

Municipal Update: Helping address homelessness in the Halifax region

Date of issue: August 9, 2022

The Halifax Regional Municipality's priority has been, and continues to be, treating those experiencing homelessness with dignity – and continuing to work with community partners to find ways to provide support to them within our organization's capacity and scope. The following is an update on ongoing efforts to help address homelessness in our region.

Response to the statement from homeless serving organizations

- The municipality is aware of the August 5, 2022, statement from homeless serving organizations with their recommendations for a resolution of the situation at Meagher Park.
- Municipal staff reviewed the letter and the Executive Director of Parks and Recreation replied to the organizations with an [official response](#) on August 8, 2022.
- The Executive Director reiterated that the municipality is open to dialogue and conversation on the issue of homelessness in our community and those individuals are best served by everyone working together. The letter also reinforced that the municipality's preference is not to require police to be involved in enforcement related to encampments. As always, Halifax Regional Police (HRP) must respond to issues of public safety.
- Municipal staff had discussions with representatives of homelessness service providers on August 8, 2022 to seek their support in closing Meagher Park and conversations are on-going in light of the municipality's intention to vacate the park and fence it off. Once fenced, the municipality will begin the remediation process to re-open Meagher Park for all to enjoy as a park.

Meagher Park

- As outlined in the [staff presentation](#) at the Special Regional Council meeting on August 2, 2022, extensive efforts over the past several weeks through a civilian-led engagement approach to close Meagher Park have been exhausted. The Council-endorsed response plan now indicates Halifax Regional Police (HRP) may be asked to assist in vacating the park.
- On August 3, 2022, the Executive Director of Parks and Recreation submitted an [official request](#) to the Chief of Police for HRP's assistance.
- The municipality has been encouraging those sheltering in Meagher Park to accept offers of support from Street Navigators and service providers. Those interested in locating to one of the designated outdoor sheltering locations have been, and will continue to be, provided assistance with transportation by the municipality, as requested.
- Over the weekend of August 7 and 8, 2022, municipal staff assisted three people who were sheltering in Meagher Park to move to one of the designated outdoor sheltering locations.
- As of noon, August 8, 2022, municipal staff received confirmation that there were no individuals sheltering in Meagher Park.
- While no one was sheltering in the park, there were people gathered in the park and indications that protestors were mobilizing. As a result, the fencing was not able to be installed because it could not be done safely.
- The municipality plans to fence the park as soon as it is possible to do so in a safe manner.
- In the response to the homeless serving organizations the municipality asked that they support the closure of the park.
- As mentioned in previous updates, some advocates and protesters have indicated their intention to engage in conflict should the municipality enforce the July 5, 2022, notice to vacate, and remove individuals from the park.

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- Enforcement actions are now an operational matter for HRP. The municipality will continue to work to support those sheltering in the park and encourage them transition to a designated outdoor sheltering location – if offers by the province or service providers for temporary housing are either not available or would not / could not be accepted.
- Municipal administration does not have authority to direct police-related operations. As explained by the Chief of Police during the Special Meeting of Regional Council, HRP will take a measured approach that includes assessing the situation, developing a plan, and taking steps that ensure public safety remains paramount. Additional questions about a possible police-led operation need to be referred to HRP.

Additional background

- Further to the [municipal statement on July 5, 2022](#), and the municipal updates issued on [July 15, 2022](#), [July 22, 2022](#), [July 27, 2022](#), and [August 4, 2022](#), the municipality set July 17, 2022, as the date for those who had been sheltering in Meagher Park to transition to a designated outdoor sheltering location – if offers by the province or service providers for temporary housing were either not available or would not / could not be accepted.
- The health and safety conditions in the park continue to place those sheltering in this location in an increasingly vulnerable situation. The designated outdoor sheltering locations provide a safer alternative with access to additional supports and services.
- In the lead up to, and throughout, the transition period which ended on July 17, 2022, municipal staff have visited the park regularly to perform wellness checks with those who remain onsite, connect them with service providers, inform them of the closure of the park and explain the services that are available at each of the four designated outdoor sheltering locations.
- Various groups have been protesting at Meagher Park since July 17, 2022, and municipal staff have been in contact with representatives from some of these groups to ensure service providers have unimpeded access to the park to support those experiencing homelessness. Staff have spoken with individuals who have indicated association with Halifax Mutual Aid; Permanent, Accessible, Dignified and Safe (PADS) Community Network; and Nova Scotians United. Staff are also aware that members of the Freedom Convoy have been on site.
- Municipal efforts remain focused on assisting those who are experiencing homelessness and encouraging those who remain in the park to vacate the site and accept alternative options, including the support and services currently provided at the designated outdoor sheltering locations.
- As mentioned previously, if someone refuses to leave the park, for whatever reason, and a negotiated settlement is not successful, the response plan may include requesting the assistance of Halifax Regional Police, as a last resort. Failure to comply with the closure of the park is an offence under the Municipal Parks Bylaw and the *Protection of Property Act, R.S.N.S., 1989*.
- Once vacated, the municipality will be fencing Meagher Park so that reconstruction work can be completed – returning the park to its original state. Over the coming months, planned work includes assessing the condition of the park, cleaning the area and resodding the grass.

For more information about ongoing efforts by the municipality to help address homelessness in our region visit halifax.ca/addressinghomelessness.