

## Policing Encampments

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### **Purpose**

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

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

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

#### 1. HUMAN RIGHT

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

#### 2. PARTICIPATION:

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

#### 3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW

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

#### 4. PERSON-CENTERED

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

#### 5. HOUSING FIRST

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

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

## 6. RELATIONSHIPS

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

## 7. TRANSPARENCY

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

## 8. COOPERATION

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

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

## 9. CIVILIAN LED RESPONSE

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

## 10. TRAUMA-INFORMED

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

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

## **Definitions**

In the context of this document:

**Board** means the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners

**Chair** means Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners

**Chief officer** means the Chief of Halifax Regional Police

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

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

**HRM** means the Halifax Regional Municipality

**HRP** means the Halifax Regional Police

## **Policy of the Board**

It is the Policy of the Board that:

### **General**

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

### **Mission, Vision and Values**

3. The chief officer shall ensure that HRP's policies regarding Encampments align with the mission, vision and values, as outlined in HRP's Strategic Plan<sup>2</sup>, and the Principles of Policing, as outlined in HRM's Police Board By-law P-100.

### **Inter-agency Cooperation**

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

### **Training**

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

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

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

8. The chief officer shall ensure that training considers tactics that aim to reduce any re-traumatization, and whenever possible, that this training is informed by organizations that design and facilitate training specifically for homelessness and housing service providers.

#### HRP's day-to-day involvement with Encampments

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

#### HRP's involvement with closing Encampments and reporting requirements

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

#### Halifax Regional Detachment

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

Public Posting of Policy

13. The chief officer or designate will notify the Chair once HRP's policy is publicly posted and when any revisions to that policy are publicly posted.