

## Homeless Encampment Update

### **Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine: May - September, 2019**

On May 22, 2019, Administration circulated a memo to City Council outlining an action plan to find better housing solutions for unsheltered individuals and address safety concerns a high number of homeless encampments in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine. The plan was carried out beginning May 22, 2019, with higher levels of enforcement maintained in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine to remove and prevent new encampments through the summer until September 3, 2019.

In advance of enforcement and clean-up efforts, Boyle Street Community Services Street Outreach notified individuals living in the area that a large scale clean-up effort would begin on May 22, 2019. With additional City resources, 10 of the individuals who were sleeping rough were successfully housed by Street Outreach in bridge housing accommodations (hotels). All of these individuals have since been permanently housed through Coordinated Access, which includes Housing First programs coordinated by Homeward Trust. The City will continue to provide funding for this type of housing intervention for up to 20 more people through to the end of 2019.

Administration conducted an intensive clean of the area from May 22 to May 29, 2019. Over seven days, 104 inactive encampments were cleaned up, which culminated in 30,000 kilograms of waste and over 3,700 needles. Natural areas that experienced severe degradation were fenced off to allow for the re-establishment of native vegetation.

Park Rangers were on site to prevent individuals from setting up encampments so clean-up efforts could continue uninterrupted. Officers continued to patrol the area with increased frequency until September 3, 2019, in order to protect park remediation efforts. Administration is undertaking a replanting effort across the park.

### **Cost**

Significant City resources were dedicated to the housing, clean-up, and enforcement efforts in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine from May 23, 2019 to September 3, 2019. It is important to note that the costs outlined below are in addition to ongoing operations and costs to address homeless encampments (estimated to be approximately \$1.8 million a year).

<b>Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine Encampment Clean Up Costs</b>		
<b>Area</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Citizen Services, Housing and Homelessness	Bridge housing and associated program costs for 10 individuals for 4-6 weeks.	\$21,000
Citizen Services, Community Standards and Neighbourhoods	Increased Park Ranger patrols to conduct proactive sweeps and prevent the setting up of new encampments in the area.	\$128,000
City Operations, Parks and Road Services	Additional labour, remediation materials and equipment, and staff training to address encampment related garbage and debris in Dawson Park.	\$97,000
<b>Total Cost</b>		<b>\$246,000</b>

### **Improved response to encampments**

Elevated enforcement efforts in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine challenged the City's ability to establish elevated enforcement service levels in other areas of the city. There have been 4,004 reported homeless encampments across the entire city so far in 2019 across the entire city, up from a total of 2,171 for 2018. As of October 30, 2019, the City had 416 reported encampments awaiting investigation.

Some of the individuals who had been unsheltered and sleeping in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine, as well as others new to Edmonton or the inner city, began to establish encampments with increased frequency north of downtown. In late September 2019, more than 100 individuals were sleeping in large groups adjacent to Hope Mission, Bissell Centre and the LRT tracks along 95 Street.

Given the complexity of health needs in this population and continued re-establishment of encampments in the area despite standard responses, a more robust, cross-systems response was planned. On September 25, Homeward Trust led an urgent meeting to establish an encampment response team to lead an intensive effort to house unsheltered individuals living in the area. The team is made up of representatives from Homeward Trust, Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Edmonton Police Service, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Supports, Government of Alberta, and the City of Edmonton.

The Encampment Response Team identified individuals living in the area by name; information was shared across housing, health, and social systems to determine what kinds of support would be needed to transition them into housing. The City of Edmonton supplied an Edmonton Transit Service bus to convene multi-agency teams outside of different encampment areas to serve as a mobile housing and health intake office.

As a result of regular, coordinated engagement by housing teams, Alberta Health Services, and Alberta Supports between October 16 and October 29, 2019, 127 people were confirmed to be added to the By Name List, 37 of which were not previously known. Of the 127, 73 were connected to housing first staff to begin the process of securing permanent housing. The length of time it takes to house an individual varies, depending on their needs and the supply of suitable housing available. Housing workers aim to have someone housed within 45 days of being connected with services. As of November 1, 2019, nine individuals had been housed and were receiving follow up support, while several others have already been approved for apartments and are waiting to move in.

Throughout this effort, Edmonton Police Service and City Peace Officers monitored the areas to ensure safety in the area and ultimately recommend a camp closure and clean-up approach. By November 1, 2019, the majority of the larger scale encampment areas had been entirely resolved and cleaned.

Throughout the operations in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine and work done by the Encampment Response Team, Administration has endeavoured to incorporate evidence-based recommendations from the Report on Homeless Encampments on Public Land (March 2019). Accordingly, the decisions made by the Encampment Response Team to support the closure and clean-up of the areas north of downtown were made in pursuit of safety for both encampment occupants and the surrounding community. Moving forward, closure decisions will be made based on multiple factors of urgency as opposed to responding to encampments through repeated cycle of chasing single campers from site to site or being over reactive to citizen inquiries. Key to improving the city-wide response to homeless encampments is prioritizing housing, enforcement and clean-up actions to ensure that people who are making progress towards permanent housing or whose encampment poses low levels of risk to both the individual and the community are not unnecessarily displaced and high risk scenarios are prioritized for immediate resolution.