

HOMELESSNESS AND ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE STRATEGY - UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION

That the October 11, 2022, Community Services report CS01278, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	BELONG. LIVE.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bylaw 2202 - Parkland Bylaw • Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CS01225 Homelessness and Encampment Response Strategy (April 25, 2022 Community and Public Services Committee and May 9, 2022 City Council) • CS00939 Indigenous-led Shelters, Housing and Programming (June 27, 2022 Community and Public Services Committee) • CS01347 Small-scale Sanctioned Encampments (July 4, 2022 City Council) 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 9/11, 2022, City Council meeting the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide an interim report and update on engagement with Edmontonians living rough and neighbours living close to encampments, initial findings and next steps for applying a human-centred design methodology that includes the development of prototypes, centering on

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Edmontonians' lived experiences, including a summary of findings from research and opportunities related to housing as a human right.

Executive Summary

- Over the spring and summer of 2022, engagement was conducted with four groups to better understand their unique perspectives and concerns: encampment residents, led by Mapping and Planning Support (MAPS) Alberta Capital Region, neighbours and businesses impacted by encampments, agency-led outreach teams and City staff.
- A preliminary list of draft prototypes has been developed from each of the four different engagements. As Administration analyzes the intersections between each of the four perspectives, a refined list of high and low fidelity prototypes will be developed with current and new partners.
- While current Canadian law does not stipulate that housing is a human right, many municipalities, including Edmonton, are aligning their policies and protocols toward a human-centred approach to adequate housing.

REPORT

The City Plan's Big City Move Inclusive and Compassionate emphasizes the importance of "city-making that supports human-centred design where people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities can not only survive, but thrive." Similarly, the principles of the Community Safety and Well-being Strategy commit to actions that incorporate a GBA+ approach and are grounded in personal experiences. This report describes the human-centred engagement undertaken with individuals impacted by encampments and the next steps for service design and prototype development.

Homeless encampments are a complex issue, and the City's response is a critical piece of its strategies relating to affordable housing and homelessness. Affordable housing and homelessness is a strategic investment area under the goal of Healthy City, as well as a key component of the Community Safety and Well Being Strategy.

The City responds to encampments on public land with the Encampment Response Team, which includes Homeward Trust, Boyle Street Community Services, Bissell Centre and Edmonton Police Service. Throughout the year, the team is notified of encampment sites through 311 as well as scouting by street outreach teams, who assist individuals sleeping unsheltered to find support and connect them to housing. If a complaint is made, enforcement officers investigate the location as quickly as possible. The officers determine risk level to the site, either low, moderate or high, which determines the nature of the ensuing response. If the site is found to be inactive, it is cleaned up as soon as resources allow. Low and moderate risk sites are scheduled for closure and then diverted to the Encampment Resolution Team for housing-focused outreach while high-risk sites are prioritized for accelerated closure. Once a site is vacant, City crews clean up closed encampments to address public safety and environmental concerns related to these locations.

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Based on experience and evidence, it has become clear that encampment response and the delivery of emergency shelter services must continually evolve and adapt to the demand pressures in order to remain effective, address unmet needs and ensure that housing outcomes can be achieved.

Administration completed a comprehensive evaluation that included partners in the methodology (such as interviews, data collection, etc.) of the 2021 encampment response, producing the following insights:

- The approach used in 2021 succeeded in enhancing collaboration between all parties and prevented encampments from becoming high risk and large-scale.
- Nonetheless, the efforts displaced encampment occupants. The displacement from the large sites led to more small-scale encampments and higher clean-up costs.
- Encampment response teams are not adequately resourced to address the volume of encampments or the complexity of health and security challenges faced by encampment residents.
- There are challenges with data management and coordination that impact the ability to evaluate outcomes and performance.

In response to the recommendations of the evaluation, Administration initiated an Encampment Response Improvement Project to ensure ongoing evaluation, human-centred engagement, service design and prototyping, and partnership development.

Human-Centred Design

Human-centred design is a creative ground-up, problem-solving process. It starts with building a deep empathy and collaborating to generate ideas, create solutions, iterate, and eventually put forward new solutions tailored to meet people's needs and goals.

Administration used human-centred design to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and experiences of encampment residents, neighbours and businesses impacted by encampments. As well as, social agencies, mutual aid organizations, and City staff who support the encampment response.
- Identify and test promising solutions to the complex challenges associated with encampments and the encampment response process.

The approach consists of three phases:

- *Observation*: learning directly from people most impacted by encampments. This phase began mid-spring 2022, with most activities concluding in August 2022.
- *Ideas*: making sense of what was learned, identifying opportunities, and prototyping possible solutions. Administration is reviewing the findings and setting the stage for prototyping, which is anticipated to start in late October 2022.

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- *Implementation*: bringing co-created solutions to life in the real world. Given that human-centred design is an iterative practice, Administration anticipates this phase will continuously evolve to ensure solutions can adapt to emerging and changing needs. It is anticipated that prototypes will be tested in 2023.

Engagement

Engagement with People Living in Encampments

Mapping and Planning Support (MAPS) Alberta Capital Region facilitated the engagement with people living in encampments. Initial learnings are presented in this report and the full research report and journey maps will be available in November 2022. The data collected will be analyzed along with demographic information; allowing the data to be presented through a variety of lenses such as age, ethnic group or gender.

Data collection began with a pipe opening ceremony hosted by the Indigenous partner agency for the project, Niginan Housing Ventures. A total of 86 community members who had stayed outside within the past 12 months accepted the invitation to participate in the research.

- Three in four participants (64) identified as Indigenous. Eighty-seven per cent of females staying outside were Indigenous, compared with only 13 per cent non-Indigenous females.
- While two in three Indigenous participants had personally experienced residential schools, day school and/or the foster care system, almost all had relatives or friends with this experience.
- The average age was 44 years with a range of 21 to 73 years old. Females (average age of 39) who stayed outside were significantly younger than their male counterparts at an average age of 48 years.
- Only one in 10 participants reported being in an attached relationship (having a partner). Having an attached relationship can make a difference in terms of safety.
- Half of the participants had completed high school or attained a General Educational Development (GED) certification, with half of those having also attained post-secondary education.
- The majority of respondents reported health challenges including addiction/substance use, trauma, medical illnesses, mental health issues, physical disability, or learning issues but on average only 29 per cent of respondents had received treatment.
- Ninety-two per cent experienced two or more health challenges.
- The majority of participants (67 per cent) reported that they do not prefer to stay outside. Those who stated that they prefer to stay outside (33 per cent) primarily do so because they cannot stay in shelters – the most prevalent reasons being fear for their own safety, overcrowding and a lack of privacy.
- Females who stayed outside were twice as likely than men to have lived in their own rented or owned space in the past 12 months (45 per cent females versus 22 per cent males). They

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were also more likely to say that the reason they did not stay in shelters was that they could not stay with their partners (23 per cent females versus 6 per cent males).

Initial Insights

"Take people aside and respect them. Treat them as you would like to be treated."

- Participants called for staff training in mental health, trauma, de-escalation and respectful relationships.
- Participants expressed a desire to preserve relationships and some were interested to take de-escalation training themselves. Many talked about how difficult it is to manage their own behaviour when they are under the influence or being triggered.
- Overall, they felt that better communication, clear rules and consistent service would lead to better situations.

"We are recyclable people."

- Many voiced their weariness with waiting and wanting to be housed but then not being able to gain housing or have the supports to maintain housing.
- When asked about the contact they had with a long list of people, outreach workers were the most positive contacts people felt they had.

"Being moved means no one knows where we are and we have to wait for services because we cannot be found."

- Respondents talked about being given little warning and not having the ability to move their belongings without help.
- The most prevalent issue was that people are told to move and not given any choices of places to go and many who stay outside shared stories of constantly being displaced every 24 to 48 hours.
- When asked what could be done to make living outside better, respondents focused on basic needs and safety.
- Young women struggle to find places that are safe to sleep, and those with physical disabilities and mobility issues have concerns about finding places to stay and protecting their space. Several people using walkers or with amputations found themselves in vulnerable and unsafe outdoor conditions.
- The daily struggle to stay with one's tent and protect belongings, access hygiene, and obtain food, all while dealing with disability and/or health challenges, made it challenging for some to keep appointments for reapplication support, thus, lengthening the time without supports.
- Elements that could make living outside easier include a place to make a fire, supplies such as tents, shelters, food, and water, along with access to toilets and showers. Respondents talked about how humiliating it is to defecate outdoors and then to be ticketed when they had no other choice.

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“Quit telling and start listening.”

- Some suggested that being in a sanctioned Indigenous designed and led outdoor space could be an important first step in the journey towards being housed.
- Loneliness is an issue that often leads to having too many guests and being evicted once housed.
- The ability to be in a safe space long enough to rest and begin to consider the next steps would be beneficial for both the individual experiencing homelessness as well as outreach staff trying to locate them. Furthermore, one could better focus on doing the many things needed to gain housing or access health care, such as ID and income, if they did not have to worry about basic survival.

“If you keep your camp clean without taking bikes apart and garbage all over they’ll let you stay. Do not make fire. Bag garbage. Don’t litter.”

- Many participants provided detailed understanding as to how to be able to remain in their encampments longer, however without garbage bags and disposal sites, it is difficult to keep one’s space clean.
- Participant comments reflected a willingness to stay within certain parameters to show they respected the space they were in. The common sentiment was that staying within these parameters would reduce the negative interactions they have with City staff and allow them to remain where they are set up.
- Participants suggested the City could help maintain a clean and safer space by providing some basic services in addition to garbage disposals, such as a safe place for a fire, toilets, showers and potable water.

Possibilities for prototype development:

- Prototype an Indigenous designed and led camp to act as the first step in the journey to being housed.
- Offer options for where to move when displacing individuals staying outside.
- Offer community events to bring together housed and unhoused community members to build relationships and understanding.
- Share research findings in an infographic with community members in neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of tension between the housed and unhoused. The intent would be twofold; unhoused community members would see an outcome of their participation and other community members would receive credible information about those who stay outside. Increase access to training and education in de-escalation and trauma-informed care.
- Foster working relationships with mutual aid groups.
- Address barriers/challenges to accessing Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH).

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Engagement with Neighbours and Businesses

Administration met with 78 individuals from communities and community leagues, business owners and representatives from Business Improvement Areas as well as one mutual aid group. Administration used a semi-structured interview method through virtual focus groups, ride-along/shadowing, and site visits with highly impacted neighbours and businesses. Participants shared their current experiences engaging with encampment residents and the encampment response process, including ideas for how the process could be improved, what makes them feel unsafe and what success looks like.

Many neighbours living near encampments, businesses and volunteers from mutual aid organizations have tried to help people experiencing homelessness and living in encampments in their own way. However, many participants shared feelings of helplessness, disappointment and frustration. Administration heard that people want to help, but they do not know how to be impactful and are experiencing compassion fatigue.

Four different personas have been created to represent the diversity of views heard during the engagement activities and can be found within Attachment 1. A deliberate effort was made to ensure that everyone engaged could see themselves in at least one or more of the personas created.

Possibilities for prototype development:

- Cleanliness and access to basic human resources like water, food and shelter.
- Improving mental health and physical safety of staff working in businesses and neighbours living near encampments.
- Improving the effectiveness of reporting services such as 211 and 311.
- Safe and trauma-informed interactions between encampment residents, neighbours and businesses.

Engagement with Agency-led Encampment Outreach Teams

Administration engaged with encampment-focused outreach teams from Boyle Street Community Services and Bissell Centre through semi-structured interviews and ride-alongs/shadowing. Engagement allowed for a deeper understanding of the outreach teams' experiences, challenges, and end-to-end process and workflows. Discussions centred on improvements to the encampment response process and how to better support people on their journey out of homelessness.

From a system perspective, there was interest in balancing emergency crisis responses with longer-term sustainable approaches. One idea included resource investments for follow-up support to help individuals maintain housing and build life skills and capabilities. Considerable emphasis was placed on the need to support people's dignity, for example providing increased access to washrooms, showers and laundry. Discussions also highlighted the opportunities to build relationships and trust between encampment residents and their neighbours; and the need for increased access to trauma and violence-informed care for all frontline workers. Access to

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culturally safe health care and mental health and well-being support was another central topic. Specific to the encampment response process, areas of opportunity included expansion of services to meet basic needs; enhancing coordination and information sharing amongst all system partners; increased programming and resources to support women and youth; integrating data systems; and a common/single case management outreach app.

Possibilities for prototype development:

- Design a centralized data management system for use by multiple agencies where data is organized, integrated and stored using common data standards, including role-appropriate access to information.
- Explore how partners can leverage facility spaces, such as Recreation Centres, to create safe spaces for arts and culture programming.
- Design portable showers and bathrooms to meet basic needs.
- Sustainable and continuous learning and training on trauma and violence informed care, cultural safety, and anti-oppressive practices for sector and system partners (police, health care providers, City staff).

Engagement with City Staff

Staff in Community Services and City Operations were also engaged using human-centred continuous quality improvement and service design approaches, to understand their daily experiences and end-to-end processes (services and data quality). Service design is a method that aims to ensure services are useful, usable, and desirable from the public's point of view and effective, efficient, and feasible from the service provider's point of view. In hopes of creating a shared operational understanding, a data process/workflow map (Attachment 2) and City staff process map of the encampment response (Attachment 3) was developed.

In terms of experiences and perspectives, staff highlighted the need for more opportunities to strengthen a system-wide approach to better address the root causes of homelessness. Highlights emphasized improvements to the shelter system, an increased supply of supportive housing, as well as increased resources for mental health and addiction services.

Discussions centred on uncovering process problem(s), how encampment response services and data are organized and resourced, where operational challenges are occurring in the process, and where there are opportunities for improvements. While both operational areas have implemented a continuous improvement approach with operational improvements underway, some process suggestions include: data quality improvements and better information sharing and communication, internally and externally.

Possibilities for process prototypes:

- Explore how to improve safe needle disposal and garbage disposal.
- Integrated and centralized data system and apps with:
 - A centrally-located data repository where data is organized, integrated and stored using common data standards, including security layers for users.

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- Dedicated data analysts who oversee the repository and provide encampment related data analytics and data storytelling.
- Enhance how data is used through data storytelling to craft a narrative out of the information to effectively communicate insights.
- A streamlined complaints process where updates can be included and viewed by complainants. This will also enable a more integrated intake process for operational areas.

Housing as a Human Right

As part of the Encampment Response Improvement Project, Administration conducted a jurisdictional scan and literature review to provide relevant comparisons and insights into issues related to unsheltered individuals and encampments.

In Canada, there is no constitutional right to housing. Governments do not owe a positive duty to provide housing (or affordable housing) under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* or the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

Canada is a signatory to a number of international instruments that address housing through a human-rights lens. These international instruments do not form part of the domestic law of Canada but do act as interpretive aids.

In this spirit, the Government of Canada's *National Housing Strategy Act*, which received royal assent in 2019, contains a federal housing policy aimed at furthering the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing.

As such, although Canadian law does not impose a positive obligation to provide housing as a human right, governments and municipalities can still voluntarily pursue an approach towards the progressive realization of providing safe and adequate housing for all. Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax have aligned their policies and protocols toward a human-centred approach to adequate housing.

Resources and toolkits such as the National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada and the Addressing Homelessness in Parks: An Inclusive Practices Guide are available for policy leaders and designers to use. Edmonton's current encampment response is progressing many of the recommendations within these resources.

All four engagement streams expressed concern about barriers to basic human needs and recommended increasing access to essentials like washrooms and showers, food, water, appropriate clothing and opportunities to stay safe from extreme weather.

Human-centred related recommendations that align with the findings from the engagement include:

- Local, portable rent supplements
- Optimizing diversion efforts for safe family/friend reunification options

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- Access to safely prepared food, drinking water, seasonally-appropriate clothing, protection from the elements, a toilet, hygiene and harm reduction supplies and facilities
- Training in the provision of trauma-informed care
- Access to health, mental health and addiction supports

Next Steps - Prototype Development

Prototypes are solutions that are tested to understand what parts of a solution work or don't work, why or why not and for whom. Prototypes are for learning, and quick testing before investing in the larger-scale implementation of solutions.

Recognizing the diversity of experiences and perspectives of people most impacted by the encampment response, Administration aims to develop more inclusive and tailored solutions that help improve people's experiences, work towards addressing inequities and support capacity building. Prototype development will also explore operational solutions to reduce challenges throughout the encampment response process, taking into consideration any continuous improvement initiatives underway that can be leveraged.

Administration will work with existing and new partners to determine and prioritize prototype development anticipating a mix of low and high-fidelity prototypes. The prototype's fidelity refers to the level of detail and functionality included in the prototype.

Anticipated prototype schedule:

- November to December 2022
 - Decisions on which opportunities to advance to prototype development
 - Use of varying design methods to develop the prototype
- January to March 2023
 - Continual process of feedback and iteration with partners and stakeholders
 - Moving to test prototypes in the real world

Budget/Financial Implications

An integrated unfunded service package for Encampment and Unsheltered Homelessness Response will be brought forward for Council's consideration during the 2023-2026 budget deliberations to enhance encampment resolutions through multidisciplinary outreach teams, improved response times and prototype development. Available resources will be one factor considered in determining which prototypes advance from *Ideas* to *Implementation*.

Legal Implications

The City, as a public body, must comply with privacy legislation, including the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, which may reduce or eliminate the City's ability to share certain information or data despite any creation of data sharing processes.

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COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Given the nature of the motion, the majority of this report represents community insights from a variety of stakeholders. Altogether, the four engagement streams collected the motivations, behaviours, feelings and experiences of over 200 individuals living and/or working in Edmonton.

In addition, to establish a baseline prior to prototype development, a survey was conducted via the Insight community where over 4,500 residents provided feedback on their experiences with encampments where they either live or work. A significant percentage of those surveyed felt encampments and incidents of social disorder (litter, disruptive behaviour, etc.) have increased since 2020 (46 per cent and 55 per cent respectively). The majority of these responses came from neighbourhoods such as Downtown, Oliver, Strathcona, Westmount and Alberta Avenue. Although a large number of responses were received, the Insight community is volunteer-based and therefore may not be representative of Edmonton's diverse population.

GBA+

In Edmonton, the number of people experiencing homelessness has increased steadily over the last couple of years, with a doubling from 2019 to 2022. In Edmonton, as consistent with national research, Indigenous adults and youth experience a higher rate of unsheltered homelessness, compared to non-Indigenous adults and youth. Women, particularly Indigenous women, experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of physical violence and sexual assault.

While there is limited local data, a national study by Statistics Canada using data from the 2018 Canadian Housing Survey shows that in addition to increases in homelessness among Indigenous people, there are increases among women, recent immigrants, veterans and people identifying within Gender, Sexual and Romantic Minority (GSRM) communities. In particular, GSRM youth are at greater risk of unsheltered homelessness, in part due to increasing rates of discrimination, victimization and family violence. For racialized people, experiences of unsheltered homelessness were more predominant among racialized men compared to non-racialized men, however, no statistically significant differences were found between racialized and non-racialized women. Research shows that housing discrimination, systemic racism, and structural inequities drive racial disparities in homelessness.

Administration applied a GBA+ lens during engagements with encampment residents, neighbours and businesses, outreach teams and City teams. GBA+ analysis of encampment residents revealed the distinct power differentials unhoused individuals perceive and experience, particularly when dealing with enforcement, further compounded by histories of trauma and discrimination. GBA+ analysis of the engagement with neighbours and businesses revealed higher safety concerns for young children, women and seniors. These concerns are often centred around their ability to feel safe using public green spaces and parks or while walking around their neighbourhood. GBA+ analysis with outreach teams revealed the levels of historical and ongoing trauma experienced by unsheltered individuals and subsequent needs for supporting individuals with trauma and violence-informed care; while also recognizing the dignity and strengths-based approaches. GBA+ analysis with City staff revealed that preventing and ending homelessness

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must take an intersectional approach that targets actions at the individual, relationship, community and societal level.

Adopting human-centred design as the approach to this work is a significant equity measure, because it acts as a catalyst for Administration to re-centre equity as the key driver of this work. By deliberately prioritizing equity in each of the three phases of this work—observation; ideas; and implementation—Administration is better equipped to prevent harm and work collectively to create more equitable outcomes. Importantly, while statistical data reflects the inequities, an equity-focused approach enables a strengths-based approach to co-designing and prototyping. Given that human-centred design calls for more inclusive design, and an understanding of the full range of perspectives, Administration was able to more deeply understand the many unique realities and experiences of homelessness. In turn, solutions must also be driven by equity, co-designed and culturally responsive and tailored to the strengths and needs of the people most impacted.

ATTACHMENTS

1. City of Edmonton Encampment Response with Neighbour and Business - What We Heard Report Spring/Summer 2022
2. Encampment Response Data Processes
3. High Level Encampment Response Process - City of Edmonton Encampment Teams