



Item No. 10.2.3
Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality
September 3, 2025

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

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 8, 2025

SUBJECT: Update on the HRM response to the Halifax Independent Civilian Review into August 18, 2021, Encampment Evictions

ORIGIN

September 4, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion 10.2.1 Halifax Independent Civilian Review Into August 18, 2021 Encampment Evictions

MOVED by Commissioner Blackburn, seconded by Commissioner Smith

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for Halifax Regional Municipality:

1. Request the Halifax Regional Police (HRP) prepare a staff report to address the Halifax Independent Civilian Review's recommendations pertaining to HRP and develop an action plan and report back to the Board;
2. Refer the Halifax Independent Civilian Review's report to Regional Council and recommend that Regional Council request the CAO to prepare a staff report to review the Independent Civilian Review's recommendations pertaining to Halifax Regional Municipality, develop an action plan and report back to Council; and
3. Create a working group comprised of three Board members, including the Chair, to review the Halifax Independent Civilian Review's recommendations pertaining to the Board of Police Commissioners and to report back to the Board.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2

RECOMMENDATION

Motion:

That the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality:

1. Refer this Update to Halifax Regional Council for Council's information.

BACKGROUND

On August 18, 2021, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and Halifax Regional Police (HRP) closed four encampments in Halifax parks, including a high-profile site near the former 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 HRM 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. This review culminated in a report released on August 12, 2024, with 37 recommendations to address the issues identified.

DISCUSSION

As noted in the February 3, 2025, update, the Independent Civilian Review addressed various issues, including the legal framework surrounding encampments, HRM's approach to supporting those experiencing homelessness, encampments, and closing encampments before August 18, 2021, HRP's planning and execution on the day of the evictions, and the roles of HRM, HRP, and the BoPC after the events. The analyses completed by the independent civilian review provide a foundation for the 37 recommendations to prevent similar incidents and foster better relations between police, HRM, persons experiencing homelessness, and the surrounding community.

The review also emphasized the need for a more compassionate and coordinated approach to homelessness. Recommendations included improving inter-agency collaboration, revising policies on the use of force, and enhancing the BoPC's oversight of HRP operations. It proposed creating a working committee to strengthen relations with the unhoused community.

Community Safety, HRP, BoPC, and RCMP staff formed a working group in late 2024 to address the 37 recommendations in a holistic manner that recognized that the overall response to encampments and homelessness is not solely the responsibility of any single agency.

Prior to and during the course of the review consultation, HRM, HRP, RCMP, the BoPC, and Community Safety have taken several steps that align with the recommendations outlined in the February 3, 2025, report to the BoPC (attached).

A number of these recommendations have already been implemented and operationalized through updated policies and procedures. The working group will continue to meet and collaborate on BoPC policies to ensure they reflect the spirit of the Review; however, the working group will not be returning to BoPC to provide updates as the outstanding items will be addressed individually.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ALTERNATIVES

No alternatives to the responses to the Independent Civilian Review's recommendation report at this time.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

BoPC's Terms of Reference – By-law P-100 "section 8 (2) The Board in accordance with the Police Act and HRM Bylaws may carry out any of the following roles and responsibilities: (h) carry out any studies or investigations respecting its civilian governance responsibilities; (j) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing goals and methods."

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Encampment Report Recommendation Tracker

Attachment 2 –Response to the Independent Review Feb 3.2025 BOPC Item 10.2.2

Report Prepared by: Kara Evans, Coordinator, Public Safety Office 902.478.117

ATTACHMENT 1 Encampment Report Recommendation Tracker

Rec		Lead Business Unit	Progress Update February 2025	Progress Update September 2025
1	The Board of Police Commissioners should review the relevant portions of the Morden, Epstein, and Rouleau Reports and publicly commit to the robust oversight recommended in those Reports to ensure greater police governance and accountability.	Board of Police Commissioners	This review is ongoing.	While the Morden, Epstein and Rouleau Reports were produced within a different legislative framework, the progress outlined in this tracking document outlines the BoPC’s commitment to meeting the robust oversight recommended in each of these reports, within Nova Scotia’s unique legislative framework.
2	More specifically, the Board of Police Commissioners should adopt policies consistent with the Morden, Epstein, and Rouleau reports. Those policies should define what constitutes a “critical point” that would require the Chief of Police to disclose relevant information to the Board for consideration and discussion. Guidance on what criteria might be applied to determine whether a critical point has been reached can be found in Recommendations 3 and 4 of Justice Epstein’s Report, and Recommendation 4 of Justice Rouleau’s Report.	Board of Police Commissioners	The BoPC is drafting a Critical Point policy in collaboration with HRP, RCMP, and Community Safety that incorporates the elements articulated in this recommendation.	The BoPC adopted a policy entitled Matters of Immediate Strategic Significance at its June 4 th meeting. The policy includes the key elements included in this recommendation.
3	The Board of Police Commissioners should ensure that the Chief of Police and HRP establish corresponding procedures to the policies outlined in Recommendations 1 and 2 for what constitutes a critical point and the expectations and procedure for the sharing of information with the Board.	Board of Police Commissioners	The draft Critical Point policy defines what/when an event is considered a critical point. Additionally, it provides procedures to ensure that HRP shares relevant information with the BoPC in a timely and secure manner.	The BoPC’s policy includes a definition of Matters of Immediate Strategic Significance and includes notification requirements to the BoPC when such events occur.
4	The Board of Police Commissioners and HRP should publicly commit to a human rights-based approach to address the needs of the unhoused and those who live in encampments, including the right of the unhoused and encampment residents to meaningfully participate in the design and implementation of policies and practices that affect them. The Board of Police Commissioners and the HRP should also acknowledge the distinct needs of Indigenous individuals (see Recommendation 3 below), Black and other racialized individuals, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	The BoPC and Halifax Regional Police are drafting policies relating to police interactions with the unhoused population that incorporates the elements articulated in this recommendation. The draft policies commit to a human rights-based approach. And acknowledge the distinct needs of marginalized communities.	At its June 4th meeting, the BoPC adopted, in principle, subject to a period of public comment, a policy entitled Policing Encampments that includes the key elements articulated in this recommendation, including committing to a Human Rights based approach and acknowledging the distinct needs of Indigenous people, Black and other racialized people, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities. The policy is on track to be formally adopted at its September 3rd meeting. The draft HRP policy on the same remains in progress. Finalization will take place following the Board’s adoption of its policy, to ensure alignment.

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5	The Board of Police Commissioners, HRP, and HRM should publicly acknowledge the distinct relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and the right to live on that land in the cultural, historical and spiritual manner they wish.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	This language is included in the draft policies referred to in the response to Recommendation 4.	This language is included in the Policing Encampments policy that the BoPC considered at its June 4 th meeting.
6	The Board of Police Commissioners should clearly articulate a process by which it transparently identifies Board and HRP policies that require review and how revisions, if any, should be implemented.	Board of Police Commissioners	The BoPC’s Policy Manual states that policies are reviewed every four years and/or when the Police Act is amended. Proposed revisions are brought forward to the board for review. The BoPC can also request specific policies to be reviewed by way of motion.	An update to the Policy Manual that is to be brought forward in Fall 2025 will reinforce this process.
7	The Board of Police Commissioners should review its own policies to determine if any additional policies for the Board are needed on topics such as policing encampments and the unhoused, human rights, the use of force, and the use of pepper spray. Important components to be included in such policies are set out in detail in Chapter 6. As part of this process, the Board can review and consider policies from other police boards across Canada. The Board should also play a more active role in directing the Chief of Police to review HRP policies and report back to the Board on what changes, if any, are appropriate.	Board of Police Commissioners	The BoPC’s policy manual is reviewed regularly, and new policies are created at the BoPC’s direction. Prior to receiving the Independent Review, the BoPC provided direction to produce new policies in the areas of policing encampments and the unhoused and Use of Force. The draft policy on encampments and the unhoused references the principle of human rights. A jurisdictional scan is an integral component of the policy development process.	At its May 21 st meeting, the BoPC approved its 25/26 workplan, which includes the creation of policies in the areas of Matters of Immediate Strategic Significance, Armoured Rescue Vehicle, Policing Encampments, Use of Force, Body Worn Cameras, and Sexual Assault Case Review.
8	The Board of Police Commissioners and the HRP should review and revise the HRP Use of Force policy. The revised Use of Force policy should emphasize that the goal is to <i>not</i> use force and that force should be used only as a last resort. Every available option other than force should be exhausted before a resort to use of force is justified. The policy should emphasize that de-escalation and withdrawal are always options that are available and should be considered prior to the use of force and throughout the engagement.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	The BoPC has previously provided direction to produce a Use of Force policy for inclusion in its policy manual. This policy would provide direction to the HRP to review and revise its Use of Force Policy to ensure alignment with the BoPC’s policy. In September 2024, the Government of Nova Scotia issued policing standards for all municipal police agencies in the province and the RCMP. These standards include the Use of Force and de-escalation. Discussions are ongoing on whether a separate BoPC policy on Use of Force is still required. HRP is currently reviewing and revising its Use of Force Policy and will consider this recommendation during the process.	The BoPC has reaffirmed its commitment to adopt a Use of Force policy by requesting this item be included in its 2025-26 workplan, which was adopted at its May 21st meeting. Work on a Use of Force Policy has begun and is targeted to be considered by the BoPC in Fall 2025. Revision of the existing HRP Use of Force policy remains in progress. Finalization will take place following the Board’s adoption of its policy, to ensure alignment.
9	The Board of Police Commissioners should direct the HRP to review and revise the Sensory Irritant Policy. The revised policy should set specific criteria and procedures related to use, ensure only properly trained officers carry OC Spray (both initial training and regular retraining), and provide guidelines to ensure timely first aid is provided to those effected by pepper spray.	Board of Police Commissioners	Sensory irritants are a part of the Use of Force continuum and would be included in any Use of Force policy. The BoPC has previously provided direction to produce a Use of Force policy for inclusion in its policy manual. This policy would provide direction to the HRP to review and revise its Use of Force Policy to ensure alignment with the BoPC’s policy. In September 2024, the Government of Nova Scotia issued policing standards for all municipal police agencies in the province and the RCMP. These standards include the Use of Force and de-escalation. Discussions are ongoing on whether a separate BoPC policy on Use of Force is still required.	Sensory irritants will be covered in a Use of Force policy that will be brought forward to the BoPC.
10	The Board of Police Commissioners should consider a policy to ensure that after any critical event, a formal debriefing is held by the HRP. The debriefing should be led by senior officers and provide an opportunity for attendees to openly and safely discuss the events in question. Officers should be provided the opportunity to review the events in question and openly discuss the successes and flaws of the operation, and the lessons to be learned. There should also be an opportunity for officers to	Board of Police Commissioners	This principle is included in the BoPC’s draft Critical Point policy	This principle is included in the policy on Matters of Immediate Strategic Significance, which was formally adopted at the BoPC’s June 4 th meeting.

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	anonymously provide such input in the event they do not feel comfortable expressing their views publicly. The debriefing should be properly memorialized by a scribe. The Chief of Police and senior command, if not present at the debriefing, should receive a copy of the notes and take steps to implement any lessons learned.			
11	The Board of Police Commissioners should require that after the debriefing, the Chief of Police must report the content of the debriefing and lessons learned to the Board. The Board and Chief of Police could then consider if any changes in policy, procedure or practices are appropriate and, if so, what those changes should be. Any changes in policy and/or procedure should then be reported back to the force so the officers know the outcome of the feedback provided. If deemed necessary, the review of the report could be held <i>in camera</i> to protect confidential information about police tactics and strategies.	Board of Police Commissioners	This principle is included in the BoPC's draft Critical Point policy	This principle is included in the policy on Matters of Immediate Strategic Significance, which was formally adopted at the BoPC's June 4 th meeting.
12	The Board of Police Commissioners and HRP should ensure they have a program that allows for counselling and mental health support for its officers. It is likely that there is an Employee Assistance Plan in place. The HRP should take steps to advise all of its officers that mental health support and counselling is available to its officers who have been subjected to traumatic experiences, whether on August 18, 2021, or any other date.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	Under their 2024-25 work plan, the BoPC requested a report on HRP actions to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports. The BoPC received the report at the December 4, 2024, meeting, followed by a presentation on the same at the December 18, 2024, meeting. The report and presentation outline the existing and planned positions, programs and initiatives in this area at HRP, including, but not limited to: • Employee and Family Assistance Program • Reintegration Program • Wellness Program Specialist • Health Specialists • Safeguarding Program • Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments • Rainbow Internal Support Network Other steps include the identification and initiation of an Early Intervention (EI) Program designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed. This work is being progressed in partnership with HRM IT. Additional work and supports in this area include employee benefit plans which include coverage for counselling, focus areas being addressed by the HRP Employee Engagement Working Group, and HRM policies. Employees are advised of these resources and supports on an ongoing basis.	The BoPC's 2025-26 work plan includes an annual update report on actions to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports.
13	The Board of Police Commissioners should direct the HRP, in conjunction with HRM, to develop a policy for joint operations that permits senior HRM staff to determine whether the operation should continue. The Review is not suggesting that HRM should be permitted to direct HRP operations. Rather, HRM staff should be provided the tools to determine whether HRM goals are worth their continued involvement, including operations that may involve the use of force by the HRP against civilians.	Board of Police Commissioners	This principle is included in the BoPC's draft policy relating to police interactions with the unhoused population.	Operational planning for encampments includes both HRM senior staff and HRP and indicates when civilian led operational will be transferred to civilian operations.

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14	The HRP and HRM should publicly acknowledge that there were flaws in the decision-making process that led to the evictions, as well as in the execution of that plan. HRM and HRP should issue a public apology for those errors.	HRM/Halifax Regional Police	HRM and HRP recognize that the response to the August 18, 2021, clearing of encampments involved errors in the decision-making process that contributed to people being placed in precarious positions that caused harm. Prior to the release of this report there was collective recognition of the need for change. There is a strong commitment to do better through policy development and changes to encampment management processes, which have since been tested in encampment closures with positive outcomes for all involved. HRM will issue a statement which publicly acknowledges these facts, as well as its continuing commitment to learn from people experiencing homelessness and those involved in the work to support them.	
15	As part of their training, the HRP should include a training module on working with unhoused communities and encampments. The people who provide the training should include people who are or were unhoused, and those from social service agencies who assist the unhoused. This will assist in training officers how to best interact with unhoused people and encampments and foster greater trust between unhoused communities and the police. The training should also address the fact that the unhoused often face intersecting forms of discrimination, including but not limited to anti-Black and/or Indigenous racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. Accordingly, the training should also address those issues and include members of those communities as trainers.	Halifax Regional Police	When developing its policy on interacting with unhoused persons, HRP will consider training requirements. Development of any training in this area would require collaboration with HRM Community Safety. Regarding intersectional discrimination, since 2022, HRP officers have received training on identifying, recording, and responding to hate crimes and incidents, and referring them to HRP’s Hate Crime Unit.	The draft HRP policy on interacting with unhoused persons is in development.
16	HRP should establish a Working Committee on Homelessness that is comprised of senior HRP officers, a member of the Board of Police Commissioners, unhoused persons, and representatives from social service agencies that assist the unhoused. There should also be representation on all sides from the Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized communities. The Working Committee should have as its stated goal to identify current issues related to the relationship between the HRP and unhoused communities, and how to build better relationships and trust between the HRP and unhoused communities. The Working Committee will be able to develop and or recommend policies, strategies and actions plans for approval by the Board that help achieve that goal. The Working Committee will also be able to review the development and implementation of the service training identified in Recommendation 15 and offer recommendations for enhancement.	Halifax Regional Police	Since its inception, Community Safety has taken the lead for HRM on issues related to the unhoused population. HRP will consider this recommendation in conjunction with Community Safety.	Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025.
17	HRP, including the PSU, should continue to develop Operational Plans in advance of any significant police engagement. That Operational Plan should clearly define the parameters of what is expected of police, including the goal to be achieved and the scope of work to be conducted by police. While recognizing that police work is dynamic and plans must be flexible to allow the police to accomplish their goals, and ensure the safety of the public and officers, the HRP should not exceed the original scope of the Operational Plan except where there are extenuating or urgent circumstances.	Halifax Regional Police	Since August 2021, the content, components, and structure of operational plans for PSU deployments have been reviewed and strengthened in certain areas. Each plan clearly outlines essential information, including (but not limited to) roles and responsibilities, objectives, goals, resources, supports, execution details, and withdrawal plans. The PSU has developed and executed 32 Incident Action Plans (IAPs) since August 2021. Each IAP follows the SMEAC process: Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, and Control. The Mission portion outlines the focus, goals and mission of the deployment. The Execution portion outlines the finer details of how the mission will be achieved, including the resources and structure of the deployment. The scope of the work is clearly detailed within each IAP as it relates to sections 2(b) and 2(c) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, namely the Freedoms of Expression and Assembly.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.

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18	While police work is dynamic and not every contingency can be anticipated in advance, those who draft the Operational Plan should always endeavour to identify impediments and/or challenges to the plan, such as protests, public resistance, the presence of weapons, and any other risks. The Operational Plan should clearly identify those risks and articulate how police will manage them. Simply stated, the police should ask, “What could possibly go wrong and what are we going to do if it goes wrong?”	Halifax Regional Police	Since August 2021, HRP has reviewed and enhanced its operational framework relating to the deployment of the Public Safety Unit (PSU) and the HRP response to demonstrations. The overarching objective is to ensure a clear, robust, and consistent approach that affirms HRP's commitment to upholding public safety and protecting the public’s rights to freedom of assembly and expression. Prior to and since August 2021, all PSU operational plans have included a threat assessment. The ability to identify challenges to the operational plan has evolved since August 2021, enabling improved alignment during PSU deployments with the mission and objectives. The assessment is initially based on information and intelligence gathered before the event and is used to assess the viability of the plan and required resources, such as the use of Police Liaison Teams, where officers work with demonstrators to establish and maintain effective communication, maintain the peace, and de-escalate potential violence. During the event, the threat assessment is re-visited dynamically as information changes or is received.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.
19	HRP should always ensure that any Operational Plan includes the possibility of withdrawal and under what circumstances withdrawal would be appropriate.	Halifax Regional Police	Since August 2021, PSU operational plans have formally included withdrawal plans. Where this recommendation refers to ‘operational plans’ in general, it should be noted that withdrawal would not be appropriate in some operational plans, such as those for a festive community event.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.
20	HRP should always ensure that any Operational Plan includes the possibility of mass arrests, the circumstances under which arrests will be appropriate, and how arrestees and officers will be able to safely leave the scene. The Operational Plan and the guidance given to officers should also make clear that people must be given the right to counsel upon detention, and that they must be given access to counsel within a reasonable period of time.	Halifax Regional Police	Prior to and since August 2021, PSU operational plans include arrest plans and estimated required resources. These address the exercise of Charter rights for detained persons. Since August 2021, the structure of the plan template has been updated to incorporate additional planning and information relating to this component. The operational plans direct that if arrests exceed anticipated numbers, the PSU Commander will secure additional resources through consultation with the Duty Officer and Watch Commander.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.
21	HRP should not detain people longer than is appropriate once a decision has been made to release them from the station. Detainees are entitled to be released once they are processed and it is safe for them to be released. Officers should be trained that to hold detainees in custody beyond that time may constitute a breach of s.9 of the <i>Charter</i> and is unlawful.	Halifax Regional Police	PSU operational plans include arrest plans, which address the exercise of Charter rights for detained persons. Outside of PSU deployments and training, officers receive training on these rights in relation to a person’s arrest and detention during the course of general policing duties.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.
22	HRP should ensure they continue requiring their uniformed officers to identify themselves with a clearly identifiable and visible nametag that shows the officer’s name and badge number. This should be memorialized in a force wide policy or Directive.	Halifax Regional Police	The HRP Dress and Deportment Policy is currently being reviewed and revised, and will incorporate direction on the display of name tags and numbers.	Revision of the HRP policy on dress and deportment remains in progress.
23	The Commanding Officer on scene of the PSU should ensure that she/he is sufficiently removed from the events that she/he can objectively observe the events in question, communicate effectively with headquarters and provide direction to the officers on scene. This will assist in ensuring the chain of command is maintained.	Halifax Regional Police	The elements of this recommendation have been operationally implemented in every PSU deployment since August 2021, and factored into training scenarios. The PSU Commander remains off-site during PSU operations.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.

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24	On-site Commanding Officers should be trained to listen to and consider the input of other officers and ensure that information is passed up the chain of command so those in charge of the operation can make informed and proper decisions. This is particularly important where there may be disagreement among on-site officers about how to best proceed.	Halifax Regional Police	The elements of this recommendation are operationally implemented in every PSU deployment. In accordance with training, PSU Commanders obtain and consider information and input from the PSU command structure (those on-site), evaluate it against the situation and balance it with the mission and objectives contained in the operational plan. Further direction and corresponding decisions are the responsibility of the PSU Commander and/or, where an Incident Command is in place, with the Incident Commander. The direction and decisions may or may not align with the assessment or recommendations of the on-site PSU command structure.	This recommendation has been addressed. Please refer to the update delivered in February 2025 for details.
25	The HRP should review and revise its Use of Force policy. The revised Use of Force policy should emphasize that the goal is to <i>not</i> use force, and that force should be used only as a last resort. Every available option other than force should be exhausted before a resort to use of force is justified. The policy should emphasize that de-escalation and withdrawal are always options that are available and should be considered prior to the use of force and throughout the engagement.	Halifax Regional Police	The HRP Use of Force Policy is currently being reviewed and revised and will incorporate direction on these points.	Revision of the existing HRP Use of Force policy remains in progress. Finalization will take place following the Board’s adoption of its policy on the same, to ensure alignment.
26	The HRP should review and revise the Sensory Irritant Policy. The revised policy should set specific criteria and procedures related to use, ensure only properly trained officers carry OC Spray (both initial training and regular retraining), and provide guidelines to ensure timely first aid is provided to those effected by pepper spray.	Halifax Regional Police	The HRP Sensory Irritant Policy is currently being reviewed and revised and will incorporate direction on these points.	Revision of the existing HRP policy on sensory irritants is in progress. It is being incorporated into the revised HRP Use of Force policy.
27	Until the housing crisis is resolved (which will not be for many years), HRM should continue to designate appropriate public spaces for encampments as required.	Community Safety	HRM has five designated locations for those forced to shelter outside. Should more locations be required, staff will return to Regional Council to discuss creating additional designated locations. Community Safety will continue to support those living in encampments to help reduce the negative impacts of encampments for those living in and around them.	HRM currently has four designated locations. We will not be returning to Council to expand these sites. Instead, the focus will shift to a joint research project aimed at understanding why chronically homeless individuals are not successfully transitioning into housing. This work will support a broader strategy that emphasizes housing solutions and encourages individuals to consider indoor options, with the goal of reducing the number of people sleeping rough.
28	HRM should continue to provide the designated encampment sites with essential services such as tents, water, sanitation, and bathrooms.	Community Safety	The municipality’s current strategy to support those persons sleeping rough includes the provision of water, garbage and waste management, and porta potties at designated locations. Municipal outreach staff also provide support to persons not sheltering in designated locations. Looking into the future, the municipality will continue to provide support to people sheltering outside, focused on ensuring that people are housing-ready so that when suitable opportunities present themselves, people can leave encampments.	HRM currently has four designated locations. We will not be returning to Council to expand these sites. Instead, the focus will shift to a joint research project aimed at understanding why chronically homeless individuals are not successfully transitioning into housing. This work will support a broader strategy that emphasizes housing solutions and encourages individuals to consider indoor

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				options, with the goal of reducing the number of people sleeping rough.
29	HRM should only consider eviction in non-designated locations (and designated) as a last resort. As held by Canadian courts, unhoused people and those living in encampments must be provided with a variety of alternative housing options before eviction from the encampment is contemplated or implemented. No steps should be taken to prevent the use of those designated public spaces for shelter, or evict the residents, unless HRM has taken every step possible to ensure there are enough and sufficient shelters spaces/beds to accommodate every unhoused person in HRM.	Community Safety	HRM and Community Safety have implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report, including written notices with notice periods to give people time to consider where they can relocate to, maps and guides to alternative locations and options, referrals to shelters and temporary housing projects, cooperation with service providers to ensure people experiencing homelessness have the most resources available to them they can and a civilian-led response. Looking into the future, the municipality will continue to provide support to people sleeping rough, focused on ensuring that people are housing-ready so that when suitable opportunities present themselves, people can leave encampments and be successful in permanent supportive housing options.	HRM and Community Safety have successfully implemented encampment closure protocols in line with the recommendations.
30	If HRM does decide to clear an encampment, it is critical that HRM issue a Notice that specifies the compliance date. There should be sufficient time, at least 14 days, between the issuing of the Notice and the deadline for residents to adequately prepare.	Community Safety	The municipality currently provides different lengths of notice based on particular circumstances. In cases where a designated location is closed, the municipality provides 4 – 6 weeks’ notice of the closure. The encampment closure notice policy is attached.	HRM and Community Safety follow the prescribed encampment closure protocol outlined in Recommendation 29.
31	HRM should use a variety of communication channels and methods to ensure that people living in encampments are informed of the HRM's plans in a clear and timely way. This would include Notices being physically placed at encampment sites and the use of social media. There should also be an HRM resource for individuals living in encampments to contact if they have questions or concerns about the planned clearing. This contact information should be made public.	Community Safety	The municipality currently uses various communication methods to ensure that people are aware of a need and plan to close an encampment. Information is provided to those sheltering in encampments and the general community through the following channels. • Staff from the Government of Nova Scotia are provided with an update on the pending closure of the site at least one week in advance. • Service providers who support clients in the encampment are also given advance notice so they can support their clients when they are informed of the pending closure. • The first step is to ensure that the first people told publicly about a closure are those sheltering in the encampment. Notices and a verbal update from compliance staff are provided to those in encampments. The notice is attached to their tent or sheltering structure if someone is unavailable to speak to staff. • Municipal Councillors are provided with information to share through their contacts and to answer questions from members of the community. • Information is posted on the municipal website. • Public service announcements are provided to the media. • After the initial notification, outreach workers and navigators follow up with each person in the encampment to ensure they receive the notice and understand what it says. • Municipal staff are made available to media for interviews. • Regular communication is set up between various organizations providing outreach to ensure that services and supports are coordinated and any issues are flagged for all personnel. 10 – 14 days before the date when people must vacate a site, encampment outreach staff and navigators remind people of the requirement to relocate and	This recommendation has been operationalized and is therefore considered complete.

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			provide them with several plastic totes for valuables they wish to ensure are preserved when the site is formally shut down.	
32	If HRM decides to clear an encampment, the Notice should be accompanied by a letter providing individuals living in the encampment with information about their options and what they can expect from the HRM as part of the clearing process. This information should be clear, accessible, and in plain language.	Community Safety	HRM and Community Safety have implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report, including written notices with notice periods to give people time to consider where they can relocate to, maps and guides to alternative locations and options, referrals to shelters and temporary housing projects provided by the province, cooperation with service providers to ensure people experiencing homelessness have the most resources available to them they can and a civilian-led response.	This recommendation has been operationalized and is therefore considered complete.
33	HRM should also ensure that social service agencies that support and assist the unhoused and those in encampments are also provided with the Notice and letter. HRM should take meaningful steps to work with those in encampments and social service providers to assist the residents to find alternative housing or encampment options prior to the date of eviction on the Notice.	Community Safety	HRM and Community Safety have implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report. These include notifying staff from the Government of Nova Scotia with an update on the pending closure of the site at least one week in advance. Service providers who support clients in the encampment are also given advance notice so they can support their clients when they are informed of the pending closure.	This recommendation has been operationalized and is therefore considered complete.
34	Should HRM decide not to proceed with a clearing, they should inform individuals living in the encampment as soon as possible before the date specified on the Notice. Should HRM then plan to clear the encampment in the future, it should issue a new Notice with a new compliance date as soon as possible, with sufficient time for residents and social service agencies to provide assistance (at least 14 days).	Community Safety	The municipality currently uses various communication methods to ensure that people are aware of a need and plan to close an encampment. Information is provided to those sheltering in encampments and the general community through the following channels. • Staff from the Government of Nova Scotia are provided with an update on the pending closure of the site multiple weeks in advance. • Service providers who support clients in the encampment are also given advance notice, so they can support their clients when they are informed of the pending closure. • The first step is to ensure that the first people told publicly about a closure are those sheltering in the encampment. Notices and a verbal update from compliance staff are provided to those in encampments. The notice is attached to their tent or sheltering structure if someone is unavailable to speak to staff. • Municipal Councillors are provided with information to share through their contacts and to answer questions from members of the community. • Information is posted on the municipal website. • Public service announcements are provided to the media. • After the initial notification, outreach workers and navigators follow up with each person in the encampment to ensure they receive the notice and understand what it says. • Municipal staff are made available to media for interviews. • Regular communication is set up between various organizations providing outreach to ensure that services and supports are coordinated, and any issues are flagged for all personnel. 10 – 14 days before the date when people must vacate a site, encampment outreach staff and navigators remind people of the requirement to relocate and provide them with several plastic totes for valuables they wish to ensure are preserved when the site is formally shut down.	This recommendation has been operationalized and is therefore considered complete.

ATTACHMENT 1 Encampment Report Recommendation Tracker

35	HRM should undertake a review of the resources provided to the Director of Housing and Homelessness to determine if there is sufficient funding and staffing to address the goal of assisting and supporting the unhoused community and those in encampments.	Community Safety	Community Safety accepts this recommendation and will work towards building an options menu on what support looks like with different funding levels to support those sleeping rough.	We have a policy in place that outlines the level of support available to clients.
36	HRM should approach the province about forming a permanent and joint Committee on Housing and Homelessness. The Committee would include provincial representatives, municipal representatives, representatives from the unhoused community, police, the private sector, and social service agencies who work with the unhoused. The Committee should meet on a regular schedule to jointly and collaboratively identify the needs of the unhoused and those in encampments, how to best address those needs, the resources required to address those needs, and a joint long-term plan to address the housing crisis in HRM.	Community Safety	HRM has monthly meetings with representatives from the Government of Nova Scotia that focus on a shared approach to respond to those experiencing homelessness and those sleeping rough.	HRM and Community Safety staff meet monthly with provincial staff and service providers. Additionally, HRM hosts consultations with individuals with lived experience to help inform policy development and best practices.
37	The Board of Police Commissioners, HRP and HRM should provide a public update on the implementation of these recommendations by June 1, 2025.	Board of Police Commissioners, HRP, and HRM	At the Board's Feb 3/25 meeting a report was provided for Item 10.2.2 Update on the HRM response to the Halifax Independent Civilian Review into August 18, 2021, Encampment Evictions. At that time the Board referred the report to Regional Council for their information. See - https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/february-3-2025-board-police-commissioners - Next public update is in six (6) months	



Item No. 10.2.2
Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality
February 3, 2025

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

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 11, 2024

SUBJECT: Update on the HRM response to the Halifax Independent Civilian Review into August 18, 2021, Encampment Evictions

ORIGIN

September 4, 2024, Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality motion 10.2.1 Halifax Independent Civilian Review Into August 18, 2021 Encampment Evictions

MOVED by Commissioner Blackburn, seconded by Commissioner Smith

THAT the Board of Police Commissioners for Halifax Regional Municipality:

1. Request the Halifax Regional Police (HRP) prepare a staff report to address the Halifax Independent Civilian Review's recommendations pertaining to HRP and develop an action plan and report back to the Board;
2. Refer the Halifax Independent Civilian Review's report to Regional Council and recommend that Regional Council request the CAO to prepare a staff report to review the Independent Civilian Review's recommendations pertaining to Halifax Regional Municipality, develop an action plan and report back to Council; and
3. Create a working group comprised of three Board members, including the Chair, to review the Halifax Independent Civilian Review's recommendations pertaining to the Board of Police Commissioners and to report back to the Board.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2

RECOMMENDATION

Motion:

That the Board of Police Commissioners for the Halifax Regional Municipality:

1. Refer this Update to Halifax Regional Council for Council's information.

BACKGROUND

On August 18, 2021, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and Halifax Regional Police (HRP) closed four encampments in Halifax parks, including a high-profile site near the former 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 HRM 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. This review culminated in a report released on August 12, 2024, with 37 recommendations to address the issues identified.

DISCUSSION

The report addressed various issues, including the legal framework surrounding encampments, HRM's approach to supporting those experiencing homelessness, encampments, and closing encampments before August 18, 2021, HRP's planning and execution on the day of the evictions, and the roles of HRM, HRP, and the BoPC after the events. The analyses completed by the independent civilian review provide a foundation for the 37 recommendations to prevent similar incidents and foster better relations between police, HRM, persons experiencing homelessness, and the surrounding community.

The review also emphasized the need for a more compassionate and coordinated approach to homelessness. Recommendations included improving inter-agency collaboration, revising policies on the use of force, and enhancing the BoPC's oversight of HRP operations. It proposed creating a working committee to strengthen relations with the unhoused community.

Community Safety, HRP, BoPC, and RCMP staff formed a working group to address the 37 recommendations. While each department requires internal work, the approach to responding to each recommendation is holistic, as it is recognized that the overall response to encampments and homelessness is not solely the responsibility of any single agency.

Through its findings and recommendations, the review is an additional tool for guiding HRM and HRP as they continue to develop and implement person-centered and humane strategies to address homelessness and uphold public safety.

It is important to note that HRM, HRP, RCMP, the BoPC, and Community Safety have already taken a number of steps that align with the recommendations in the report. Prior to its release in August 2024, HRM turned its focus to supporting those experiencing homelessness, as noted below.

HRM Community Safety

Since August 18, 2021, HRM has created a Housing and Homelessness Division, which provides direct

support to those experiencing homelessness and the Province of Nova Scotia in their sheltering and housing efforts. In February 2023, Regional Council approved the Framework to Address Homelessness, a strategy to guide HRM's efforts to address the homelessness crisis. Additionally, in April 2023, HRM created the Community Safety (CS) Business Unit, which focuses on crime and harm reduction in all aspects of the Community.

The municipality's current strategy to support persons experiencing homelessness includes connecting people to resources and emergency supplies, providing water, garbage and waste management, and porta potties at designated locations. Municipal outreach staff also offer support to persons sheltering in non-designated locations. Since August 2021, HRM has had to close multiple encampment locations and has implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report, including written notices with notice periods to give people time to consider where they can relocate to, maps and guides to alternative locations and options, referrals to shelters and temporary housing projects, cooperation with service providers to ensure people experiencing homelessness have the most resources available to them they can and a civilian-led response.

Looking to the future, the municipality will continue to provide support to people sleeping rough, focused on ensuring that people are housing-ready so that when suitable opportunities present themselves, people can leave encampments and be successful in permanent supportive housing options.

Halifax Regional Police

Following the events of August 18, 2021, HRP has reviewed and enhanced its operational framework relating to the deployment of the Public Safety Unit (PSU), and the HRP response to demonstrations, with the overarching objective of ensuring a clear, robust, and consistent approach which affirms the commitment of HRP to upholding public safety and protecting the public's rights to freedom of assembly and expression.

Since August 2021, these efforts have included the successful introduction of Police Liaison Teams, where officers work with demonstrators to maintain the peace and de-escalate potential violence. In addition, the content, components, and structure of operational plans for PSU deployments have been reviewed and strengthened in certain areas. Each plan clearly outlines essential information, including (but not limited to) roles and responsibilities, objectives, goals, resources, supports, execution details, and withdrawal plans. A threat assessment is conducted for each incident based on the information available and is re-visited dynamically as information changes or is received.

Other steps taken by HRP include the ongoing review and update of existing policies in areas including use of force, sensory irritant, and dress and deportment. A draft policy on interacting with unhoused persons is also being developed.

Going forward, HRP will continue work in this area with a risk management and continuous improvement lens, and collaborate with its HRM and RCMP partners to support the municipality's efforts to address homelessness.

RCMP

The Halifax Regional Detachment (HRD) of the RCMP supports the municipality's homelessness strategy. In November 2023, HRD staff travelled to Vancouver, BC, with municipal partners to learn best policing practices around homelessness. Following this trip, HRD has been participating in municipal partner collaboration and strategy meetings to identify priorities. A pilot project was initiated in January 2024 whereby a Community Action Response Team (CART) member was assigned to the municipality's Public Safety Office, liaising with stakeholders to foster relationships with residents. This pilot project was in place until the end of March 2024. The success of this initiative was punctuated by the exceptional collaboration

and outreach between the member, the HRM Community Safety Office, the unhoused population in Lower Sackville, and civilian service providers that culminated in the rapid and completely compliant disencampment of the Sackville Ball Field in February 2024. The successful transition of residents from the Lower Sackville encampment to more suitable housing options was a direct result of these inclusive and collaborative efforts.

This year, HRD committed a full-time CART member resource to continue as a liaison with the Community Safety Office in the same capacity. The member works as a collaborator with stakeholders on solutions to support the unhoused, local businesses and the community.

HRD is committed to continuous learning as it relates to best approaches in addressing homelessness. As such, representatives attended in-person sessions at the Canadian National Conference to End Homelessness (CAEH) in Halifax in 2023 and Ottawa in 2024.

In order to ensure a consistent and best-practice service delivery model, the HRD is developing its own internal homelessness strategy to ensure HRD's alignment with HRM's approach to homelessness, which reflects the teachings from HRD's trip to BC, the learnings from the CAEH, and the recommendations documented in the Halifax Independent Civilian Review into August 18, 2021, Encampment Evictions.

Board of Police Commissioners

Since August 18th, 2021, the BoPC has taken several steps to improve its governance and oversight functions, as recommended in the review and other reports, including the Mass Casualty Commission Final Report. These activities include requesting and receiving funding to seek independent legal advice (this funding enabled the BoPC to request the review) and creating a new staff position with a focus on conducting research and providing policy support.

Prior to the review's release, the BoPC provided direction to create policies that the review has since recommended. For example, in August 2023, the BoPC requested a policy related to the police response to homelessness. While this work commenced, it was put on hold pending the review's release to ensure any policy drafted is consistent with its recommendations. This work has since restarted and is taking place in collaboration with the HRP, Community Safety, and the RCMP.

In March 2024, the BoPC provided direction to draft a Use of Force policy. In September 2024, the Government of Nova Scotia issued policing standards for all municipal police agencies in the province and the RCMP. These standards include the Use of Force. Discussions are ongoing on whether a separate BoPC policy on Use of Force is still required.

Next Steps

The working group will continue to meet to track the progress of each recommendation that has yet to be completed and will report back to the Board in six months.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ALTERNATIVES

No alternatives to the responses to the Independent Civilian Review's recommendation report at this time.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

BoPC's Terms of Reference – By-law P-100 “section 8 (2) The Board in accordance with the Police Act and HRM Bylaws may carry out any of the following roles and responsibilities: (h) carry out any studies or investigations respecting its civilian governance responsibilities; (j) ensure that community needs and values are reflected in policing goals and methods.”

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Encampment Report Recommendation Tracker

Attachment 2 - Halifax Regional Municipality Encampment Response Guide May 23, 2021 (permission was granted to share the report publicly)

Report Prepared by: Kara Evans, Coordinator, Community Safety
Joanne Smith, Research and Development Coordinator, Halifax Regional Police
Josh Bates, Policing Policy Strategist, Legal and Legislative Services
Cory Bushell, Inspector, RCMP

Report Approved by: Original Signed

William (Bill) Moore, Executive Director, Community Safety

Attachment 1

Rec		Lead Business Unit	Response
1	The Board of Police Commissioners should review the relevant portions of the Morden, Epstein, and Rouleau Reports and publicly commit to the robust oversight recommended in those Reports to ensure greater police governance and accountability.	Board of Police Commissioners	This review is ongoing.
2	More specifically, the Board of Police Commissioners should adopt policies consistent with the Morden, Epstein, and Rouleau reports. Those policies should define what constitutes a “critical point” that would require the Chief of Police to disclose relevant information to the Board for consideration and discussion. Guidance on what criteria might be applied to determine whether a critical point has been reached can be found in Recommendations 3 and 4 of Justice Epstein’s Report, and Recommendation 4 of Justice Rouleau’s Report.	Board of Police Commissioners	The BoPC is drafting a Critical Point policy in collaboration with HRP, RCMP, and Community Safety that incorporates the elements articulated in this recommendation.
3	The Board of Police Commissioners should ensure that the Chief of Police and HRP establish corresponding procedures to the policies outlined in Recommendations 1 and 2 for what constitutes a critical point and the expectations and procedure for the sharing of information with the Board.	Board of Police Commissioners	The draft Critical Point policy defines what/when an event is considered a critical point. Additionally, it provides procedures to ensure that HRP shares relevant information with the BoPC in a timely and secure manner.
4	The Board of Police Commissioners and HRP should publicly commit to a human rights-based approach to address the needs of the unhoused and those who live in encampments, including the right of the unhoused and encampment residents to meaningfully participate in the design and implementation of policies and practices that affect them. The Board of Police Commissioners and the HRP should also acknowledge the distinct needs of Indigenous individuals (see Recommendation 3 below), Black and other racialized individuals, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	The BoPC and Halifax Regional Police are drafting policies relating to police interactions with the unhoused population that incorporates the elements articulated in this recommendation. The draft policies commit to a human rights-based approach. And acknowledge the distinct needs of marginalized communities.
5	The Board of Police Commissioners, HRP, and HRM should publicly acknowledge the distinct relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and the right to live on that land in the cultural, historical and spiritual manner they wish.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	This language is included in the draft policies referred to in the response to Recommendation 4.
6	The Board of Police Commissioners should clearly articulate a process by which it transparently identifies Board and HRP policies that require review and how revisions, if any, should be implemented.	Board of Police Commissioners	The BoPC’s Policy Manual states that policies are reviewed every four years and/or when the Police Act is amended. Proposed revisions are brought forward to the board for review. The BoPC can also request specific policies to be reviewed by way of motion.
7	The Board of Police Commissioners should review its own policies to determine if any additional policies for the Board are needed on topics such as policing encampments and the unhoused, human rights, the use of force, and the use of pepper spray. Important components to be included in such policies are set out in detail in Chapter 6. As part of this process, the Board can review and consider policies from other police boards across Canada. The Board should also play a more active role in directing the Chief of Police to review HRP policies and report back to the Board on what changes, if any, are appropriate.	Board of Police Commissioners	The BoPC’s policy manual is reviewed regularly, and new policies are created at the BoPC's direction. Prior to receiving the Independent Review, the BoPC provided direction to produce new policies in the areas of policing encampments and the unhoused and Use of Force. The draft policy on encampments and the unhoused references the principle of human rights. A jurisdictional scan is an integral component of the policy development process.
8	The Board of Police Commissioners and the HRP should review and revise the HRP Use of Force policy. The revised Use of Force policy should emphasize that the goal is to <i>not</i> use force and that force should be used only as a last resort. Every available option other than force should be exhausted before a resort to use of force is justified. The policy should emphasize that de-escalation and withdrawal are always options that are available and should be considered prior to the use of force and throughout the engagement.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	The BoPC has previously provided direction to produce a Use of Force policy for inclusion in its policy manual. This policy would provide direction to the HRP to review and revise its Use of Force Policy to ensure alignment with the BoPC’s policy. In September 2024, the Government of Nova Scotia issued policing standards for all municipal police agencies in the province and the RCMP. These standards include the Use of Force and de-escalation. Discussions are ongoing on whether a separate BoPC policy on Use of Force is still required.

			HRP is currently reviewing and revising its Use of Force Policy and will consider this recommendation during the process.
9	The Board of Police Commissioners should direct the HRP to review and revise the Sensory Irritant Policy. The revised policy should set specific criteria and procedures related to use, ensure only properly trained officers carry OC Spray (both initial training and regular retraining), and provide guidelines to ensure timely first aid is provided to those effected by pepper spray.	Board of Police Commissioners	Sensory irritants are a part of the Use of Force continuum and would be included in any Use of Force policy. The BoPC has previously provided direction to produce a Use of Force policy for inclusion in its policy manual. This policy would provide direction to the HRP to review and revise its Use of Force Policy to ensure alignment with the BoPC's policy. In September 2024, the Government of Nova Scotia issued policing standards for all municipal police agencies in the province and the RCMP. These standards include the Use of Force and de-escalation. Discussions are ongoing on whether a separate BoPC policy on Use of Force is still required.
10	The Board of Police Commissioners should consider a policy to ensure that after any critical event, a formal debriefing is held by the HRP. The debriefing should be led by senior officers and provide an opportunity for attendees to openly and safely discuss the events in question. Officers should be provided the opportunity to review the events in question and openly discuss the successes and flaws of the operation, and the lessons to be learned. There should also be an opportunity for officers to anonymously provide such input in the event they do not feel comfortable expressing their views publicly. The debriefing should be properly memorialized by a scribe. The Chief of Police and senior command, if not present at the debriefing, should receive a copy of the notes and take steps to implement any lessons learned.	Board of Police Commissioners	This principle is included in the BoPC's draft Critical Point policy
11	The Board of Police Commissioners should require that after the debriefing, the Chief of Police must report the content of the debriefing and lessons learned to the Board. The Board and Chief of Police could then consider if any changes in policy, procedure or practices are appropriate and, if so, what those changes should be. Any changes in policy and/or procedure should then be reported back to the force so the officers know the outcome of the feedback provided. If deemed necessary, the review of the report could be held <i>in camera</i> to protect confidential information about police tactics and strategies.	Board of Police Commissioners	This principle is included in the BoPC's draft Critical Point policy
12	The Board of Police Commissioners and HRP should ensure they have a program that allows for counselling and mental health support for its officers. It is likely that there is an Employee Assistance Plan in place. The HRP should take steps to advise all of its officers that mental health support and counselling is available to its officers who have been subjected to traumatic experiences, whether on August 18, 2021, or any other date.	Board of Police Commissioners /Halifax Regional Police	Under their 2024-25 work plan, the BoPC requested a report on HRP actions to enhance psychological safety and trauma supports. The BoPC received the report at the December 4, 2024, meeting, followed by a presentation on the same at the December 18, 2024, meeting. The report and presentation outline the existing and planned positions, programs and initiatives in this area at HRP, including, but not limited to: • Employee and Family Assistance Program • Reintegration Program • Wellness Program Specialist • Health Specialists • Safeguarding Program • Critical Incident Debriefs and Assessments • Rainbow Internal Support Network

			Other steps include the identification and initiation of an Early Intervention (EI) Program designed to intervene where there are early signs of psychological struggle for an employee, where otherwise they might be missed. This work is being progressed in partnership with HRM IT. Additional work and supports in this area include employee benefit plans which include coverage for counselling, focus areas being addressed by the HRP Employee Engagement Working Group, and HRM policies. Employees are advised of these resources and supports on an ongoing basis.
13	The Board of Police Commissioners should direct the HRP, in conjunction with HRM, to develop a policy for joint operations that permits senior HRM staff to determine whether the operation should continue. The Review is not suggesting that HRM should be permitted to direct HRP operations. Rather, HRM staff should be provided the tools to determine whether HRM goals are worth their continued involvement, including operations that may involve the use of force by the HRP against civilians.	Board of Police Commissioners	This principle is included in the BoPC's draft policy relating to police interactions with the unhoused population.
14	The HRP and HRM should publicly acknowledge that there were flaws in the decision-making process that led to the evictions, as well as in the execution of that plan. HRM and HRP should issue a public apology for those errors.	HRM/Halifax Regional Police	HRM and HRP recognize that the response to the August 18, 2021, clearing of encampments involved errors in the decision-making process that contributed to people being placed in precarious positions that caused harm. Prior to the release of this report there was collective recognition of the need for change. There is a strong commitment to do better through policy development and changes to encampment management processes, which have since been tested in encampment closures with positive outcomes for all involved. HRM will issue a statement which publicly acknowledges these facts, as well as its continuing commitment to learn from people experiencing homelessness and those involved in the work to support them.
15	As part of their training, the HRP should include a training module on working with unhoused communities and encampments. The people who provide the training should include people who are or were unhoused, and those from social service agencies who assist the unhoused. This will assist in training officers how to best interact with unhoused people and encampments and foster greater trust between unhoused communities and the police. The training should also address the fact that the unhoused often face intersecting forms of discrimination, including but not limited to anti-Black and/or Indigenous racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. Accordingly, the training should also address those issues and include members of those communities as trainers.	Halifax Regional Police	When developing its policy on interacting with unhoused persons, HRP will consider training requirements. Development of any training in this area would require collaboration with HRM Community Safety. Regarding intersectional discrimination, since 2022, HRP officers have received training on identifying, recording, and responding to hate crimes and incidents, and referring them to HRP's Hate Crime Unit.
16	HRP should establish a Working Committee on Homelessness that is comprised of senior HRP officers, a member of the Board of Police Commissioners, unhoused persons, and representatives from social service agencies that assist the unhoused. There should also be representation on all sides from the Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized communities. The Working Committee should have as its stated goal to identify current issues related to the relationship between the HRP and unhoused communities, and how to build better relationships and trust between the HRP and unhoused communities. The Working Committee will be able to develop and or recommend policies, strategies and actions plans for approval by the Board that help achieve that goal. The Working Committee will also be able to review the development	Halifax Regional Police	Since its inception, Community Safety has taken the lead for HRM on issues related to the unhoused population. HRP will consider this recommendation in conjunction with Community Safety.

	and implementation of the service training identified in Recommendation 15 and offer recommendations for enhancement.		
17	HRP, including the PSU, should continue to develop Operational Plans in advance of any significant police engagement. That Operational Plan should clearly define the parameters of what is expected of police, including the goal to be achieved and the scope of work to be conducted by police. While recognizing that police work is dynamic and plans must be flexible to allow the police to accomplish their goals, and ensure the safety of the public and officers, the HRP should not exceed the original scope of the Operational Plan except where there are extenuating or urgent circumstances.	Halifax Regional Police	Since August 2021, the content, components, and structure of operational plans for PSU deployments have been reviewed and strengthened in certain areas. Each plan clearly outlines essential information, including (but not limited to) roles and responsibilities, objectives, goals, resources, supports, execution details, and withdrawal plans. The PSU has developed and executed 32 Incident Action Plans (IAPs) since August 2021. Each IAP follows the SMEAC process: Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, and Control. The Mission portion outlines the focus, goals and mission of the deployment. The Execution portion outlines the finer details of how the mission will be achieved, including the resources and structure of the deployment. The scope of the work is clearly detailed within each IAP as it relates to sections 2(b) and 2(c) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, namely the Freedoms of Expression and Assembly.
18	While police work is dynamic and not every contingency can be anticipated in advance, those who draft the Operational Plan should always endeavour to identify impediments and/or challenges to the plan, such as protests, public resistance, the presence of weapons, and any other risks. The Operational Plan should clearly identify those risks and articulate how police will manage them. Simply stated, the police should ask, “What could possibly go wrong and what are we going to do if it goes wrong?”	Halifax Regional Police	Since August 2021, HRP has reviewed and enhanced its operational framework relating to the deployment of the Public Safety Unit (PSU) and the HRP response to demonstrations. The overarching objective is to ensure a clear, robust, and consistent approach that affirms HRP's commitment to upholding public safety and protecting the public's rights to freedom of assembly and expression. Prior to and since August 2021, all PSU operational plans have included a threat assessment. The ability to identify challenges to the operational plan has evolved since August 2021, enabling improved alignment during PSU deployments with the mission and objectives. The assessment is initially based on information and intelligence gathered before the event and is used to assess the viability of the plan and required resources, such as the use of Police Liaison Teams, where officers work with demonstrators to establish and maintain effective communication, maintain the peace, and de-escalate potential violence. During the event, the threat assessment is re-visited dynamically as information changes or is received.
19	HRP should always ensure that any Operational Plan includes the possibility of withdrawal and under what circumstances withdrawal would be appropriate.	Halifax Regional Police	Since August 2021, PSU operational plans have formally included withdrawal plans. Where this recommendation refers to ‘operational plans’ in general, it should be noted that withdrawal would not be appropriate in some operational plans, such as those for a festive community event.
20	HRP should always ensure that any Operational Plan includes the possibility of mass arrests, the circumstances under which arrests will be appropriate, and how arrestees and officers will be able to safely leave the scene. The Operational Plan and the guidance given to officers should also make clear that people must be given the right to counsel upon detention, and that they must be given access to counsel within a reasonable period of time.	Halifax Regional Police	Prior to and since August 2021, PSU operational plans include arrest plans and estimated required resources. These address the exercise of Charter rights for detained persons. Since August 2021, the structure of the plan template has been updated to incorporate additional planning and information relating to this component. The operational plans direct that if arrests exceed anticipated numbers, the PSU Commander will secure additional resources through consultation with the Duty Officer and Watch Commander.
21	HRP should not detain people longer than is appropriate once a decision has been made to release them from the station. Detainees are entitled to be released once they	Halifax Regional Police	PSU operational plans include arrest plans, which address the exercise of Charter rights for detained persons. Outside of PSU deployments and training, officers receive training

	are processed and it is safe for them to be released. Officers should be trained that to hold detainees in custody beyond that time may constitute a breach of s.9 of the <i>Charter</i> and is unlawful.		on these rights in relation to a person's arrest and detention during the course of general policing duties.
22	HRP should ensure they continue requiring their uniformed officers to identify themselves with a clearly identifiable and visible nametag that shows the officer's name and badge number. This should be memorialized in a force wide policy or Directive.	Halifax Regional Police	The HRP Dress and Department Policy is currently being reviewed and revised, and will incorporate direction on the display of name tags and numbers.
23	The Commanding Officer on scene of the PSU should ensure that she/he is sufficiently removed from the events that she/he can objectively observe the events in question, communicate effectively with headquarters and provide direction to the officers on scene. This will assist in ensuring the chain of command is maintained.	Halifax Regional Police	The elements of this recommendation have been operationally implemented in every PSU deployment since August 2021, and factored into training scenarios. The PSU Commander remains off-site during PSU operations.
24	On-site Commanding Officers should be trained to listen to and consider the input of other officers and ensure that information is passed up the chain of command so those in charge of the operation can make informed and proper decisions. This is particularly important where there may be disagreement among on-site officers about how to best proceed.	Halifax Regional Police	The elements of this recommendation are operationally implemented in every PSU deployment. In accordance with training, PSU Commanders obtain and consider information and input from the PSU command structure (those on-site), evaluate it against the situation and balance it with the mission and objectives contained in the operational plan. Further direction and corresponding decisions are the responsibility of the PSU Commander and/or, where an Incident Command is in place, with the Incident Commander. The direction and decisions may or may not align with the assessment or recommendations of the on-site PSU command structure.
25	The HRP should review and revise its Use of Force policy. The revised Use of Force policy should emphasize that the goal is to <i>not</i> use force, and that force should be used only as a last resort. Every available option other than force should be exhausted before a resort to use of force is justified. The policy should emphasize that de-escalation and withdrawal are always options that are available and should be considered prior to the use of force and throughout the engagement.	Halifax Regional Police	The HRP Use of Force Policy is currently being reviewed and revised, and will incorporate direction on these points.
26	The HRP should review and revise the Sensory Irritant Policy. The revised policy should set specific criteria and procedures related to use, ensure only properly trained officers carry OC Spray (both initial training and regular retraining), and provide guidelines to ensure timely first aid is provided to those effected by pepper spray.	Halifax Regional Police	The HRP Sensory Irritant Policy is currently being reviewed and revised, and will incorporate direction on these points.
27	Until the housing crisis is resolved (which will not be for many years), HRM should continue to designate appropriate public spaces for encampments as required.	Community Safety	HRM has five designated locations for those forced to shelter outside. Should more locations be required, staff will return to Regional Council to discuss creating additional designated locations. Community Safety will continue to support those living in encampments to help reduce the negative impacts of encampments for those living in and around them.
28	HRM should continue to provide the designated encampment sites with essential services such as tents, water, sanitation, and bathrooms.	Community Safety	The municipality's current strategy to support those persons sleeping rough includes the provision of water, garbage and waste management, and porta potties at designated locations. Municipal outreach staff also provide support to persons not sheltering in designated locations. Looking into the future, the municipality will continue to provide support to people sheltering outside, focused on ensuring that people are housing-ready so that when suitable opportunities present themselves, people can leave encampments.
29	HRM should only consider eviction in non-designated locations (and designated) as a last resort. As held by Canadian courts, unhoused people and those living in encampments must be provided with a variety of alternative housing options before eviction from the encampment is contemplated or implemented. No steps should be taken to prevent the use of those designated public spaces for shelter, or evict the	Community Safety	HRM and Community Safety have implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report, including written notices with notice periods to give people time to consider where they can relocate to, maps and guides to alternative locations and options, referrals to shelters and temporary housing projects, cooperation with service providers to ensure people experiencing homelessness have the most resources available to them they can and a civilian-led response. Looking into the future,

	residents, unless HRM has taken every step possible to ensure there are enough and sufficient shelters spaces/beds to accommodate every unhoused person in HRM.		the municipality will continue to provide support to people sleeping rough, focused on ensuring that people are housing-ready so that when suitable opportunities present themselves, people can leave encampments and be successful in permanent supportive housing options.
30	If HRM does decide to clear an encampment, it is critical that HRM issue a Notice that specifies the compliance date. There should be sufficient time, at least 14 days, between the issuing of the Notice and the deadline for residents to adequately prepare.	Community Safety	The municipality currently provides different lengths of notice based on particular circumstances. In cases where a designated location is closed, the municipality provides 4 – 6 weeks’ notice of the closure. The encampment closure notice policy is attached.
31	HRM should use a variety of communication channels and methods to ensure that people living in encampments are informed of the HRM's plans in a clear and timely way. This would include Notices being physically placed at encampment sites and the use of social media. There should also be an HRM resource for individuals living in encampments to contact if they have questions or concerns about the planned clearing. This contact information should be made public.	Community Safety	The municipality currently uses various communication methods to ensure that people are aware of a need and plan to close an encampment. Information is provided to those sheltering in encampments and the general community through the following channels. • Staff from the Government of Nova Scotia are provided with an update on the pending closure of the site at least one week in advance. • Service providers who support clients in the encampment are also given advance notice so they can support their clients when they are informed of the pending closure. • The first step is to ensure that the first people told publicly about a closure are those sheltering in the encampment. Notices and a verbal update from compliance staff are provided to those in encampments. The notice is attached to their tent or sheltering structure if someone is unavailable to speak to staff. • Municipal Councillors are provided with information to share through their contacts and to answer questions from members of the community. • Information is posted on the municipal website. • Public service announcements are provided to the media. • After the initial notification, outreach workers and navigators follow up with each person in the encampment to ensure they receive the notice and understand what it says. • Municipal staff are made available to media for interviews. • Regular communication is set up between various organizations providing outreach to ensure that services and supports are coordinated and any issues are flagged for all personnel. 10 – 14 days before the date when people must vacate a site, encampment outreach staff and navigators remind people of the requirement to relocate and provide them with several plastic totes for valuables they wish to ensure are preserved when the site is formally shut down.
32	If HRM decides to clear an encampment, the Notice should be accompanied by a letter providing individuals living in the encampment with information about their options and what they can expect from the HRM as part of the clearing process. This information should be clear, accessible, and in plain language.	Community Safety	HRM and Community Safety have implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report, including written notices with notice periods to give people time to consider where they can relocate to, maps and guides to alternative locations and options, referrals to shelters and temporary housing projects provided by the province, cooperation with service providers to ensure people experiencing homelessness have the most resources available to them they can and a civilian-led response.
33	HRM should also ensure that social service agencies that support and assist the unhoused and those in encampments are also provided with the Notice and letter. HRM should take meaningful steps to work with those in encampments and social service providers to assist the residents to find alternative housing or encampment options prior to the date of eviction on the Notice.	Community Safety	HRM and Community Safety have implemented new processes that align with the recommendations in this report. These include notifying staff from the Government of Nova Scotia with an update on the pending closure of the site at least one week in advance. Service providers who support clients in the encampment are also given

			advance notice so they can support their clients when they are informed of the pending closure.
34	Should HRM decide not to proceed with a clearing, they should inform individuals living in the encampment as soon as possible before the date specified on the Notice. Should HRM then plan to clear the encampment in the future, it should issue a new Notice with a new compliance date as soon as possible, with sufficient time for residents and social service agencies to provide assistance (at least 14 days).	Community Safety	The municipality currently uses various communication methods to ensure that people are aware of a need and plan to close an encampment. Information is provided to those sheltering in encampments and the general community through the following channels. • Staff from the Government of Nova Scotia are provided with an update on the pending closure of the site multiple weeks in advance. • Service providers who support clients in the encampment are also given advance notice, so they can support their clients when they are informed of the pending closure. • The first step is to ensure that the first people told publicly about a closure are those sheltering in the encampment. Notices and a verbal update from compliance staff are provided to those in encampments. The notice is attached to their tent or sheltering structure if someone is unavailable to speak to staff. • Municipal Councillors are provided with information to share through their contacts and to answer questions from members of the community. • Information is posted on the municipal website. • Public service announcements are provided to the media. • After the initial notification, outreach workers and navigators follow up with each person in the encampment to ensure they receive the notice and understand what it says. • Municipal staff are made available to media for interviews. • Regular communication is set up between various organizations providing outreach to ensure that services and supports are coordinated, and any issues are flagged for all personnel. 10 – 14 days before the date when people must vacate a site, encampment outreach staff and navigators remind people of the requirement to relocate and provide them with several plastic totes for valuables they wish to ensure are preserved when the site is formally shut down.
35	HRM should undertake a review of the resources provided to the Director of Housing and Homelessness to determine if there is sufficient funding and staffing to address the goal of assisting and supporting the unhoused community and those in encampments.	Community Safety	Community Safety accepts this recommendation and will work towards building an options menu on what support looks like with different funding levels to support those sleeping rough.
36	HRM should approach the province about forming a permanent and joint Committee on Housing and Homelessness. The Committee would include provincial representatives, municipal representatives, representatives from the unhoused community, police, the private sector, and social service agencies who work with the unhoused. The Committee should meet on a regular schedule to jointly and collaboratively identify the needs of the unhoused and those in encampments, how to best address those needs, the resources required to address those needs, and a joint long-term plan to address the housing crisis in HRM.	Community Safety	HRM has monthly meetings with representatives from the Government of Nova Scotia that focus on a shared approach to respond to those experiencing homelessness and those sleeping rough.
37	The Board of Police Commissioners, HRP and HRM should provide a public update on the implementation of these recommendations by June 1, 2025.	Board of Police Commissioners, HRP, and HRM	This should come from the Commissioner of Public Safety Public update of the release.

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Attachment 2

MAY 23, 2021

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE GUIDE

ORGCODE CONSULTING INC.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Guide was written on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, and is within the lands protected by the Dish with One Spoon wampum agreement.

The audience for the Guide, and people experiencing homelessness potentially impacted by any actions taken associated with the Guide, are located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.

AUTHORSHIP

The Halifax Regional Municipality Encampment Response Guide has been prepared by OrgCode Consulting, Inc. Nothing in this document or contractual arrangement with the municipality should be considered a transfer of intellectual property rights.

The document reflects the inputs provided, main currents of thought and practice in responding to encampments, and expertise of the consultants. This document has been prepared on an accelerated timeline to meet the needs of the community, and subsequent documents may be considered for a public audience, if written differently.

Errors and omissions in the document are the responsibility of OrgCode Consulting Inc. Implementation and other actions taken informed by this document are not the responsibility of OrgCode Consulting Inc.

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This document should be used exclusively for internal purposes.

PREAMBLE

The Halifax Regional Municipality Encampment Response Guide provides counsel on understanding and appropriately responding to encampments within the community. The guidance provided is intended to help balance and navigate the needs of people experiencing homelessness living in Crisis Shelters or tents, with the possibility of enforcement that will dismantle and remove the structures. The encampment response must not lose sight of the fact that human beings who are involved and impacted may have long histories of trauma, and if not handled well, the closure of the encampment presents another potentially debilitating, traumatic incident. Consistent messaging and availability of assistance, however, can mitigate these impacts, and allow people living in encampments to continue on a pathway to achieving housing.

After providing some introductory commentary, the report shifts into three primary sections:

1. **Preparation:** this section examines what needs to be done to get ready for an encampment response;
2. **Mitigation:** this section examines all of the services and tasks to be completed when engaging with unsheltered persons living in an encampment; and,
3. **Closure:** this section examines enforcement and service offers to assist people when an encampment goes through voluntary or forced closure.

PRINCIPLES

The Encampment Response Guide is grounded in the following principles:

- A) Voluntary closure is preferred to enforcement;

- B) Halifax prefers that people reside in buildings and structures meant for human habitation on property zoned and serviced for the building or structure, pre-approved through existing processes before building or siting;
- C) People living in encampments have strengths and rights that should be leveraged and respected in the process of engagement, and when necessary, closure.

UNDERSTANDING UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

People experiencing homeless that are unsheltered are not a homogenous group. Each person has their own strengths and story, opportunities for support and practical needs. One size will not fit all when it comes to meeting service needs. Each person within an encampment benefits from an individualized, person-centred plan of supports dedicated to assisting them exit the encampment for safe and appropriate alternatives.

Generally speaking, people that are unsheltered fit into one of three categories of outdoor residential living:

1. Those that remain at or near a fixed location of the encampment. These tend to be situations where there are structures and an encampment.
2. Those that move from location to location frequently while remaining unsheltered. People living in vehicles frequently fall into this category, as do some people that live in tents; however, many people in this category will assess different options for where to sleep rough nightly such as an ATM vestibule, alcove of a business, under awning, in laneways, and sometimes the likes of park benches.
3. Those that were unprepared for being unsheltered, and are frequently unsheltered for just a night or two until other services are accessed or other temporary solutions are found to accommodate the person.

While all three groups are deserving of street outreach services, for the purposes of responding to encampments, Group 2 to some degree and especially Group 1 tends to dominate the outreach worker's time, take the longest to resolve, and where there is more likely to be a municipal response that spans different departments.

Amongst people living in more structured encampments, available data and research suggests the following characteristics are frequently encountered:

- Chronic homelessness
- Greater lengths of homelessness
- Substance use disorder
- Brain injury
- Mental illness
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Chronic disease such as liver disease, kidney disease and heart disease

These characteristics can be a challenge for engagement and rapport building to examine solutions to living outdoors. As such, timelines to take action to resolve an encampment either voluntarily or through forced closure need to account for the potential complexity of engaging with the population to be served.

SERVICE ORIENTATION

Engagement and the provision of support services should incorporate and use a very specific service orientation, whether the professionals doing the engagement are social work professionals, by-law enforcement, police, etc.:

Trauma Informed: Accepting that trauma is widespread within the population being engaged and the adoption of a trauma-informed approach are both critical for success. Engagement should be conducted in such a way so as to promote feelings of safety. Transparency on what is going to occur and the available service options is necessary to develop and maintain trust. The process of service planning is a collaborative one. The exploration of service options happens with people, not to people or for people. Culture, gender and history of each individual will be considered in the process of providing support. People should be empowered to make decisions on alternatives to living in an encampment. Every engagement should be conducted using open body language, with hands and eyes visible. People engaging on site with people experiencing homelessness

should avoid raising their voice and maximize engaged dialogue using open-ended, exploratory and non-judgmental questions.

Harm Reducing: People encountered in encampments engage in higher risk behaviour that comes with serious risks up to and including death. Living outdoors in a structure not designed for permanent human habitation should be considered a high risk behaviour. This is in addition to harms that may be encountered related to substance use and/or participation in sex work. Some people living in encampments may also be more prone to be victims of violence or sexual assault. The entire response should engage people in a non-judgmental way, meeting people where they are at both literally and circumstantially. As the encampment is receiving service, residents of the encampment should have harm reduction supplies such as safer use kits, testing strips, naloxone kits on site, and condoms. Offers of alternatives to the encampment should be presented and positioned as harm reduction interventions.

Strengths Based: Surviving in an environment and structure not intended for permanent occupation takes considerable strengths and resiliency. It is important to acknowledge the efforts and resiliencies, as well as problem-solving skills and the ability to take care of basic needs on an ongoing basis. The service options prepared and presented to encampment residents should be based upon their strengths rather than focusing on deficits.

Motivational: With rapport developed with encampment residents, the intention is to structure conversations to be motivational, evoking from within the encampment resident's own desire to change their living situation. Whenever possible, ordering, commanding, lecturing, bargaining, bribing, coercing and/or forcing people to accept services should be avoided. If structured appropriately and practiced effectively, Motivational Interviewing should be effective in assisting encampment residents in considering change and taking appropriate action based upon those internal motivations to change.

In Vivo: When people are living in encampments, it is important and necessary to serve people in their most natural setting rather than expecting people from the encampment to go elsewhere in the community to explore service options or connect with service providers. As such, whenever possible, helping professionals will go to the site to provide

services to people living in the encampment, rather than expecting the encampment resident to journey elsewhere to receive service.

Culturally Appropriate: Culture is understood as the customs of a particular social group or nation. To be culturally appropriate is to ensure that those people engaging with encampment residents are respectful and appropriate for Indigenous people, people of colour, LGBTQ2S+ people, youth and young adults, etc.

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE THAT ARE UNSHELTERED

People experiencing homelessness, including people that are unsheltered, do not surrender their rights because they are experiencing homelessness. The Canadian *Charter* applies. The same rights and freedoms that apply to housed Canadians apply to Canadians that are homeless. In practical terms, this means that all actions taken in regards to encampments must be guided by the commitment to maintain human rights and human dignity when working to resolve the housing needs of encampment residents. It is understood that housing is identified as a basic human right and the failure of governments to ensure adequate supply of safe, affordable housing stock has ensured that homelessness has increased across the country.

Many communities examine their legal authority to remove encampments. What also must be considered is whether the actions by a municipality are infringing upon the rights of Canadians in encampments. As such, the examinations of explicit legal authority to address the encampment should be coupled with a legal examination of whether the local approach, as planned and implemented, would violate the rights of the people living in the encampment.

PREPARATION

EXPLICIT LEGAL AUTHORITY

Explicit legal authority should be explained and understood by the people living in the encampments, social service agencies involved in the response, and, at a higher level, the general public.

Avoid talking about complaints or unsightliness. Avoid conjecture and uninformed opinion. Avoid speculating why there are people that live in encampments in Halifax. Focus exclusively on the activities or behaviours that violate existing by-laws, provincial law, or federal law. The removal of any structure should be positioned as an action step that would be taken on any property within the municipality, to ensure safe habitation to explicit building standards. In other words, focus on the explicit legal authority to address the structures and acceptable behaviours on public space.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Identify which by-laws, provincial laws, and federal laws apply to the encampments and their potential removal;*
- 2)** *Vet the rationale and perceived legal authority through municipal or external legal advice;*
- 3)** *Develop key messaging related to legal authority to move forward with enforcement action with an emphasis on what is occurring being applied to all residents of Halifax and is not selectively applied to people that are homeless living in public spaces (for example, a person could not erect a standalone structure on their own property if intended for residential purposes without pre-approval, permits, inspections, etc.);*
- 4)** *Develop posters/one pagers that can be shared with people living in the encampments and posted in plain view near the site that outlines the legal authority and proposed*

course of action. The proposed course of action should always begin with a request that they voluntarily vacate or remove the structure by a fixed date, after which if the structure(s) remain they will be forcibly removed and potentially destroyed.

ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE MUNICIPALITY AND THE PROVINCE

While the encampments occur within the municipality, services to people experiencing homelessness are primarily a provincial responsibility. The response to encampments will be more difficult without alignment between provincial service organizations and the municipality. Consistency in approaches and messaging will be important for encampments residents and community members. Ideally, provincial support for the municipality in its response will be evident.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Halifax should invite the Province to be the Social Service Response Leader for the encampment response, and work in partnership with the municipality to meet the service and support needs of people living in encampments;*
- 2)** *Develop a memorandum of understanding between Halifax and the Province of Nova Scotia on resources available to assist with encampment engagement, service offers, and availability of resources by provincially-funded homelessness services and the municipality;*
- 3)** *Include provincial representation in local planning and response discussions that pertain to social service opportunities for people living in encampments;*
- 4)** *The municipality should request that the province provide a dedicated contact with income supports to troubleshoot any issues with government income for people living in encampments; and,*
- 5)** *Ensure that clarity on the responsibilities of each order of government is included in key messages and materials prepared for encampment residents.*

DIVERSITY AND EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Because of the potential diversity of encampment residents in race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, abilities, etc. the encampment response needs to respect diversity and help people connect to other appropriate local resources, if needed.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Through engagement with encampment residents, understand their diversity and interest with engaging other community-based organizations or their cultural group based upon their diverse identity;*
- 2)** *Review the local encampment response action plan through an equity and anti-oppression lens, using external experts as necessary;*
- 3)** *If encampment residents are interested, reach out to various community-based organizations and cultural groups to gauge interest in engaging and offering services or supports to people living in the encampments, in an integrated fashion with the existing social services engagement.*

INVENTORY OF AVAILABLE SERVICES

Up to date, relevant information on which social service and housing options are available must be compiled. This inventory of available services should be curated to be relevant to the specific needs of people living in the encampment, not a general community resource guide for people experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, the inventory of available services should reflect how services are currently operating during COVID.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Survey main homelessness services providers in Halifax to understand what services they have available that may be relevant to a person living in an encampment;*
- 2)** *Compile a “Service Options for People Living in Encampments” service guide;*

- 3) *Disseminate the service guide to all parties within the municipal government involved in the response to encampments;*
- 4) *Ensure the service guide is shared with encampment residents at least two weeks prior to any enforcement activity.*

LEADERSHIP

Four leaders are necessary to effectively engage and resolve encampments:

1. **Local Response Leader:** the Local Response Leader is an experienced senior manager/executive who is provided the authority to convene other leaders and interests in the encampment response. This authority can come through the likes of an elected body or a Chief Administrative Officer. The Local Response Leader needs to navigate inter-governmental engagement related to encampments, mobilize the social services sector, ensure authorities and legal justification for engagement and resolution is clear and operationalized by the Operations Response Leader, and work to coordinate with Police and other relevant bodies to help support public safety.
2. **Social Service Response Leader:** consideration may be given to requesting the Province of Nova Scotia perform this function given they fund, monitor and establish priorities and policy for the majority of services for people experiencing homelessness in Halifax. The Social Service Response Leader should be able to navigate and influence income supports, access to non-market housing, and provide instruction to direct service staff like outreach workers in the field or homeless shelter providers. In the absence of the Province agreeing to take on this role, the existing outreach staff funded directly by the municipality may be asked to take on as much of this role as they are operationally capable of doing.
3. **Operations Response Leader:** the Operations Response Leader is a senior manager or executive who is well versed on policy, legal authorities of the job, and has the ability to guide or direct operations staff (for example, By-law Officers) on where and when to respond to an encampment, and what to do when/if an encampment is encountered. The Operations Response Leader needs to be able to assemble and

instruct municipal staff if the encampments need to be physically disassembled and the site cleaned.

- 4. Public Safety Response Leader:** likely to sit within Police, the Public Safety Response Leader is responsible for assessing safety issues associated with the encampment, structures, and/or assembly of people on public space. To be clear, the position advances public safety for all people; they do not exist to be the enforcement body, nor do they exist to conduct surveillance on people living in encampments. Public safety personnel will be necessary to conduct a safety assessment on each encampment site, if necessary, as well as handle some logistics on the day of the closure such as traffic control. It is not recommended that warrant checks or that conditions of release from incarceration be the primary focus of the activities of public safety, though it is acknowledged some of these tasks can be part of any engagement between police and an individual. The Public Safety Response Leader should also plan an approach to engagement that focuses on keeping everyone safe in the event that there is a protest activity on the day of the planned closure of the encampment. In very rare circumstances, and to be avoided if at all possible, the Public Safety Response Leader must be prepared to provide instruction and mobilization of escorting people out of the encampment.



Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Name/appoint the leaders of each part of the response;*
- 2)** *Create a Leadership Group where the person leading each part of the response has the opportunity to share, plan and problem solve with each other and the Local Response Leader;*
- 3)** *Develop terms of reference for how the leaders engage and interact with each other, and how decisions are made and implemented.*

RESPONSE TABLE

While each leader may mobilize a small group to assist with their planning and operations, it is recommended that the Local Response Leader convene a larger response table. This can occur virtually. Considerations may be given to inviting some or all of these types of people to engage in the response table:

Entity	Role
Police	Likely already to have some representation through the Public Safety Response Leader, the police should function in a support role, not an enforcement role. As police engage with encampment residents prior to closure, it would be beneficial to have them reinforce the importance of accepting services. Police can also be very useful in providing a safety assessment of each encampment site from their perspective. If people at an encampment are arrested or incarcerated through direct police action for any reason other than being in an encampment, this needs to be communicated to the Local Response Leader, and may result in an accelerated clean-up of the site. On the day of the encampment closure, police may be needed to escort people off the encampment site, as well as manage crowd control if people assemble to be curious onlookers or protest what is occurring.
Fire	Efforts should be made to prevent loss of life or injury as a result of fires, combustibles, explosives or carbon monoxide at the encampment site. Representatives from Fire can be critical to the safety assessment of each encampment site. In rare circumstances, safety hazards identified that cannot be remediated may result in a quicker required closure of the encampment site.

Entity	Role
Public Health	Public Health departments often assess encampments for levels of hygiene and risks of disease transmission, including COVID. Recommendations from the assessment can result in things like altering the configuration of the encampment to improve physical distancing, providing portable toilets at the site, providing hand washing stations at the site, or providing instructions on safe food handling and storage. From time to time, rodent infestations at or near an encampment site, an accumulation of garbage, and/or biohazards on or near the site such as human faeces or urine can prompt Public Health officials to recommend or order that an encampment be closed sooner than expected.
Indigenous Organizations	If there are Indigenous people experiencing homelessness at any of the encampment locations, it can be advantageous to invite Indigenous organizations to have input on the approach to services or which services are offered. The Indigenous organization may also partner with the municipally funded street outreach worker to attend the encampment(s) where Indigenous people are located.
Income Assistance	Either through direct onsite service or through a dedicated contact via phone or video chat, Provincial income assistance workers should be invited to provide resources and assistance either with applying for income assistance, reactivating benefits, and/or troubleshooting anything in the client's file.
Street Outreach	The municipally funded street outreach worker, who may be the Social Service Response Leader if the Province denies the opportunity to perform that function, is the most integral part of the service response strategy to avoid enforcement. In partnership with other social service providers when there is interest and availability, a comprehensive understanding of unsheltered homelessness is necessary for all planning and deliberations of actions and timing.
Shelter	While people in the encampment have likely rejected shelter or been rejected by shelter, this does not negate the importance of shelter(s) being part of the response table. Sometimes shelters have existing knowledge of people in encampments that can be helpful in the service planning with the individual, when consent allows that information to be shared. Shelter space should also be dedicated to people from the encampment on the day of enforcement if at all possible. Furthermore, if people from encampments select a motel stay, it is often shelters that are asked to provide support to people in motels as well.

Entity	Role
Coordinated Access	Some of the people living in encampments may already be on the local By Name List for Coordinated Access, and in the queue for housing. For others, this may be the opportunity where they engage to get on the By Name List. Coordinated Access representatives should be invited to participate to provide existing information, with consent, or to assist the individuals in encampments in getting on the By Name List. It is important that people living in encampments do not jump the queue in accessing housing, otherwise a dangerous precedent is set that may result in more people that are homeless choosing to live outside if it is seen as accelerating access to housing.
Legal	Municipal legal staff or outside counsel are necessary to examine the legal justification being used to close the encampments. In addition, the response table may consider involving community legal aid resources in the event any individual at an encampment is in need of legal assistance.
Corporate Communications	As discussed throughout the document, Corporate Communications play a key role in the planning, mitigation and closure phases, helping to prepare, manage and disseminate internal and external communication documents. The preparation of key messaging and briefing notes are also necessary. On top of this, Corporate Communications may be the municipal spokesperson on the encampment response, or may prepare the Local Response Leader to be the spokesperson.
Representative from the CAO Office	Because of the different municipal departments involved in the encampment response, it can be advantageous to have a representative from the CAO office participate in the encampment response, or be the Local Response Leader.
Representatives from Various Elected Officials Offices	Each encampment occurs within the district of an elected official at the municipal, provincial and federal level. Each of these offices - as well as some other members of City Council - may be able to help organize and mobilize resources. Perhaps more importantly, because all politics are local and an encampment is hyper-local, it is prudent to brief and update elected officials on the approach and results of the response.
By-law	As the enforcement body, by-law must have a seat at the response table and coordinate their response with other operating units and the social service response. By-law is often the entity that best knows what the legal justification is for the removal of encampments, in order to comply with local by-laws. By-law may be the Operations Response Leader, or may accompany the Operations Response Leader on the notification to vacate the site on the day of enforcement.
Operating Units within Municipal Government	All relevant operating units within municipal government (for example, Buildings, Sanitation, Public Works, Transportation, etc.) should have a seat at the response table. The operating units will be responsible for the implementation of the clean-up of the site after it is voluntarily vacated or there is enforcement.

Entity	Role
Mental Health Organization	It is anticipated that one or more people living in an encampment has a mental illness, and it is possible that one or more person lives with a serious and persistent mental illness. By bringing a mental health organization to the response table it is possible to get additional mental health expertise, possible access to mental health first aid, possible streamlined access to mental health supports, and/or, additional guidance and resources for the municipally funded street outreach worker.
Addiction Support Organization	Some people living in the encampments are known to be living with addiction. An addiction support organization should be provided a seat at the response table. They can assist with harm reduction expertise and/or addiction recovery access and supports.
Faith Based Organizations	Faith-based organizations already operating services, supports, programs or financial investment in the local homelessness response should be invited to participate in the response table.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Develop terms of reference for the Response Table;*
- 2)** *Local Response Leader to convene the table to engage at least weekly in the four weeks leading up to possible enforcement activities;*
- 3)** *Create a central, shared repository of information considered by the Response Table.*

PRELIMINARY ENGAGEMENT WITH OCCUPANTS OF THE ENCAMPMENTS

The Social Services Response Leader, Operations Response Leader and Public Safety Response Leader need to be on the same page, and present a common message to the occupants of the encampment. The Operations Response Leader needs to communicate the enforcement action that is likely to occur if the encampment is not vacated. The Public Safety Response Leader needs to communicate their role in promoting and maintaining public safety. The Social Services Response Leader needs to communicate that services are available to assist, including alternatives to staying unsheltered, and that the desire is to see the encampment occupants accept services in advance of any enforcement activity.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Prepare a one-pager on all three aspects - social service assistance, potential operations enforcement, and the promotion of public safety - and distribute to all people living in encampments;*
- 2)** *Have the three relevant leaders - social services, public safety and operations - jointly visit each of the encampment sites to engage in aligned dialogue;*
- 3)** *Use the preliminary engagement as an opportunity to understand the specific needs of each person, so that an intensive social service response can be crafted for each person potentially affected.*

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Preliminary training has been provided to key staff involved in encampment planning and response. It will be necessary for the core components of the training to be relayed to direct service staff, especially in operations, that may be directly involved in communicating with people experiencing homelessness that are living in encampments.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Disseminate slides from the training provided on May 17, 2021 to relevant frontline staff;*
- 2)** *Create a virtual forum for staff that are involved in responding to encampments to ask questions of clarification, prior to any intensive engagement at the encampment locations by operations or public safety staff.*

INTERDEPARTMENTAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROTOCOL

The purpose of the Interdepartmental and Intergovernmental Protocol is to establish working parameters surrounding who does what, when they do it, how they do it, and who makes decisions. Think of it as the document that gets all parties on the same page. Without it, messaging, decision-making and activities that impact people living in an

encampment are hampered, and can turn what seemed like a well-planned encampment response into an operational disaster.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Develop an interdepartmental protocol outlining the roles and responsibilities, representation, decision-making and leadership for all municipal government departments and agencies that have a direct role in the response to the encampment;*
- 2)** *Develop an intergovernmental protocol outlining the roles and responsibilities of the municipality and the roles and responsibilities of the provincial government in meeting the service needs of people living in an encampment, putting forth solutions, allocating social services staff to respond, how income support assistance is provided, etc.*

COMMUNICATIONS

In the planning phase, Communications are important to prepare backgrounders, begin developing key messages, and, when relevant, engaging the media proactively. As non-homelessness experts, and without expertise in operations, by-law or public safety, the Communications professional can also be an important layperson perspective on what is being planned, how it is being planned, as well as how actions and prepared materials are likely to be interpreted and responded to, all of which assists with eliminating blindspots in the preparation of the encampment response.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Develop a backgrounder;*
- 2)** *Develop key messages;*
- 3)** *Develop briefing materials for elected officials;*
- 4)** *Name the spokesperson on behalf of the municipal response and ensure there is only one spokesperson;*



- 5) *Share communication materials such as the services available to people living in encampments far and wide.*

MITIGATION

GET CONSENT TO SHARE INFORMATION

While service providers going to the encampments may have already received consent from the individual(s) to provide services, in the mitigation phase it is necessary to secure consent to allow for sharing of relevant information across all entities involved in the encampment. The intention is to ensure that people do not need to share their stories repeatedly, which is potentially re-traumatizing, and to ensure that any entity going to the site, whether it be a municipal department involved with enforcing standards or an outreach worker, can share information on what is happening by way of social services to the individual. This consent is critical. Without it, there is no legal mechanism for sharing any information about encampment occupants.

Actions for Consideration

- 1) The Social Service Response Leader should create a common consent form to be used by all entities that may be providing social services on the site, as well as sharing information pertaining to services offered and accepted by encampment occupants. Health information and historical information on trauma, past criminal infractions, etc. should NOT be shared or in scope of the consent.*

INTENSIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH OCCUPANTS AT THE SITES

As the enforcement bodies move to taking action to close the encampment, engagement with encampments residents should increase in intensity. In the two weeks leading up to possible enforcements, engagement should occur daily. This must be seen as an essential service, even with COVID, and precautions should be taken through Personal Protective Equipment to allow this engagement to continue.

Through engagement, information needs to be collected on the following:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ▪Name | ▪Total income amount |
| ▪Aliases | ▪Identification by type of identification |
| ▪Date of birth | ▪Whether or not they are interested in working with a service agency of their choosing to explore housing options |
| ▪Individual, couple or family | ▪Whether or not they will accept offers of available shelter options |
| ▪Length of homelessness | ▪Immediate barriers to housing (such as documentation needs) to be resolved |
| ▪Homeless services still currently used (e.g., drop-in) | ▪Pet(s)/service animals |
| ▪Homeless services previously used (e.g., which shelter they used to stay at most frequently) | ▪Description of structure (e.g., colour and location of structure or tent) |
| ▪Income source(s) | |

Actions for Consideration

- 1) The Social Service Response Leader should convene a meeting with all social service providers that have or plan to provide supports to the site to determine roles, responsibilities, frequency and timing of visits, as well as develop and implement a common consent form to allow for information sharing appropriately between service providers.*

CONVENE CASE CONFERENCES

The Social Service Response Leader, or their designate, may benefit from organizing case conferences related to each person in a Crisis Shelter or tent. Assembling other professionals from the social service sector, health sector and/or public safety sector can result in improved brainstorming on potential solutions or engagement strategies. If consent is in place, it is also possible to discuss what the various parties already know

about the individuals when it would help advance service acceptance. The person experiencing homelessness in the encampment should have the opportunity to have input into the case conference, and even attend virtually if technology allows.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *At least two weeks out from anticipated closure, the Social Service Response Leader should convene a case conference (or case conferences) to discuss additional support service options or alternative accommodation locations.*
- 2)** *Based upon the case conference, allied professionals may also be invited to attend the encampment in person and offer services, either with the street outreach worker funded through the municipality or independently.*

REQUEST A CONVERSATION WITH THE HALIFAX MUTUAL AID GROUP

While it is understood that the Mutual Aid Group is neither a non-profit nor a formal entity of any other sort (a collection of volunteers), it is an important part of the process to demonstrate that the municipality has reached out to members of the group for a conversation. Hosted by the Local Response Leader, the municipality should outline why the Crisis Shelters are potentially problematic.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *The municipality, through the Local Response Leader, provides a formal request to the Mutual Aid volunteers to cease creating and siting structures that are on public property, present safety concerns, do not comply with permit or approval processes, and which may be exacerbating the ability to provide intensive services to resolve homelessness.*
- 2)** *The municipality, through the Local Response Leaders, provides other opportunities for members of the Mutual Aid volunteers to be involved constructively in reducing and ending homelessness in Halifax.*

- 3)** *If relevant, outline potential fines or penalties to members of the group if they continue to create and site Crisis Shelters in the community.*
- 4)** *Outline that the Crisis Shelters will be removed. The preference is to resolve each person's homelessness or find alternatives to staying in an encampment through voluntary closure. Be clear, however, that the municipality is ready to take action to remove the Crisis Shelters even if people that are homeless using the shelters do not voluntarily accept other service offers.*
- 5)** *Invite the members of the Mutual Aid Group to reclaim their property throughout the City given the volume of time and money invested in creating the Crisis Shelters.*

SECURING ALTERNATE LOCATIONS FOR PEOPLE

A range of viable alternatives to remaining in an encampment need to be offered, explained, and if there is interest, implemented. Some of the alternate locations to living in an encampment are temporary in nature, while others may permanently resolve the homelessness experienced by the encampment residents. In addition to the people living in encampments, it can be helpful to ensure that media, local elected officials, service providers, the general public and all staff that may have direct contact with people in the encampments (regardless of the staff role) are familiar, and can be positively reinforced.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *For encampment residents with friends or family that would be appropriate and safe to stay with, assistance should be provided to help them reunite with these family members or friends. Confirmation with the friend or family member that they are interested and capable of providing assistance to the person in the encampment should be confirmed prior to implementation. Assistance may be provided with transportation to the family member or friend, whether that is elsewhere in the Halifax area, elsewhere in Nova Scotia, or elsewhere in Canada. In addition, temporary assistance usually in the form of gift cards may be provided to the family member or friend to help with allowing the person from the encampment to transition to living with them. This can include the likes of gift cards for grocery or other stores that sell home goods like bedding.*

- 2)** *Some encampment residents may choose the events as an opportunity to consider addiction recovery through residential treatment. Advanced connections with addiction support organizations, and as necessary their funder, can help create viable service pathways to residential addiction treatment. Assistance may be required in helping the person from the encampment prepare for and access the addiction recovery service.*
- 3)** *It is understood that motels have been offered thus far and rejected. Nonetheless, the motel option should be kept on the table as the encampment winds down. If there is an enforcement activity that occurs to dismantle the encampment, it is especially important that motel rooms are secured for encampment residents starting that day, with an opportunity to stay for a predetermined length of time while continuing to work on next steps for housing. Three weeks of accommodation with the possibility of extension is likely prudent.*
- 4)** *It is understood that most, if not all, residents of encampments have rejected shelter or been rejected by shelter. However, shelters can remain an important part of the overall response. Consideration should be given to inviting shelter staff to accompany outreach staff to resolve shelter entry issues or other barriers to accessing shelter. This should happen well in advance of any enforcement activity. If possible, on the day of enforcement, request space within the shelter for people within the encampment. Offers and availability of shelter should be known and potentially shared in key messages on the day of the closure.*
- 5)** *It is likely that some encampment residents state a preference for being outdoors and “urban camping”. As camping is not permitted throughout the municipality, it is possible to respond to this interest through vouchers and transportation to actual campgrounds in Nova Scotia. Like a motel stay, it is best to start with a predetermined amount of time that the camping will be paid for, with an opportunity for renewal. For those encampment residents living in Crisis Shelters, it may be necessary to offer, and as necessary provide access to, camping materials.*
- 6)** *Given the timeframe, securing housing through Coordinated Access is unlikely. Any offer of housing, therefore, has to be accommodating of the person’s needs and economic means. For many this will be offers of rooming houses or rooms for rent. It is*

also possible for the municipality to consider time-limited rent supplements to allow people from the encampment to have more housing options in the private market, while other permanent housing options are considered. Depending upon the nature of the relationship of people within the encampments, it is also possible to support roommate matching which increases the available housing options by making them more affordable when two or more people are cost-sharing the dwelling.

SECURING SAFE STORAGE FOR BELONGINGS

One of the challenges that can prevent people from accepting offers of service, and/or which complicates the relationship with people in encampments during a clean-up effort is that people in encampments can require a safe location to store their belongings. It is common for people residing in encampments to accumulate more belongings than individuals experiencing homelessness that use the shelter system.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Secure storage location to hold items from an encampment up to 30 days;*
- 2)** *Develop a process for determining what items are permitted in storage, recording all belongings brought into storage, and noting the name of the owner of the belongings;*
- 3)** *Decide on when and how people from encampments can access their belongings, and provide this information verbally and in writing;*
- 4)** *Provide explicit instructions on when and how items will be disposed of if not claimed within the storage period.*

ENGAGING THE SHELTER SYSTEM

Through the province, or directly with shelter providers, the shelter system needs to be engaged. With consent, shelter providers may be able to provide additional background information on encampment residents that previously stayed in shelter. Such information would be helpful in developing temporary or alternative options to living in an encampment. In addition, dedicated shelter access may be necessary to provide as an

option in the encampment wind-down, and previous issues with shelter stays may need to be resolved to allow the person re-entry.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Determine which encampment residents previously stayed in shelter. Get consent. Engage with the shelter for background information that would be helpful in creating temporary or permanent alternatives to living in an encampment going forward.*
- 2)** *If any previously shelter guests have outstanding service restrictions or have been barred from accessing the shelter, communication with the shelter provider will be necessary to ascertain whether the service restriction or barring remains in effect, and what would need to be done to resolve outstanding issues to allow shelter entry again.*
- 3)** *The Social Service Response Leader should consider inviting one or more staff from each relevant shelter to visit the encampment locations with them. The shelter staff can hear first hand why the person does not want shelter, and can help resolve access and support issues related to the shelter.*
- 4)** *Work to secure shelter space for all encampment residents on the day of encampment closure, especially if it is forced closure of the encampment.*

HEALTH & SAFETY ASSESSMENT

If at all possible, each encampment location should be subject to a health and safety assessment by the fire department, police and public health officials. It is important for any operations or social service staff going to the site to be aware of any potential hazards. It is also important for residents of the encampment to have documented, transparent information on the health and safety risks as determined by fire, police and/or public health. Such risks can potentially be addressed while the encampment remains to ensure residents are as safe as possible. If there are immediate health and safety issues raised that cannot be resolved through any activity other than closure, these need to be articulated as well.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *The Public Safety Response Leader should work with colleagues in appropriate departments to mobilize staff to complete the health and safety assessments;*
- 2)** *The Social Service Response Leader should inform encampment residents that the health and safety assessment will be occurring and that the encampment residents can expect fire, police and/or public health staff to visit the site and complete their assessment;*
- 3)** *Have outreach worker on site or available just off site during the health and safety assessments;*
- 4)** *Bring the results of the health and safety assessments back to the Leadership Table for consideration on action.*

COMMUNICATIONS

In the Mitigation phase, the communication strategy should shift to the frequency and type of social services being made available to people in the encampment locations, as well as why enforcement may need to be considered. It should be clearly messaged to all relevant stakeholders that the intention is to resolve the encampments voluntarily through offers of service, and that only if service offers are repeatedly rejected will enforcement occur.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Develop key messages on the type, duration, frequency and intensity of service offers made to people at the encampment sites;*
- 2)** *Internal to the municipality, prepare a briefing note for all elected officials and all relevant department heads on the activities, strategy and timeline for resolving the encampments;*
- 3)** *Refresh communications to encampment residents on available resources, offers of assistance, and what may occur if offers of service are declined.*

CLOSURE

POSTING NOTICE

The official posting of notice is the initiation of the closure period. It is important for communicating with encampment residents, volunteers that engage with encampment occupants, and the general public. The notice should:

- Be official (from the municipality)
- Be easily visible
- Be easily understood (Grade 5 reading level)
- Be posted by the enforcing body (likely the Operations Response Leader or their designate)
- Indicate the geographic area where removal of encampments may occur and/or the proximity from the sign where removal of encampments may occur
- Explicitly name the legal authority being used to remove the structures
- Outline the services available to people at the encampment
- Reiterate that it is hoped all people will accept services that can provide an alternative to living in an encampment
- Identify who to contact for more information (Operations Response Leader), and how and when to contact that person
- Provide a date and time on or after enforcement may occur
- Be posted a minimum of 14 days and preferably 30 days before any enforcement will occur

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Local Response Leader should instruct the Operations Response Leader to prepare the notice, even if the exact closure date is pending;*
- 2)** *Social Service Response Leader or their designate should inform encampment residents that they have heard enforcement is likely and that official signs will soon be posted to gauge whether the change in reality spurs interest in accepting services;*
- 3)** *Vet the notice through appropriate municipal legal experts internal or external to the municipality to ensure they agree with the interpretation of relevant by-laws and City Council or Provincial authorities to take action;*
- 4)** *On the day the notice is posted, the Operations Response Leader or their designate should attempt to personally engage with each encampment resident to provide them a written copy of what is included on the notice and outline what is going to occur and approximately when (on or after the specified date). Encampment residents may again be encouraged by Operations to engage with social services staff.*

ASSISTING PEOPLE MOVE OFF THE SITE TO SHELTER OR OTHER SAFE, APPROPRIATE ALTERNATIVES

Services to assist people experiencing homelessness, unsheltered or otherwise, are voluntary. There is no legal mechanism to force people to accept services or shelter. Being homeless in Canada is not illegal. Assisting people move off the site to shelter or other safe, appropriate alternatives requires the person(s) experiencing homelessness to voluntarily accept the services offered.

Assuming all social service agencies and staff engaging with people at the encampments are on the same page, they should present themselves as a unified front that wants to provide assistance so as to avoid forced closure of the encampment. Throughout this process, it is important that social service staff not be seen as an arm of enforcement. In fact, the social service engagement is intended to ward off the need for any enforcement.

For each person in an encampment willing to accept shelter or other safe, appropriate alternatives to residing in an encampment, an individualized support plan should be created and shared across all social services staff attending to the encampments, when consent is in place. For the other entities involved in the encampment, the Social Service Response Leader should provide a summary of names and aliases, who is accepting services and who is not, and a projected timeline for having the alternative or shelter in place.

Service intensity should ramp up in the two weeks prior to the stated closure date and time. At least once per day, social service personnel need to be onsite to not only move along service planning with people that have voluntarily engaged, but to also check in again with encampment residents that previously declined service offers.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Develop communication between social service providers, and between the Social Service Response Leader and the Local Response Leader daily, updating on progress of services;*
- 2)** *Attempt engagement at the encampment sites at different times of day, and if possible, different personnel;*
- 3)** *Present viable shelter and alternative options that are safe, appropriate and can be put into action prior to expected closure date;*
- 4)** *Ensure maximum visibility of social service staff engaging at the site such as identifiable clothing or vests.*

MOBILIZING RESOURCES TO CLOSE THE ENCAMPMENTS

Once service options have been exhausted, and/or there is an immediate safety concern that cannot be resolved through other means, and/or the enforcement body otherwise feels it is necessary to take action, the Local Response Leader should meet with the Public Safety Response Leader, the Social Service Response Leader and the Operations

Response Leader to confirm that the time has come to schedule enforcement. From that point onwards, each Leader mobilizes resources within their purview to prepare for taking action, and to show up on site, as necessary, on the day of enforcement.

Much can go off the rails if communications are not held confidentially at this time between the Local Response Leader and other key entities on the Response Table. It is not recommended that a broadcast message go out to all members of the Response Table. However, it may be necessary for the Local Response Leader or their designate to coordinate different aspects of service or enforcement.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Unless there is a health and safety reason to go quicker, the Local Response Leader should consider where encampment residents are at in accepting services and realizing shelter or other alternatives prior to scheduling the actual closing date and time.*
- 2)** *Increase the presence of public safety and operations staff in the week prior to the posted date for closure. If asked, public safety and operations staff should positively reinforce the social services available to people at the site. While on site, even if briefly, operations staff should prepare their plan for how the site will be cleared on the day of clean up.*
- 3)** *Provide boxes, totes or large plastic bags to encampment residents at least two days prior to the scheduled closure to pack their belongings. Ensure extra boxes, totes or large plastic bags are also available the day of the closure.*
- 4)** *Offer safe storage of belongings to:*
 - A.** *Any person from an encampment that accepts shelter or other alternate locations to go to;*
 - B.** *Every person experiencing homelessness that remains onsite on the day of the closure.*

- 5)** *Consider making trash pick up possible at set intervals in the two weeks leading up to the planned closure, to make it possible for encampment residents to get rid of trash, especially larger, bulkier items, prior to the day of clean up.*
- 6)** *If there are five or more people impacted at the encampment site because of the closure, secure a debrief location for social service staff to engage and provide assistance. The debrief location should be offsite. Social service buildings, community buildings, and buildings/property owned by religious groups can all serve this purpose. The location should be available for a minimum of three hours post enforcement, even if it is not needed.*
- 7)** *Ensure transportation services are available at the site the morning of the enforcement through to the time that encampment residents vacate the premises. The transportation can take people to the debrief site or any other location they wish to go.*
- 8)** *Pick the best time - morning after news or early afternoon before evening news. Consider Mondays, Tuesdays or Wednesdays as closure days.*
- 9)** *Operations Response Leader should work with appropriate colleagues to schedule work crews for the day of clean up.*
- 10)** *On the day of closure, have the Operations Response Leader, Public Safety Response Leader and Social Service Response Leader attend the site together, at least one hour prior to the planned closure to notify encampment residents what is going to occur. Written and verbal instructions should be provided on what people are to do (pack their belongings and vacate the site prior to work commencing), as well as what services continue to be available to people.*
- 11)** *On the day of closure, ensure the Local Response Leader or their designate is available for media requests.*
- 12)** *After the hour has been provided for people to pack up and vacate the site, if people remain, the Operations Response Leader should again outline their legal authority to remove the encampment. If people do not voluntarily vacate the site, the Public Safety*

Response through the police have to be prepared to take action to escort people out of the way of the cleaning.

- 13)** *The Public Safety Response Leader provides the green light to proceed with the work of the operating unit that will remove the encampments once it is confirmed that no people remain onsite.*
- 14)** *Give consideration to roping off the area where operations work will occur once people have left the site and before the work of removing trash and structures begins. It may also be necessary for Public Safety staff to provide personnel to secure the perimeter of the work area, especially if there are media, other onlookers, or advocates that wish to get involved.*
- 15)** *Prior to removing any items from the encampment, it is recommended that operations and social service staff scan all areas for objects of obvious value that have been left behind. These should be photographed or videotaped, logged, and transported to the safe storage facility for encampment resident belongings.*
- 16)** *A safety scan should be completed of the encampment site prior to proceeding with removing structures and trash. Attention should especially be paid to needles, biohazards like human or animal faeces and urine, rodent infestations, bed bugs, weapons, and explosive or flammable substances like propane tanks. Depending on the nature of the encampment and the safety scan, additional precautions to avoid harm in the clean up process of the operations staff may be necessary.*
- 17)** *The structures may have been considered home for someone for a period of time. It is not recommended that heavy equipment like bobcats, plows or dump trucks be used unless absolutely necessary. It is better to remove the core structures in tact, if possible, and destroy and dispose of the structures off site. This results in less chaos at the site.*
- 18)** *The stress and anxiety of the closure may result in some encampment residents using substances more. Harm reduction supplies should be available on the day of enforcement. Naloxone with a person trained in its administration should also be on site.*

COMMUNICATIONS

In the closure phase, Communications has very important roles. Key stakeholders need to be briefed on what has occurred and what will occur, and the rationale for doing so. Media requests are likely to intensify, and key messages need to be crafted and spokespersons prepped for interviews. Public relations are always a component of responding to encampments through enforcement. Do not blame people from encampments for not accepting services, and instead focus on the voluntary nature of services that are available to people to choose to participate in or not.

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Prepare a confidential briefing note for key internal stakeholders and elected officials. Ensure the briefing note outlines all of the services that have been offered, and the reasons for closing the encampment, including the legal justification.*
- 2)** *Prepare key messages for engagement with media. In addition to the key messages around service offers and the legal justification for closing the encampment, it is recommended that the voluntary nature of services be reinforced. There is no mechanism to force people to accept social services in encampment situations.*
- 3)** *Prepare the Local Response Leader, or the identified spokesperson, for the questions that are anticipated in response to the encampment closures.*
- 4)** *Prepare background notes regarding the role of the Province in providing and funding social services, how many shelter beds are in the system and currently available, measures to support people experiencing homelessness during COVID, and, if available, the projected needs on the number of affordable housing units for people of very low incomes and the number of supportive housing units for people with affordability issues and acute support needs, that are needed in Halifax to address the state of homelessness and restore dignity in having a place to call home.*

STRATEGIES TO DECREASE THE NUMBER OF ENCAMPMENTS MOVING FORWARD

There will continue to be encampments in Halifax. This is not a passing phenomenon in Canada. Scarcity of housing that is affordable to people with very low incomes, COVID, shelter operations or locations, demands for homeless services, and options that are seen to promote freedom and privacy are examples of what is fuelling the surge in encampments throughout the Country. If complete prevention is not an option, Halifax needs to take steps to have more rapid detection and resolution rather than having encampments settle in to a location on public space. Resources to ensure sufficient street outreach to encampments is necessary, as is the need to rapidly deploy resources to remove structures as soon as they are abandoned. Without the ability to do this, Crisis Shelters will continue to be reoccupied soon after the previous resident of the Crisis Shelter is housed. Moreover, field research OrgCode has completed with encampment residents in other jurisdictions (eg., Edmonton, Windsor, Durham Region) suggests that one of the reasons that more people move into encampments from shelters, especially during warmer months, is because encampments are seen as permitted by the municipality...*"if other people can live outside in a tent, why can't I?"*

Actions for Consideration

- 1)** *Ensure early detection of Crisis Shelters, tents or other structures moving forward. Deploy municipally funded street outreach within 48 hours of detection of the encampment to initiate a service response.*
- 2)** *In the event a person from an encampment vacates a structure, on their own or through acceptance of services, the relevant municipal operating division should aim to remove the structures as rapidly as possible. Posting notice may not always be necessary in these instances.*
- 3)** *Advocate to the Province and to the Community Entity responsible for Federal Reaching Home dollars to allocate funding to specifically increase encampment outreach and response.*



- 4)** *Use existing powers to address and work to prevent volunteer organizations from building and siting structures without appropriate permits, inspections or zoning.*

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Encampments are a growing reality in communities large and small throughout the country. Halifax is not immune to this growth in encampments. COVID has altered an already fragile homelessness response system.

If the community gets the encampment response infrastructure and protocols down for this first wave of response, it gets easier with subsequent encampments and early detection of encampments. Key to success is the intensive social service response and rapid deployment of resources to remove structures in the event a person accepts temporary or permanent alternatives to living outdoors.

As social services are a provincial responsibility in Nova Scotia, the pathway forward in Halifax is impacted when it comes to the municipality directing a plethora of resources from the homelessness response system to engage. The pathway forward is either an intergovernmental protocol where the province agrees to engage and even perform the function of the Social Service Response Leader, working in partnership with the municipality; or, an expansion of municipal investment in street outreach services. While the former is preferred, and presents more resource options to deploy while also connecting into the shelter system and potentially the income support system, the latter may be necessary. A number of municipalities in North America are creating, or have recently created, positions to manage the encampment response and ensuring there are municipally funded street outreach workers to be dedicated to encampment responses. One example is Washington, DC where the encampment response coordinator is a position attached to the mayor's office, and municipally funded street outreach workers - different from federally funded street outreach workers in DC - focus exclusively on engagement with people in encampments and working to resolve encampments through non-enforcement engagement.

Local encampment responses are ripe for continuous improvement. Collectively, throughout North America, encampment responses are continuing to evolve. It is clear that encampment response that solely focuses on dismantling encampments without sufficient social service engagement results in ever increasing costs, as encampments that are dismantled simply emerge elsewhere and the pattern repeats itself. A recent study by Abt Associates in the United States found that merely sweeping away encampments cost thousands of dollars per unsheltered person per year — money that could have been used to provide a rent supplement or other financial assistance to resolve the situation rather than moving the situation from one location to another and repeating the process over and over and over again.

Several communities, including primarily west coast Canadian communities, are learning the hard way that not having explicit legal authority to dismantle an encampment is also costly and problematic. The rush to ensure structures are removed, without adequate social service response first and without explicit authority to do so, has resulted in court interventions in the homelessness response system and considerable costs for municipalities. One example from British Columbia demonstrates the consequences of judicial intervention: sanctioned encampments. These types of encampments, even when sanctioned by a municipality or required by the courts, are very costly to operate and take money away from investing in solutions to homelessness.

Above all else, it must be remembered and top of mind that encampments frequently become conversations about structures and trash and community problems, when fundamentally encampments are about people and their desire to survive and thrive in adverse situations. People living in encampments demonstrate considerable skills and resiliency. Channeling that energy towards accessing and maintaining permanent housing is the key to success.