



Item No. 10.2.5
Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality
June 4, 2025

TO: Chair O'Malley and Commissioners of the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 27, 2025

SUBJECT: Board of Police Commissioners Policy on Policing Encampments

ORIGIN

August 2, 2023, meeting of the Board of Police Commissioners, Item 7.1

MOVED by Commissioner Critchley, seconded by Commissioner Blackburn

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC) direct the Policy Subcommittee to adopt the following as its first two areas of focus:

1. Review the Board of Police Commissioners' policies related to Extra Duty and Off Duty employment, and
2. In consultation with the Chief, draft a Board of Police Commissioners policy related to police response to homelessness for the BoPC's consideration.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality adopt in principle, subject to a period of public comment, the policy Policing Encampments for inclusion in the Board of Police Commissioners' Policy Manual, as outlined in Attachment 1 of this report.

BACKGROUND

On August 18, 2021, the Halifax Regional Municipality and Halifax Regional Police (HRP) closed four Encampments in Halifax parks, including a high-profile site near the Memorial Library on Spring Garden Road. These Encampments were established by individuals experiencing homelessness due to a severe shortage of affordable and supportive housing. The Encampment evictions escalated into confrontations between municipal staff, law enforcement, and members of the public, resulting in several arrests and widespread criticism of the authorities' actions.

In response to these events, the Board of Police Commissioners (BoPC), on May 3, 2023, engaged Cooper, Sandler, Shime & Schwartzentruber LLP to conduct an independent civilian review ("the Independent Review"). This work culminated in a report released on August 12, 2024, with 37 recommendations to address the issues identified.

This report deals specifically with the police response to homelessness portion of the August 2, 2023 motion. Revised Off Duty and Extra Duty employment policies were previously approved by the BoPC.

DISCUSSION

Thirteen of the Independent Review's 37 recommendations are directed specifically at the BoPC. Recommendation 7 states that the BoPC should review its own policies to determine if any additional policies are needed, including on the topic of policing encampments and the unhoused.

The proposed policy on Policing Encampments emphasizes a compassionate and collaborative, approach to managing Encampments, focusing on the rights and needs of its residents. Specifically, the recommended BoPC policy provides direction to the Chief to produce an HRP policy with respect to its response to Encampments that:

- Is informed by the knowledge and experience of interested and impacted parties;
- Ensures relationship building is prioritized with service providers;
- Outlines expectations around training;
- Ensures certain critical activities are included as a part of the HRP's day-to-day involvement with Encampments;
- Confirms a process when HRP is involved in the closing of an Encampment, which includes ensuring the process is civilian led, where appropriate and when available; and
- Deems HRP's involvement in the closing of an Encampment a Matter of Immediate Strategic Significance.

In accordance with Recommendation 4 in the Independent Review, the policy commits to a human rights-based approach to address the needs of those who live in Encampments, and acknowledges the distinct needs of Indigenous people, Black and other racialized people, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities. In accordance with Recommendation 5, the policy acknowledges the distinct relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and their right to live on that land in the cultural, historical and spiritual manner they wish.

The policy also references the guiding principles included in Regional Council's Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and requests the HRD to review the policy for alignment and integration.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications to this report. Any future financial implications arising from

implementation of the recommendations will be addressed in staff reports and HRM departmental budgets as required.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Board of Police Commissioners is comprised of four citizen members and three Councillors. Meetings are live webcast on Halifax.ca. The agenda, reports, video, and minutes of the Board are posted on Halifax.ca. Staff are recommending that the proposed policy be posted on the BoPC's website for a period of public comment.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Police Act 2004 section 55 states:

The function of a board is to provide

...

(b) the administrative direction, organization and policy required to maintain an adequate, effective and efficient police department

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Policing Encampments

Report Prepared by: Joshua Bates, Policing Policy Strategist, Office of the Public Safety Commissioner,
902-478-2032

Policing Encampments

Original Implementation Date		Approved by	
Date of Last Revision		Approved by	
Effective Date of Last Revision		Approved by	

1 - Title

Policing Encampments

2 - Purpose

The Halifax Board of Police Commissioners is committed to overseeing the delivery of fair, effective, efficient, equitable and accountable policing services in keeping with community values, needs, and expectations to the community members, including unhoused persons.

Homelessness takes many forms. Due to insufficient housing, a lack of healthcare, as well as the lack of indoor sheltering options and associated supports or wrap around services, there are people forced to shelter outside, many who do so in Encampments within municipal parks.

Any Encampment response must not lose sight of the fact that human beings who are involved and impacted may have long histories of trauma, and the closure of an Encampment presents another potentially traumatic incident. The Halifax Board of Police Commissioners therefore adopts the following guiding principles, as outlined in Regional Council's Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality:¹

1. HUMAN RIGHT

The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes adequate housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living.

2. PARTICIPATION:

The persons whose decisions and actions will impact must be involved in developing policies and work plans. We support the mantra of "Nothing About Us Without Us."

3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW

The municipality administers and enforces the laws, regulations, and bylaws enacted by Regional Council, the Province of Nova Scotia, and the Government of Canada. This includes building, general safety, and fire codes. The municipality expects all its partners and citizens to comply with the law.

4. PERSON-CENTERED

¹ Framework for Addressing Homelessness, Halifax Regional Municipality, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/230221rc1515.pdf>

Ensure that people's preferences, needs, and values guide clinical decisions, providing care and support that is respectful of and responsive to them. It is important to remember people who shelter outside have strengths, and those must be recognized, respected, and leveraged.

5. HOUSING FIRST

A *Housing First* approach focuses on moving people experiencing homelessness quickly from a shelter or sleeping rough to safe, sustainable, and supportive housing. Stable housing is essential to deliver services successfully and supports to persons experiencing homelessness.

6. RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship building, learning, education, and voluntary compliance are always preferred over involuntary compliance action.

7. TRANSPARENCY

Transparency and ongoing communication are essential for the development of trust. Strong, productive relationships between all levels of government, service providers, and the community cannot exist without trust and transparency.

8. COOPERATION

Housing and homelessness are complex problems, with no order of government nor single community agency able to solve them independently. The municipality is committed to working in close partnership with others to reduce homelessness and increase the availability of affordable and deeply affordable housing.

Whenever possible, the municipality should avoid duplicating the work of service providers and other levels of government and instead support them in their efforts to serve all residents better.

9. CIVILIAN LED RESPONSE

Responses to homelessness issues should, whenever possible, be led by a coalition of Street Navigators, service providers, and health professionals. Halifax Regional Police (HRP) or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) primarily focus on the prevention and resolution of crime and will be involved when / as required.

10. TRAUMA-INFORMED

Trauma is often closely tied to substance use, mental illness, stigma, healthcare access barriers, and other challenges. Trauma-informed practice means recognizing this link and ensuring that people feel safe and are not re-traumatized by their current experiences.

In addition, the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners acknowledges the distinct needs of Indigenous people, Black and other racialized people, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities. The Board of Police Commissioners also acknowledges the distinct relationship that Indigenous people have with their land and the right to live on that land in the cultural, historical and spiritual manner they wish.

3 – Scope

This policy applies to all sworn and unsworn members of HRP as outlined in the Department Order #: 04-09 and to the Chief of HRP.

4 - Definitions

In the context of this document:

Police Act or Act means the *Police Act*, S.N.S. 2004, c. 31 as amended

Board means the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners

Chair means Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners

Chief Officer means the Chief of Halifax Regional Police

Chief Superintendent means the Chief Superintendent of the RCMP, Halifax District

Chiefs means the Chief of Police of HRP and the Chief Superintendent of the RCMP

Council means Halifax Regional Council

Encampment means a temporary outdoor location, often consisting of tents or other structures, used by people as a housing option, on public or privately owned land

HRD means the Halifax Regional Detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

HRM means the Halifax Regional Municipality

HRP means the Halifax Regional Police

Legislative Assistant means representative of the Municipal Clerk's Office

Member(s) means a member of the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners

5 - Distribution

Policies may be distributed to all Board of Police Commissioners, CAO, Municipal Clerk, HRM Councillors, the Chiefs and their respective departments, Nova Scotia Association of Police Governance and posted on HRM website with link to HRP website. This list may be expanded as required.

6 - Roles and Responsibilities

General

- 6.1 The chief officer shall establish a policy with respect to the Halifax Regional Police's responses to Encampments that aligns with the stated principles in this policy.
- 6.2 The chief officer's policy shall be informed by the knowledge and experience from interested and impacted parties, including HRP officers, Encampment residents, HRM Business Units, representatives from social service agencies that assist the unhoused, and the Board of Police Commissioners.

Mission, Vision and Values

- 6.3 The chief officer shall ensure that HRP's policies regarding Encampments align with the mission, vision and values, as outlined in HRP's Strategic Plan², and the Principles of Policing, as outlined in HRM's Police Board By-law P-100.

Inter-agency Cooperation

- 6.4 In accordance with the HRM Lived Experience consultation submitted to Regional Council,³ the chief officer shall prioritize relationship building with service providers by participating in inter-agency committees and partnerships.

Training

- 6.5 The chief officer shall ensure that all HRP staff are familiar and in compliance with the HRP policy on Encampments.
- 6.6 The chief officer shall ensure that any changes in the HRM coordinated response protocols involving Encampments are reflected in HRP's policy.
- 6.7 The chief officer shall ensure that HRP training for Encampments is reflective of the guiding principles, as outlined in Regional Council's Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and acknowledges the distinct needs of Indigenous people, Black and other racialized people, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities.

HRP's day-to-day involvement with Encampments

- 6.8 The chief officer shall ensure that HRP's day-to-day involvement with Encampments includes the following activities:
- a. Responding to alleged criminal conduct and criminal investigations;
 - b. When the need is identified, refer individuals to appropriate supports and service providers;
 - c. As appropriate, inform service providers of identified needs;
 - d. As appropriate and proportionate to the circumstances of each individual Encampment, provide community policing efforts to ensure the safety and security of those living in Encampments and those living in adjacent communities;
 - e. As appropriate, engaging with other Business Units, including supporting safety assessments, community engagement, and sharing and addressing community safety concerns; and
 - f. In the event that personal property is left behind following the arrest or incarceration of an individual, ensuring that the Housing and Homelessness Team in the Community Safety Business Unit is notified.

²About Halifax Regional Police, accessed May 26, 2025, <https://www.halifax.ca/safety-security/police/about-halifax-regional-police>

³Lived Experience Committee and Consultation, Halifax Regional Municipality, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/221122rc1519.pdf>

HRP's involvement with closing Encampments and reporting requirements

- 6.9 When HRP is involved in the closure of an Encampment, the chief officer shall ensure that:
- a. Property ownership and applicable legislation is determined;
 - b. The authority of the person requesting removal of the encampment is established prior to action being taken;
 - c. Any action taken by HRP to close an Encampment will be in compliance with the applicable legislation; and
 - d. Where appropriate and when available, HRP's response will follow Principle 9, Civilian Led Response, as outlined in Regional Council's Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality.
- 6.10 HRP's involvement in the closing of an Encampment is a Matter of Immediate Strategic Significance. As such, subject to security or operational concerns, the chief officer shall report the content of any debriefing or lessons learned following the closing of an Encampment to the Board.

Halifax Regional Detachment

- 6.11 The Halifax Regional Detachment (HRD) shall review this policy for alignment and integration.

7 - Policy Review

This policy should be reviewed every four years and when the Act is amended.

8 - Contact

Office of the Municipal Clerk

9 - References

None