workers, who are currently funded by the City, would connect with individuals living in hot spots areas prior to launch and would offer those individuals space in the sanctioned encampment. The sanctioned encampments would align as closely as possible to the City of Edmonton's Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards, which supports the accommodation of couples/friends together and pets onsite.

Each sanctioned encampment site would have the following characteristics:

- Operational from early August until October 31, 2022 (weather permitting).
- Accommodate up to 20 individuals per site. Growth would be managed by setting up a fence around the site.
- Tents and cots would be provided.
- Dedicated staffing complement would include: Program Manager, Site Support Workers, Overdose Response Team, Housing Workers, 24/7 Security through a private security company, and on-site cleaning staff.
- Amenities would include: Two meals a day, washroom trailer, potable water, picnic tables, fire pit, onsite storage for belongings.
- Transportation to service hubs and appointments.
- Office trailer for on-site staff and security.

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The estimated cost to operate a sanctioned encampment site under this model is \$660,000 per month for operation of three sites and an additional \$83,000 in facility costs for a total budget of \$2,063,000 million for 60 tents for three months of operations.

Boyle Street Community Services has expressed interest in running a sanctioned encampment for the remainder of the summer and then transitioning to tiny homes for a year round solution. The lead time for construction and delivery of modular tiny homes ranges between ten to 20 weeks, so this timeline could possibly be achieved. Because tiny homes include permanent structures and servicing, land requirements for tiny homes would be considerably greater than for sanctioned encampments. Appropriate sites with available services would need to be found and the required zoning and permit approvals would also need to be confirmed. This would be a separate financial requirement above and beyond the pilot cost of \$2,063,000, in the order of magnitude of \$6,000,000 for initial capital costs (to purchase 60 units) and approximately \$250,000 per month after for ongoing management. City staff resources will also be required to source and procure an appropriate tiny home solution as well as secure and prepare additional sites.

### *Advantages*

- Privacy & Safety: One reason people choose to stay in encampments instead of emergency shelters is that they see encampments as offering greater safety and privacy (personal and possessions) than existing emergency shelter options. An appropriately staffed sanctioned encampment would increase this safety by having staff and security on-site to respond to drug poisonings, restrict visitor entry, and respond directly to client needs.
- Housing-Focused: On-site housing workers will work to create housing plans with all residents to transition them into appropriate permanent housing solutions. Support workers will assist residents in accessing government ID, monthly income, and medical support.
- Reduced Transiency: By reducing displacement, sanctioned encampments would decrease the frequent relocation. This will likely improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the transition into permanent housing as support workers will be able to locate individuals more predictably and consistently.
- Sanitation: Providing washrooms, potable water and harm reduction supplies decreases the personal, public, and environmental health impacts.

### *Challenges*

- Timeframe: The short time allotted to set up and operationalize the sanctioned encampment will be challenging for the operator. There is a considerable risk that the operator will not be able to secure sufficient staff resources in time to operate as envisioned. This could impact the likelihood of success for the pilot.
- Staffing: Attracting and retaining staff for contracts of less than six months of employment will make it very difficult for Boyle Street Community Services to hire qualified staff for this operation.
- Safety: Notwithstanding the above mentioned advantages to privacy and safety, there may still be the need for peace officer or police attendance to support the 24/7 security built

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into the operational funding model. With current resourcing, Administration has identified that there are no available peace officer resources to provide service to sanctioned encampments within the current model without service level reductions in other areas of the city. In addition, it is anticipated that despite best efforts to restrict it, drug use will occur within the sanctioned encampment, placing peace officers or EPS members in an untenable situation pitting enforcement against low barrier shelter access.

- Weather: There is always a risk of exposure in heat or early inclement weather, such as snow or cold conditions, in October.
- Neighborhood Impacts: Having encampment sites in neighbourhoods could lead to unintended public and environmental health impacts and social disorder in neighbouring communities.
- Zoning and neighbourhood opposition: There is no existing land-use class or standard zone that accommodates a small-scale sanctioned encampment. Depending on the parcel of land and operational plan, the sanctioned encampment operator will likely need to apply for rezoning, which may not be a perfect fit. Land-use classes could include supportive housing, temporary shelter services, special events, or tourist campsites, or the creation of a new use class. Minimum rezoning time is three months but could be up to six months due to the likelihood of public engagement being required. Administration expects there could be significant opposition from neighbours adjacent to each site.
- Attracting non-sanctioned encampments: Due to the provision of services and security at the sanctioned encampments, there is a risk that people will want to set up their own non-sanctioned encampment sites nearby to potentially access the services and security. If this is allowed to occur, each pilot site risks becoming larger and unmanageable. Additionally, encampments set up immediately outside a sanctioned encampment site would be managed through the existing encampment response process which would see the site occupants vacated and the site cleaned up. This would create a risk of treating those on one side of the fence very differently than those on the other sanctioned side.
- Relocating people prior to winter: It takes on average 59 days to house someone sleeping in an encampment in permanent housing but this can often take longer for those with higher needs. The sanctioned encampment model includes Housing Workers in order to support people, but there is no guarantee that there will be appropriate housing options available by the scheduled end of the sanctioned encampment (90 days) and individuals may be discharged back into unsheltered homelessness.

Further details on the costs, advantages and challenges of this type of sanctioned encampment can be found on Attachment 1.

### Sanctioned Encampments in Other Jurisdictions

There is a lack of information on small-scale encampments being conducted in other jurisdictions. Different cities have had different experiences with managed encampments and comparison across jurisdictions is difficult due to significant differences among weather/climate, jurisdictional responsibility, the specific local needs of people experiencing homelessness (including the relative complexity of individual need), population size and local housing market conditions - all which factor into the decision to pursue a legal camp.

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Administration completed a brief review of more recent examples of sanctioned encampments and tiny home villages from handful of other cities in North America, with varying weather and housing market conditions, a summary is provided below:

- Victoria, British Columbia: The City of Victoria temporarily sanctioned overnight camping at a number of parks across the city during the pandemic. After complaints from parks users and nearby residents, the bylaw banning day time camping was reinstated after the Government of British Columbia and the City signed an Memorandum of Understanding to support the move of encampment residents into new bridge and supportive housing units. City of Victoria staff estimate that \$535,000 will be required to restore the parks from the damages caused to the parks.
- San Francisco, California: During the pandemic, the City of San Francisco established “Safe Sleeping Villages” for approximately 260 tents across six City-owned sites. The sites cost approximately \$18.2 million per year to operate and reviews of their effectiveness at reducing social disorder and homelessness are mixed. The City has since scaled down the program to three sites.
- Kingston, Ontario: 10 sheds were opened along Kingston’s Harbour in early January 2022 as a pilot project. Early outcomes indicated an ability to stabilize individuals who otherwise had not engaged in traditional supportive housing and also deepened awareness and understanding of the need for housing in Kingston, however only one person had been housed since the beginning of the project to May 2022. The pilot was found to be less costly than having individuals stay in hotels. The project has been received with mixed reviews by residents, people experiencing homelessness and others who see it as merely expensive substandard housing. Nonetheless, Kingston’s Council recently approved relocating the sheds to another site away from the Harbour to allow better access for boaters for the summer and plan to move them back to the Harbour for the winter.
- Kitchener, Ontario: Tiny homes, modified shipping containers, and Conestoga huts (hard-shelled, insulated shed structures) were set up on a site, as part of the *A Better Tent City* initiative, a volunteer-led effort. Sites have electrical hookups, with bathrooms, laundry facilities, and meals provided. Wrap-around supports such as a methadone program, are provided for residents.
- Halifax, Nova Scotia: In early June 2022, four municipal parks were designated as areas where 30+ individuals can tent at each park. The number of sites was anticipated to accommodate all people currently sleeping on public land and came following several high profile conflicts between police and mutual aid groups over illegally installed sleeping pods. The municipality provided washrooms and potable water. Compliance Officers have been designated to manage sites. It is too early to assess the results of this project.
- Seattle, Washington: 11 tiny house villages, with 466 tiny homes, provide shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness. Each tiny home has electricity and heating, with bathrooms provided. Mental health, housing, job search, and navigation supports are provided on-site. An evaluation of outcomes found that performance exceeded goals in most measurements, including the number of exits to permanent housing, returns to homelessness, and the average length of stay (in number of days). Tiny homes were

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reported to be relatively quick to set up (between 8-10 weeks once a site is identified), with an average cost per individual of \$9,000 USD.

- Portland, Oregon: Portland is constructing six sanctioned homeless camps, which each support a maximum of 60 individuals experiencing homelessness. Camps will have individual hard-sided sleeping pods connected to electricity and heating, with bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry facilities on site. The first safe rest village opened in June 2022.
- Missoula, Montana: A sanctioned homeless encampment is operated by a nonprofit on a privately owned site and provides 24-hour security, a warming shelter, and a makeshift kitchen, as well as access to social services. Canvas wall tents are equipped with propane heaters. 49 per cent of individuals staying there are reported to be no longer homeless - they have either found permanent housing or have been connected with recovery services or family.
- Durango, Colorado: More than 70 residents live in Durango's sanctioned homeless encampment "Purple Cliffs," which was opened in 2018 as a temporary measure in response to a fire. The residents have designed and built a kitchen which is heated and outfitted with a gas stove. There are 5 restrooms on site, and solar-powered phone charging stations throughout the camp. Following ongoing challenges with the camp, including high calls for service, violence, garbage and fires, the County announced earlier this year it would be closing the camp.

## Potential Medium and Long Term Options

While no other options were determined to be viable for summer 2022, beyond the small-scale pilot described above, Administration considered additional options for potential comparable solutions to sanctioned encampments in the medium and long term, as described below and in further detail in Attachment 1.

### Tiny Homes or Micro Shelters

In cities across North America, tiny home villages have gained traction as a viable solution to meet the immediate and critical need for housing, including Edmonton ATCO Veteran Village. These options are less expensive than building affordable housing and can be pre-fabricated, which reduces construction timelines. The amenities in tiny homes can range from being entirely self-contained to only private sleeping pods with shared washroom and kitchen areas. These sites could provide people with community and onsite support similar to Bridge Housing.

Administration has done some preliminary exploration of available options. Costs range from \$30,000 to \$100,000 per unit with a minimum 10-20 week lead time (\$1.8 million to \$6.0 million total for 60 units). This does not include the cost of preparing various sites to accommodate the tiny homes and service the units or the operational costs of running the tiny homes.

### Workforce Trailers

Workforce trailers are a temporary housing option that has been used in other cities to provide a rapid housing solution for vulnerable people on vacant, city-owned land.

Administration has previously sourced quotes from several workforce trailer manufacturers and work camp operators to understand the costs, benefits, and considerations for using workforce

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trailers as a potential solution to non-sanctioned encampments. Both purchasing and leasing options have been examined. At the time of the analysis, it was determined that costs associated with deploying trailers are relatively similar to hotels.

Administration has received a proposal from Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, and Bent Arrow Healing Society on a plan to activate a low-barrier shelter using workforce trailers that would focus on connecting 140 people with permanent housing solutions for \$10,560,000 annually or \$880,000 per month (this does not include trailer rental or utilities costs).

There are some potential challenges associated with this proposal, such as locating appropriate City-owned land that is in close proximity to public transportation with appropriate servicing and zoning challenges may also be present, depending on the parcel.

### Temporary Hotel Leases

Bridge housing is short-term, continuous-stay accommodation that helps people transition from homelessness to permanent housing. Residents stay for an average of 30 to 90 days before moving on to permanent housing that works for them. Since the start of the pandemic, hotels have been used across North America as bridge housing.

In Edmonton, bridge housing sites have been coordinated by Homeward Trust, which works with community partners to lease hotel space and make the rooms available for bridge housing. At peak usage during the pandemic, there were 396 bridge housing units available. Currently, there are 100 bridge housing units available, of which only 40 are permanently funded beyond 2022, the remaining 60 are funded by the City of Edmonton until the end of the year.

With the removal of COVID-19 restrictions and an increase in travel, most hotel operators are no longer willing to consider short-term leases. Interested hotel operators have indicated they would require a minimum three-year lease or purchase of the property. Administration has identified several suitable and available hotel properties to activate for emergency shelter or bridge housing. Leasing costs for the hotel option for 200 units is estimated to be approximately \$4,200,000 per year plus \$1,200,000 per month in operating costs.

### **Recommendation**

Administration does not recommend moving forward with a sanctioned encampment due to time constraints to operationalize and deactivate before winter, significant operational costs, and lack of opportunity to do this work in partnership with neighbourhoods.

If City Council wishes to explore alternatives to existing housing options for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, direction could be provided to Administration to undertake more detailed planning and analysis of the feasibility of piloting a weather-proof/year round solution such as workforce trailers, micro shelters or a tiny home village that can be designed and planned to be operational for next Spring.



## **Small-Scale Sanctioned Encampments**

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

The preliminary estimate to operate three sanctioned encampment sites for three months is \$2.1 million which could be funded from the COVID-specific funds set aside in the Appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve.

### **Legal Implications**

Legal Services has provided an attachment, to be considered in private, containing relevant legal advice on this issue (Attachment 2).

## **COMMUNITY INSIGHT**

Administration did not conduct any new engagement in response to this motion. If Council directs Administration to proceed with establishing a legal camp pilot project, neighbouring residents will be informed of the decision and invited to ask questions through an engagement session. Good neighbour plans would also be required to be established by each operator to clearly outline a point of contact for any resident questions or concerns.

### **GBA+**

There are almost 2,800 individuals in Edmonton currently experiencing homelessness. Despite making up only 5 per cent of Edmonton's overall population, over 60 per cent of these individuals are Indigenous. Of the 2,800+ individuals experiencing homelessness, approximately 45 per cent identify as female.

The experience of racialized and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and plus (2SLGBTQ+) community members experiencing homelessness is uniquely challenging in that they face additional discrimination and lack of appropriate support when trying to access existing shelter, housing, and social service systems. People with disabilities and significant health challenges are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness – being homeless also worsens health issues and itself is a cause of poor health and an elevated risk of death. Many services available to people experiencing homelessness are not designed to meet the needs of people with significant and complex physical and mental health challenges, including substance use disorders.

As a funder of the homeless-serving sector, the City endeavours to include contractual provisions in its agreements with agencies to best ensure the removal of barriers to access for vulnerable persons experiencing homelessness.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Preliminary Analysis of Sanctioned Encampments and Other Responses to Unsheltered Homelessness
2. Confidential Legal Advice (Private)