

Process Review Summary

Strengths of the Current Encampment Response Model

Preventing large-scale encampments

- The 2021 update to the risk matrix and response approach has been successful in preventing the establishment of encampments that are either large-scale or include a protest element. Joint standard operating procedures and decision-making frameworks have been developed to ensure a swift and coordinated response between the Edmonton Police Service and the City of Edmonton.

Prioritizing public safety

- The risk matrix has been effective in prioritizing public and community safety, through the creation of an accelerated closure process that moves quickly to close encampments where fire and public safety risks are present and facilitates the regular cleanup of areas where encampments are known to occur (ex. Downtown and Chinatown).

Collaborative approach

- The collaborative approach to the response has been regarded as positive by all partners involved. There has been enhanced communication around enforcement with the establishment of an integrated High-Risk Encampment Team made up of Edmonton Police Service and Administration, which has been valuable for assuring public safety and helping to keep pace with the growing volume of encampment complaints. The creation of the specialized enforcement team has helped standardize assessment and closure processes and created strong coordination with clean-up teams in Administration.
- Weekly tactical meetings are a connection point for the stakeholders to share information and strategize on new trends or issues arising in encampments. Enforcement teams informally engage with Administration and contracted agencies to seek input on specific encampments of concern.

Connections to homeless-serving system

- Strong social agency partnerships have enabled an increase in housing workers to focus on responding to individuals in encampments, without the further investment of City resources.

Areas for Improvement

Data Integration

- The City currently only tracks the number of complaints associated with encampments and the number of encampments that are cleaned up, leaving important data gaps. For example, it is not known how many complaints are associated with one encampment versus another, the number of structures or the number of encampment occupants or any detailed demographic information of those in the encampments.
- While the encampment response is a collaborative effort, each partner uses their own unique methods, processes, systems and tools to track their agency data. Data capturing is governed by privacy legislation and information is not consistently accessible to all stakeholder agencies. Outreach workers lack access to real-time information on the locations of encampments and spend a lot of time trying to locate specific clients who they have engaged for housing and other supports.
- These deficiencies impede data-driven decision-making, inhibit a deeper understanding of the size and scale of the problem and make it difficult to properly identify barriers that impact the effectiveness and efficiency of each stage of the encampment response process.
- The City, as a public body, must comply with privacy legislation, including the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, RSA 2000, F-25 (FOIP Act)*. This may impact the City's ability to share information or data with partner organizations. Choosing to collect, use, or disclose information, either formally or informally, requires assessment to ensure the City fulfills its obligations under the FOIP Act and protects the personal privacy of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Accountability

- There is no single entity, dedicated team or Full Time Equivalent, responsible for day-to-day oversight and reporting on the overall encampment response. As a result, real-time coordination of efforts and integrated decision-making across teams is limited.
- The lack of clear targets for all parts of the response combined with the overwhelming demand can lead to multiple competing demands and constant reassessment of priorities (i.e. parkland spaces vs. Chinatown). This can impede effectiveness.

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- There are few explicit targets or goals associated with the current encampment response and a well-articulated evaluation framework is absent. Without the means to measure progress, it is challenging to ensure the effectiveness of the response.

Encampment assessment

- Encampments are currently assessed solely on the basis of physical risk to public safety (including encampment occupants) and the surrounding environment. Other aspects of the health and safety of the encampment occupants, such as addiction, mental health or their level of vulnerability are not taken into account. Due to sector capacity, social workers and/or outreach workers are not involved in the assessment process and there are currently no alternatives for mitigating site risks beyond closure.

Coordination among partners

- Although the sense of collaboration is strong between the various partners, the success of the process relies heavily on informal or ad hoc relationships instead of formal, documented structures and processes. Instead, four external organizations and three City branches staff four separate teams that do their best to coordinate efforts through a weekly meeting.
- Enforcement processes between Parks Rangers and EPS are closely aligned for the majority of encampment closures on parkland and public property, however, different processes exist for closures on private properties and transit properties.

Improved communication

- There is no feedback loop with residents who report encampments via 311 unless specifically requested by the complainant. Park Ranger Peace Officers contact callers when requested but this is labour-intensive work and detracts from their core functions. People may be left feeling that their concern has not been heard and/or will not be addressed as a result. The absence of data integration contributes to challenges with systematic, real-time information-sharing between partners.
- Information on critical incidents such as deaths and fires at encampments is not consistently shared among partners.

Demand has outpaced growth in resources dedicated to encampment response

- In spite of the substantial increase in encampment complaints, resources dedicated to encampment response have remained relatively static. Many of

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- the reallocations and shifts in funding that have been made to adjust to the demand are only temporary.
- The backlog in encampment-related complaints highlights the strain on capacity within the current response. As an example, in August 2022, there were 480 encampment sites in cue for the initial site assessment. Without adequate resourcing, along with efforts to address the systemic pinch points, it will not be possible to reduce the number of encampments in Edmonton.