



**City Council Meeting
Additional Information**

Tuesday, February 17, 2026, 6:30 p.m.

S.H. Blake Memorial Auditorium

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| 5. Consent Agenda | |
| 5.3 Minutes of Previous Special Committee of the Whole Meeting(s) | |
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| 6. Reports of Administration | |
| 6.1 Declaring a Homelessness Humanitarian Crisis | |
| *6.1.1 Declaring a Homelessness Humanitarian Crisis – City Council At the February 10, 2026 Quality of Life Standing Committee, Report 98-2026-Growth- Strategy & Engagement was presented, a resolution was passed endorsing that City Council declare homelessness a humanitarian crisis in the City of Thunder Bay. Report 099-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement (Distributed Separately on Friday, February 13, 2026) WITH RESPECT to Report 099-2026, we recommend that City Council declare homelessness a humanitarian crisis in the City of Thunder Bay, recognizing the urgent risks to life, health, safety, and dignity for people experiencing homelessness; the disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples; and the broader implications for community safety and well-being; AND THAT Administration be authorized to finalize and issue a joint declaration of humanitarian crisis related to homelessness with Anemki Wajiw (Fort William First Nation) | 8 - 13 |

and Nishnawbe Aski Nation;

AND THAT Administration report back twice a year to the Quality of Life Standing Committee on progress, impacts on community safety and well-being, and outcomes of intergovernmental and partner advocacy;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

6.2 Guiding Criteria for Designated Encampment Sites

***6.2.1 Guiding Criteria for Designated Encampment Sites – City Council**

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At the February 10, 2026 Quality of Life Standing Committee, Report 47-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement was presented seeking feedback from the Standing Committee on guiding criteria for identifying designated encampment sites, and to request support for proceeding with site identification and the next phase of consultation. The report was referred back to Administration and will be re-presented at a future City Council meeting.

Report 110-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement (Distributed Separately on Friday, February 3, 2026)

WITH RESPECT to Report 110-2026, we recommend that the Guiding Criteria as outlined in this report be approved;

AND THAT Administration identify options for designated encampment sites in alignment with Distance Guidelines and Guiding Criteria, recognizing not all criteria may be achievable;

AND THAT Administration report back to the Quality of Life Standing Committee with consultation results and three recommended sites prior to presentation to City Council;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

8. New Business

***8.1 Establishment of Special Committee of the Whole - Closed Session - March 3, 2026**

The following resolution is presented to establish a Special Committee of the Whole - Closed Session Meeting on Tuesday, March 3, 2026:

THAT a Special Committee of the Whole –Closed Session meeting be scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. in order to receive information pursuant to the Municipal Act (Section 239 (2)) relative to: (3.1) A meeting of a council or local board or of a committee of either of them may be closed to the public if the following conditions are both satisfied:

1. The meeting is held for the purpose of educating or training the members;
2. At the meeting, no member discusses or otherwise deals with any matter in a way that materially advances the business or decision-making of the council, local board or committee. 2006, c. 32, Sched. A, s. 103 (1).



Special Committee of the Whole – Closed Session Meeting Minutes

**Tuesday, February 3, 2026, 6:04 p.m.
McNaughton Room - 3rd Floor, City Hall**

Present:

- Mayor Ken Boshcoff
- Councillor Rajni Agarwal
- Councillor Albert Aiello
- Councillor Mark Bentz
- Councillor Shelby Ch'ng
- Councillor Kasey Etreni
- Councillor Andrew Foulds
- Councillor Trevor Giertuga
- Councillor Brian Hamilton
- Councillor Kristen Oliver
- Councillor Dominic Pasqualino
- Councillor Michael Zussino

Officials:

- Jeff Walters, Manager – Legislative Services & Deputy City Clerk
- John Collin, City Manager
- Patty Robinet, City Solicitor

1. Special Committee of the Whole - Open Session

Chair: Councillor Brian Hamilton

1.1 Establishment of Special Committee of the Whole - Closed Session

At the January 13, 2026 City Council meeting, the following resolution was presented to establish the February 3, 2026 Special Committee of the Whole - Closed Session Meeting:

MOVED BY: Councillor Greg Johnsen
SECONDED BY: Councillor Michael Zussino

THAT a Special Committee of the Whole – Closed Session meeting be scheduled for Tuesday, February 3, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in order to receive information pursuant to the Municipal Act (Section 239 (2)) relative to:

- (c) a proposed or pending acquisition or disposition of land by the municipality or local board;
- (j) a trade secret or scientific, technical, commercial or financial information that belongs to the municipality or local board and has monetary value or potential monetary value; and
- (k) a position, plan, procedure, criteria or instruction to be applied to any negotiations carried on or to be carried on by or on behalf of the municipality or local board. 2001, c. 25, s. 239.

Amendment – Establishment of Committee of the Whole – Closed Session

The following resolution is presented to amend the purpose of the February 3, 2026 Committee of the Whole - Closed Session meeting:

MOVED BY: Councillor Albert Aiello
SECONDED BY: Mayor Ken Boshcoff

WITH RESPECT to the resolution to establish the Tuesday, February 3, 2026 Committee of the Whole – Closed Session, we recommend that the following reasons be added:

- (i) a trade secret or scientific, technical, commercial, financial or labour relations information, supplied in confidence to the municipality or local board, which, if disclosed, could reasonably be expected to prejudice significantly the competitive position or interfere significantly with the contractual or other negotiations of a person, group of persons, or organization;

AND THAT the following reasons be removed:

- (c) a proposed or pending acquisition or disposition of land by the municipality or local board; and
- (j) a trade secret or scientific, technical, commercial or financial information that belongs to the municipality or local board and has monetary value or potential monetary value.

CARRIED

1.3 Amended - Establishment of Special Committee of the Whole - Closed Session

MOVED BY: Councillor Albert Aiello

SECONDED BY: Councillor Michael Zussino

THAT a Special Committee of the Whole – Closed Session meeting be scheduled for Tuesday, February 3, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in order to receive information pursuant to the Municipal Act (Section 239 (2)) relative to:

(i) a trade secret or scientific, technical, commercial, financial or labour relations information, supplied in confidence to the municipality or local board, which, if disclosed, could reasonably be expected to prejudice significantly the competitive position or interfere significantly with the contractual or other negotiations of a person, group of persons, or organization; and

(k) a position, plan, procedure, criteria or instruction to be applied to any negotiations carried on or to be carried on by or on behalf of the municipality or local board. 2001, c. 25, s. 239.

CARRIED

2. Committee of the Whole - Closed Session in the McNaughton Room at 6:05 p.m.

Chair: Councillor Brian Hamilton

Present: Mayor Ken Boshcoff
Councillor Rajni Agarwal
Councillor Albert Aiello
Councillor Mark Bentz
Councillor Shelby Ch'ng
Councillor Kasey Etrene
Councillor Andrew Foulds
Councillor Trevor Giertuga
Councillor Brian Hamilton
Councillor Kristen Oliver
Councillor Dominic Pasqualino
Councillor Michael Zussino

Officials: Jeff Walters, Manager – Legislative Services & Deputy City Clerk
John Collin, City Manager
Patty Robinet, City Solicitor

Leah Prentice, Director – Recreation & Culture
Paul Burke, Supervisor – Sport & Community Development

3. Disclosures of Interest

4. Reports of Municipal Officers

4.1 Contract Related Matter

Confidential Memorandum from Supervisor – Sport and Community Development Paul Burke, dated January 23, 2026 was distributed to Members of Council, City Manager, City Solicitor and Commissioner – Community Services only on Friday, January 30, 2026.

Paul Burke provided an overview and responded to questions.

It was consensus of Committee that Administration proceed as directed.
The Deputy City Clerk advised that the resolution will be presented at the City Council meeting to be held later in the evening.

5. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

City Council Report

REPORT NUMBER 099-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement

DATE

PREPARED

February 11, 2026

FILE

**CITY COUNCIL
MEETING DATE**

February 17, 2026

SUBJECT

Declaring a Homelessness Humanitarian Crisis – City Council

RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL

WITH RESPECT to Report 099-2026, we recommend that City Council declare homelessness a humanitarian crisis in the City of Thunder Bay, recognizing the urgent risks to life, health, safety, and dignity for people experiencing homelessness; the disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples; and the broader implications for community safety and well-being;

AND THAT Administration be authorized to finalize and issue a joint declaration of humanitarian crisis related to homelessness with Anemki Wajiw (Fort William First Nation) and Nishnawbe Aski Nation;

AND THAT Administration report back twice a year to the Quality of Life Standing Committee on progress, impacts on community safety and well-being, and outcomes of intergovernmental and partner advocacy;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness in Thunder Bay is a humanitarian crisis, marked by ongoing human suffering, elevated health and safety risks, insufficient housing and shelter options, disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples, and a scale of need that exceeds the capacity of any single organization or order of government.

On February 3, 2026, leadership from Anemki Wajiw (Fort William First Nation), Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and the City of Thunder Bay met to strengthen collaboration in response to this crisis. Leaders acknowledged the ongoing impacts of colonization leading to a disproportionate impact of homelessness on Indigenous people, recognized gaps in current

approaches and available resources, and affirmed that both immediate action and longer-term system change are required.

This report recommends that City Council declare homelessness a humanitarian crisis. The declaration is intended to formally recognize the urgency and human impact of homelessness, reinforce collective action, and strengthen coordinated advocacy with provincial and federal governments. It would also provide a unified framework to support practical, outcomes-focused action that improves community safety and well-being for all residents.

DISCUSSION

Context

On February 3, 2026, leadership from Anemki Wajiw (Fort William First Nation), Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), and the City of Thunder Bay met to strengthen dialogue and collaboration in response to the ongoing impacts of the homelessness crisis, including the disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples. Leaders noted long-standing systemic conditions – including the ongoing effects of colonization, recognized gaps in current approaches and available resources, and affirmed that no single organization or order of government can resolve this crisis in isolation.

All parties agree that both immediate supports and longer-term system changes are required, and that progress must be grounded in respectful relationships, shared understanding, and tangible outcomes. Unanimously, leaders agreed that the humanitarian crisis related to homelessness is real and requires coordinated action. All parties committed to continuing dialogue and working together to seek the resources and system-level changes needed to close existing gaps.

This local reality reflects broader provincial trends outlined in a report commissioned by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), and Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) - [*Municipalities Under Pressure One Year Later: An Update on the Human and Financial Cost of Ontario's Homelessness Crisis*](#) (Municipalities Under Pressure).

The report indicates that nearly 85,000 Ontarians experienced homelessness in 2025, representing an increase of approximately 50% since 2021. It is important to note that Northern Ontario is experiencing the fastest growth in homelessness in the province, with known homelessness increasing by more than 37% in a single year and more than doubling since 2021. Northern communities now account for close to 10% of all known homelessness in Ontario, despite representing approximately 5% of the provincial population.

The report identified that Indigenous peoples comprise approximately 40% of the homeless population in Northern Ontario, aligning with local data that similarly demonstrates highly disproportionate representation of Indigenous peoples among those experiencing

homelessness. This pattern situates Thunder Bay's experience within a broader northern and provincial context, shaped by longstanding inequities and systems that have not been able to keep pace with the scale and complexity of need.

Current Actions and Collective Approach

Alongside community partners, the City of Thunder Bay and District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) play distinct but complementary roles in responding to homelessness. Important progress has been made locally, and both provincial and federal governments have increasingly come to the table in recent years with program funding and targeted investments. While these contributions have helped stabilize parts of the system and expand capacity, pressures remain.

City of Thunder Bay

Within its municipal role and capacity, the City continues to advance both immediate and longer-term actions focused on outreach, coordination, land use, safety, and advocacy. Current City-led efforts include:

- Implementing of the 10-Part Enhanced Encampment Response Action Plan, grounded in a human rights-based approach;
- Funding and implementing the Temporary Village to expand system capacity;
- Operating an Encampment Response Team to engage directly with people sheltering outdoors and support connections to services;
- Activating of the City's Severe Weather Response Plan as required;
- Investing \$5.58 million into the Affordable Rental Housing Funding Program, supporting the creation of 168 affordable and deeply affordable units; and
- Developing a Housing Affordability Strategy to support meeting current and future housing needs in a cost-effective, sustainable, and publicly beneficial way by identifying supply/demand gaps and reducing barriers to affordable housing development.

These actions reflect the City's commitment to acting within municipal authority, while recognizing that the scale of need exceeds local capacity. Findings from [Municipalities Under Pressure](#) reinforce that municipalities across Ontario are increasingly required to take on the costs of homelessness through emergency responses, by-law enforcement, public safety measures, and outreach, despite lacking sustainable funding mechanisms to address underlying causes.

District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB)

The City of Thunder Bay recognizes the significant financial support from the province to help address homelessness. Under the *Ontario Housing Services Act, 2011*, TBDSSAB is appointed as the Service System Manager for both community housing and homelessness prevention services in the District of Thunder Bay. TBDSSAB's [Impact Highlights: November](#)

[2025](#) notes a total allocation of \$58.1 million across these programs. Of this amount, the homelessness prevention-specific annual allocations include:

- \$6.8 million toward transitional and supportive housing capital projects;
- \$3.6 million toward homelessness supports and outreach services; and
- \$2.65 million toward emergency shelter operations.

Additionally, as noted in TBDSSAB's [Board Report 2025-29](#), several provincial funding envelopes have supported the creation of hundreds of units of affordable, transitional, and supportive housing since 2019, with more to come in 2026. These investments reflect TBDSSAB's critical role in stabilizing and strengthening the homelessness service system.

The actions outlined above are not exhaustive; many Indigenous organizations, nonprofits, health care providers, and community agencies play a critical role in responding to homelessness, offering innovative work every day to support people experiencing homelessness and increase local capacity.

Despite strong efforts across the local system, homelessness continues to increase in Thunder Bay. This local trend aligns with province-wide pressures identified in the [Municipalities Under Pressure](#) report, including nearly 2,000 encampments across Ontario, chronic homelessness accounting for more than half of known homelessness, and growing housing waitlists. Together, these indicators show that current interventions, though contributing to system stability, are not sufficient to keep pace with increasing demand.

Declaring a Humanitarian Crisis

A humanitarian crisis exists when conditions place human life, health, safety, or dignity at sustained and unacceptable risk. This occurs when existing systems and resources are insufficient to meet basic needs, including safe and adequate shelter. These crises are marked by preventable harm, heightened vulnerability, and the need for coordinated action across multiple sectors and orders of government.

Administration advises that the current state of homelessness in Thunder Bay is a humanitarian crisis based on the following factors:

- Loss of life and elevated health and safety risks to people sheltering outdoors, particularly during periods of extreme weather;
- Persistent gaps between community need and available shelter, housing, and support services;
- Disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples, reflecting the ongoing effects of colonization and systemic inequities; and
- A scale and complexity of homelessness that exceeds the capacity of any single organization or order of government to resolve independently.

Declaring homelessness a humanitarian crisis in Thunder Bay would formally recognize these realities and affirm that the situation extends beyond routine service pressures, creating an urgent threat to community safety and well-being. The declaration is intended to:

- Publicly acknowledge the urgency and human impact of homelessness;
- Affirm a shared commitment to collective action;
- Strengthen coordinated advocacy with other orders of government; and
- Support efforts to secure additional resources and system transformation.

While this declaration is an important statement of values and urgency, it must also be understood as part of a broader, coordinated response that requires active participation from all system partners. Its purpose is not symbolic alone, but to provide a unified framework for collaboration, advocacy, and practical action to address immediate risks while advancing longer-term solutions to improve community safety and well-being in Thunder Bay.

Next Steps

While the TBDSSAB was not part of the initial call from Indigenous leadership or the February 3, 2026, meeting, its legislated role as Service System Manager for housing and homelessness services makes it an integral partner in advancing solutions. All parties recognize that meaningful progress requires the full participation of TBDSSAB. Following the presentation of Report 098-2026 to the Quality of Life Standing Committee, the TBDSSAB formally accepted an invitation to join and support these efforts moving forward.

A leadership table will be convened with Anemki Wajiw, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board, and the City of Thunder Bay. This table will focus on aligning priorities, coordinating immediate and long-term actions, advancing shared advocacy, and establishing mechanisms to monitor progress. Additional key community partners may be identified and invited to participate as this work evolves.

CONSULTATION

On February 10, 2026, the Quality of Life Standing Committee considered [Report 098-2026](#) and its recommendations, which were unanimously endorsed.

During Committee discussion, members sought clarification regarding the purpose and practical utility of a declaration. Administration advised that a declaration would:

- Help bring leadership from Anemki Wajiw, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the City, and other partners together under a formalized commitment to collectively examine system change within the community;
- Strengthen coordinated advocacy for additional, multi-ministerial supports required to address this complex issue; and
- Provide a clear framework for aligning future reports and recommendations with Council's identified priority.

Discussion also acknowledged the important role of other orders of government in addressing key drivers of homelessness, including mental health, addictions, healthcare, and poverty.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Administration will return to Council seeking direction should the need for financial resources arise.

BACKGROUND

February 10, 2026, Report 098-2026 from R. Willianen, Supervisor – Encampment Response, K. McMonagle, Manager – Indigenous Relations, and L. Costanzo, Manager – Community Safety & Well-Being was presented and endorsed by the Quality of Life Standing Committee.

February 3, 2026, Political and Administrative leadership from Anemki Wajiw, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and the City of Thunder Bay met to strengthen dialogue and collaboration in response to the ongoing impacts of the homelessness crisis.

January 29, 2026, His Worship Mayor Ken Boshcoff issued a response letter to Chief Solomon and Grand Chief Fiddler inviting a meeting to discuss next steps.

January 23, 2026, Chief Solomon from Anemki Wajiw (Fort William First Nation) and Grand Chief Fiddler from Nishnawbe Aski Nation issued a letter to the Mayor and City Council calling on the City of Thunder Bay to declare a State of Emergency on Homelessness.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

None.

REPORT PREPARED BY

Rilee Willianen, Supervisor – Encampment Response – Growth
Kieran McMonagle, Manager – Indigenous Relations – Growth
Louisa Costanzo, Manager – Community Safety & Well-Being – Growth

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Kerri Marshall, Commissioner - Growth

Date (02/13/2026)

City Council Report

| | | |
|--|---|-------------|
| REPORT NUMBER 110-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement | | |
| DATE | | |
| PREPARED | February 11, 2026 | FILE |
| CITY COUNCIL | February 17, 2026 | |
| MEETING DATE | | |
| SUBJECT | Guiding Criteria for Designated Encampment Sites – City Council | |

RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL

WITH RESPECT to Report 110-2026, we recommend that the Guiding Criteria as outlined in this report be approved;

AND THAT Administration identify options for designated encampment sites in alignment with Distance Guidelines and Guiding Criteria, recognizing not all criteria may be achievable;

AND THAT Administration report back to the Quality of Life Standing Committee with consultation results and three recommended sites prior to presentation to City Council;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advances Item 5 of the 10-Part Enhanced Encampment Response Plan (10-Part Plan), which directs Administration to identify up to three designated encampment sites in accordance with Council-approved Distance Guidelines and in collaboration with community partners, Indigenous leadership, and people with lived and living experience.

In April 2024, Council directed Administration to pursue a designated encampment approach. In July 2024, Council approved Distance Guidelines to support implementation. While the Distance Guidelines establish spatial parameters, they do not address all operational considerations. Further, the legal landscape regarding appropriate Distance Guidelines continues to evolve, with an important decision (*Heegsma v. Hamilton (City)*) before the Ontario Court of Appeal pending, after completion of a two-day hearing on February 10th and 11th, 2026.

The proposed Guiding Criteria address site size, operational access, land-use compatibility, proximity to services, service feasibility (including sanitation and potable water), year-round

operability, and accessibility. Together, the Distance Guidelines and Guiding Criteria provide a structured but flexible framework for site selection.

The Guiding Criteria are informed by extensive consultation undertaken in 2024 and reinforced through additional engagement in 2025. Across both phases, consistent themes emerged, including the importance of access to services and transportation, emergency and operational access, compatibility with surrounding land uses, provision of basic infrastructure, and safety and dignity for encampment residents and the broader community.

Consistent with the 10-Part Plan, Administration will bring forward one recommended site in the North Core, one in the South Core, and a third site that may be located outside the Urban Cores but not in a rural area. A broader list of assessed sites will also be provided.

Subject to Council approval of the Guiding Criteria, Administration will proceed with site identification and consultation, with the intent of returning to Committee and Council with recommendations in advance of the anticipated conclusion of overflow winter shelter capacity on April 30, 2026.

DISCUSSION

Implementation Context

In April 2024, Council considered the feasibility of designated and sanctioned encampments through [Corporate Report 137-2024](#), resulting in direction to pursue a designated encampment approach due to its feasibility and alignment with municipal responsibilities and fiscal capacity. Subsequently, in July 2024, Council approved Distance Guidelines (See Attachment A – 2024 Approved Distance Guidelines) to operationalize this approach.

In October 2024, City Council adopted the *10-Part Enhanced Encampment Response Plan* (10-Part Plan) to take a more cohesive response to addressing unsheltered homelessness, with the ultimate goal of improving the health and safety of encampments, providing a pathway into services and housing, and reducing strain on community partners, encampment residents and the public.

This report responds to *Item 5 – Identify options for designated encampment locations within Urban Cores* of the 10-Part Plan, which states:

In collaboration with community partners, people with lived and living experience, and Indigenous leaders and representative organizations, and in accordance with the Distance Guidelines, up to three designated encampment areas with essential services are identified, reducing the strain on community partners and Administration, and leading to improved outcomes for encampment residents (pg. 5).

While potential locations could be identified based solely on Council-approved Distance Guidelines, experience has demonstrated that distance alone is insufficient to address key

operational, safety, environmental, and service-delivery considerations. The application of clear Guiding Criteria alongside the Distance Guidelines provides a more comprehensive and practical framework for identifying designated encampment sites that are safer, serviceable, and manageable over time.

Consistent with the direction set out in the 10-Part Plan to identify options within the Urban Cores, Administration will recommend one site in the North Core, one site in the South Core, and a third site that may be located outside of the Urban Cores but not in a rural area due to service delivery, accessibility, and operational constraints.

The legal landscape regarding appropriate Distance Guidelines continues to evolve, with an important decision (*Heegsma v. Hamilton (City)*) before the Ontario Court of Appeal pending, after completion of a two-day hearing on February 10th and 11th, 2026.

Guiding Criteria for Designated Encampment Sites

In addition to the City's existing Distance Guidelines, the following guiding criteria are proposed to be used to inform the identification of potential designated encampment sites, recognizing that not all criteria may be applicable or achievable in every location.

- **Minimum site size:** Ideally, at least one usable acre to allow for appropriate spacing, safety requirements, and access for services and emergency response.
- **Established use:** Preference for locations with encampment activity to avoid introducing encampments into new areas.
- **Emergency and operational access:** Adequate access for emergency responders, sanitation and garbage services, outreach vehicles, and snow clearing operations.
- **Land-use compatibility:** Exclusion of spaces with regular permitted, programmed, or revenue-generating uses, including parks with active City-led or contracted programming.
- **Proximity to services:** Reasonable walking distance (approximately 1.5 km or less) to public transportation or essential health and social services.
- **Service feasibility:** Ability to provide and maintain basic services such as portable toilets and regular servicing, garbage collection, potable water access, and outreach support.
- **Year-round operability:** Sites should be capable of operating safely in all seasons, including winter conditions.
- **Accessibility:** A minimum of two sites should reasonably support accessibility considerations such as the presence of gravel or paved surfaces, recognizing that full accessibility may not be achievable in all locations.

The Guiding Criteria were developed through a community safety and well-being lens, with the intent of balancing the safety and dignity of encampment residents with the safety of service providers, emergency responders, and the broader community.

Impacts on surrounding areas and neighbourhoods were a primary consideration in the development of the Distance Guidelines. As the Distance Guidelines will be applied in tandem with the Guiding Criteria, these considerations are already embedded within the overall site-selection framework and therefore are not repeated as a standalone criterion.

Emerging Trends

Historically, camping trailers and vehicle-based living have been limited within the community. More recently, however, Administration has observed a noticeable increase in individuals sheltering in vehicles and trailers. While the three designated encampment sites are intended to address tent-based encampments, Administration recognizes that vehicle-based living presents distinct spatial, safety, and servicing considerations.

As such, there may be a future need to explore a designated location specifically suited to vehicle-based sheltering. Administration will continue to monitor trends and operational pressures and will report back to Council should this additional need arise. This report does not seek approval for an additional site. Any future recommendations related to vehicle-based living would be brought forward separately for Council's consideration.

Next Steps

Subject to City Council's approval of the Guiding Criteria, Administration will identify potential options and undertake site-specific consultation. Results, along with three recommended designated encampment sites and a list of other sites that were considered but not recommended, will be presented to the Quality of Life Standing Committee for endorsement before being presented to City Council for its consideration.

This timeline is informed by the anticipated conclusion of overflow winter shelter capacity on April 30, 2026. Confirming designated encampment sites in advance of this date will support proactive communication with individuals experiencing homelessness and enable coordinated planning among service providers and partner organizations.

CONSULTATION

2024 Consultation

The proposed Guiding Criteria are informed by consultation undertaken in 2024, as detailed in Corporate Report 137-2024. Consultation included a public survey and targeted sessions with Indigenous leaders, people with lived and living experience, community partners, service providers, and representatives from the business community. In total, these efforts generated more than 1,250 points of feedback. Results directly informed the development of the proposed Guiding Criteria as outlined below.

Access to Services and Transportation

Survey respondents ranked proximity to health and social services and public transportation among the highest priorities when considering potential designated encampment location.

This is reflected in the criterion:

- Proximity to services: Reasonable walking distance (approximately 1.5 km or less) to public transportation or essential health and social services.

Operational Feasibility and Service Provision

Consultation participants identified the importance of providing basic infrastructure and ensuring that sites could be safely serviced and maintained. Feedback referenced sanitation, garbage collection, potable water access, emergency response access, outreach access, and winter maintenance.

These considerations are reflected in the criteria:

- Emergency and operational access: Adequate access for emergency responders, sanitation and garbage services, outreach vehicles, and snow clearing operations.
- Service feasibility: Ability to provide and maintain basic services such as portable toilets and regular servicing, garbage collection, potable water access, and outreach support.
- Year-round operability: Sites should be capable of operating safely in all seasons, including winter conditions.

Reducing Potential Conflict

Consultation results indicated stronger agreement with the use of vacant lots and open spaces, and strong disagreement with the use of parks with active programming or heavily used public spaces. Participants also identified concerns related to compatibility with surrounding land uses.

This is reflected in the criteria:

- Land-use compatibility: Exclusion of spaces with regular permitted, programmed, or revenue-generating uses, including parks with active City-led or contracted programming.
- Established use: Preference for locations with encampment activity to avoid introducing encampments into new areas.

Safety and Dignity

Safety considerations for encampment residents, service providers, and the broader community were consistently identified. Participants also referenced the importance of manageable site size and appropriate spacing.

This is reflected in:

- Minimum site size: Ideally, at least one usable acre to allow for appropriate spacing, safety requirements, and access for services and emergency response.
- Accessibility: A minimum of two sites should reasonably support accessibility considerations such as the presence of gravel or paved surfaces, recognizing that full accessibility may not be achievable in all locations.

The proposed Guiding Criteria therefore reflect the key themes identified through the 2024 consultation process by translating the priorities expressed through engagement into practical site-selection considerations.

2025 Consultation

In alignment with the 10-Part Action Plan's direction to collaborate with community partners, people with lived and living experience, and Indigenous leaders and representative organizations on designated sites, Administration engaged with the stakeholders below in December 2025:

- 50 people with lived and living experience of encampments;
- 33 front-line workers participating in the local Outreach Workers Network; and
- 18 community partners, including Indigenous leaders and representative organizations, involved in direct encampment-related service delivery ;

Feedback gathered through the 2025 engagement broadly reinforced the findings from 2024. Participants continued to emphasize:

- The importance of proximity to services and public transportation;
- The need for reliable access to sanitation, garbage collection, potable water, and outreach supports;
- The importance of emergency and operational access, including winter maintenance considerations;
- The need to ensure sites are compatible with surrounding land uses and avoid locations with active programming or high competing public use; and
- The importance of safety, dignity, and manageable site size.

Overall, the 2025 consultation did not introduce new or conflicting priorities. Rather, it confirmed and strengthened the themes identified in 2024, providing further validation that the proposed Guiding Criteria are aligned with stakeholder input and operational realities.

Quality of Life Standing Committee

On February 10, 2026, Corporate Report 047-2026 was presented to the Quality of Life Standing Committee seeking feedback on the proposed Guiding Criteria for identifying designated encampment sites and requesting support to proceed with site identification and

the next phase of consultation. The report was subsequently referred back to Administration to be re-presented at a future City Council meeting.

During Committee discussion, members raised questions and considerations in the following areas:

1. Flexibility of the framework and sufficiency of available land
2. Fire safety, electrical safety, and emergency access
3. Clear sightlines and site layout
4. Potable water and public health considerations
5. Winter conditions and heat sources
6. Community consultation
7. Learning from other municipal approaches

Administration's responses on how feedback is being addressed are outlined below.

1. Flexibility of the Framework and Land Availability

Members questioned whether sufficient land exists that would satisfy both the Council-approved Distance Guidelines and the proposed Guiding Criteria.

Administration advised that both the Distance Guidelines and the Guiding Criteria are intended to guide site identification rather than operate as absolute requirements. They provide a structured framework for assessment while allowing reasonable flexibility where appropriate. Based on preliminary review and analysis, Administration advised that viable site recommendations can be brought forward that reasonably align with both frameworks.

Members also expressed interest in reviewing a more exhaustive list of potential locations rather than only the three recommended sites. Administration will provide a broader inventory of assessed sites, including those considered but not recommended, in a future report.

2. Fire Safety, Electrical Safety, and Emergency Access

Concerns related to fire risk, electrical safety, and emergency response access are addressed through the following criteria:

- Minimum site size; and
- Emergency and operational access.

These criteria support appropriate spacing between structures, safe emergency vehicle access, and the ability to respond effectively to fire or other safety incidents.

Thunder Bay Fire Rescue currently assesses encampment sites for fire safety risks and provides guidance where required. This practice will continue for any designated sites to support fire prevention, emergency planning, and risk mitigation.

Administration will explore enhanced spacing standards that provide clear delineation between individual tents to support fire mitigation, emergency access, safety, and privacy considerations.

3. Clear Sightlines and Site Layout

Members emphasized the importance of maintaining clear sightlines within designated sites.

Clear sightlines are considered under:

- Emergency and operational access
- Service feasibility

These criteria require that sites are capable of being safely accessed and serviced. In practical terms, this includes ensuring unobstructed pathways for emergency responders and service providers, visibility across common areas where appropriate, and layouts that reduce hidden or inaccessible areas that may present safety risks.

4. Potable Water and Public Health Considerations

Concerns related to potable water access and broader public health risks are addressed by the following criteria:

- Service feasibility
- Emergency and operational access; and
- Year-round operability.

Access to potable water does not inherently require permanent physical infrastructure. Servicing approaches may include water delivery through trucks, refillable jugs, or other temporary measures.

5. Winter Conditions and Heat Sources

Committee discussion referenced winter heat sources and the associated fire and safety risks. The provision and regulation of safe heat sources during winter months presents operational challenges that Administration will continue to explore in consultation with Thunder Bay Fire Rescue and community partners.

These considerations are captured under the Year-round operability criterion, which requires that sites be capable of operating safely in all seasons, including winter conditions.

6. Community Consultation

Members emphasized the importance of continued community consultation.

In addition to the extensive consultation already undertaken and described in this report, Administration intends to conduct further site-specific consultation once potential locations have been identified. This next phase will provide an opportunity for community members to provide input prior to final site recommendations being brought forward.

7. Learning from Other Municipal Approaches

Committee members encouraged Administration to review and learn from approaches implemented by other municipalities following a similar approach. Administration will continue to monitor emerging practices, operational models, and risk mitigation strategies.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

Designated encampment sites can be implemented within existing resources; however, achieving voluntary uptake may require additional investments to support site safety and functionality, and responsiveness to resident needs. Should such enhancements be identified, Administration will report back to Council with options and seek direction.

BACKGROUND

February 10, 2026, Corporate Report 047-2026 from R. Willianen, Supervisor – Encampment Response was presented seeking feedback from the Quality of Life Standing Committee on guiding criteria for identifying designated encampment sites, and requesting support for proceeding with site identification and the next phase of consultation. The report was referred back to Administration to be re-presented at a future City Council meeting.

October 21, 2024, Corporate Report 384-2024 from C. Olsen, Director Strategy & Engagement was represented and recommended that the Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan be approved, and that a copy of the resolution be sent to the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, and provincial and federal members of parliament.

October 7, 2024, Corporate Report 384-2024 from C. Olsen, Director Strategy & Engagement was presented as a first report and proposed an enhanced encampment response through a ten-part Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan.

August 12, 2024, Corporate Report 312-2024 from R. Willianen, Policy & Research Analyst and C. Olsen, Director Strategy & Engagement was presented and recommended to Council that the encampment distance guidelines for trails, sidewalks, parking lots and bridges remain at 5 metres, and that they be included in the overall Distance Guidelines that were approved and ratified on July 15, 2024.

July 15, 2024, Memorandum dated July 5, 2024, from C. Olsen, Director Strategy & Engagement was presented and proposed amended distance guidelines to include 20 metres away from private non-residential property and 5 metres away from rivers and railway

tracks as they were not originally reflected. The final recommendation as presented in the memorandum was approved and ratified.

June 24, 2024, Corporate Report 252-2024 from R. Willianen, Policy & Research Analyst and C. Olsen, Director Strategy & Engagement was presented to Committee of the Whole and provided recommendations related to adopting distance guidelines, and advocacy items to other orders of government related to encampments and unsheltered homelessness.

May 6, 2024, Council directed that the City conduct an environmental scan of municipal approaches to designated and sanctioned sites, undertake an assessment of recommendations to municipalities by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, update the Encampment Response Protocol, further define designated encampments for the City, and continue to coordinate a human-rights based encampment response.

April 22, 2024, Corporate Report 137-2024 from C. Olsen, Director – Strategy & Engagement and R. Willianen, Policy & Research Analyst, was presented to Committee of the Whole and provided an update on the feasibility of designated encampment locations, including community consultation results.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment A – 2024 Approved Distance Guidelines

REPORT PREPARED BY

Rilee Willianen, Supervisor – Encampment Response – Growth

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Kerri Marshall, Commissioner - Growth

Date (02/13/2026)

Distance Guidelines

An encampment, defined as locations where one or more people live in an unsheltered area in temporary structures, are not to be located:

- On or within 100 metres of a school, or licensed children daycare centre.
- On or within 100 metres of a playground, pool, or splash pad.
- On or within 50 metres of any lake, beach, pond, or boat launch.
- On or within 50 metres of any actively programmed park, active sports field, inclusive of but not limited to, skateboard parks, fitness amenities, hockey rinks/arenas, golf courses, ball diamonds, soccer pitches, tennis courts, or any other sports or multi-use courts, as well as stadiums, dugouts, stages, and bleachers.
- On or within 20 metres of a highway.
- On or within 20 metres of any private property line (includes private residential and private non-residential).
- On or within 10 metres of any public transit stop or any formally designated heritage properties.
- On or within 5 metres of any trail, sidewalk, or parking lot or on or under any bridge, including pedestrian access points to such areas and structures.
- On or within 5 meters of any cemetery, including its roads, lanes and paths for travel within the cemetery.
- On or within 5 metres of any off-leash dog area.
- On or within 5 metres of any community garden and including any garden shed or greenhouse.
- On or within 5 metres of any designated fire route, or the entrance to or exit from a designated fire route or located so as not to block any fire hydrant.
- On or within 5 metres of any accessibility entrance or ramp or located in a way that blocks access to such entrances or ramps.
- On or within 5 metres any entrance, exit or a doorway to a building or structure, and including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, an area adjacent to such entrances or exits required in the event of fire or emergency.
- Within 5 metres of any railway tracks.
- Within 5 metres of rivers.

- Within the Environmental Protection Zone or any area identified as susceptible to flooding, erosion, slope instability, or other environmental hazards that presents a risk to health and safety.
- It is recommended that there be no more than five tents/temporary structures per cluster, with 10m of separation between each cluster, and a maximum of up to 25 tents or 30 individuals at any one location, to be assessed on a site-by-site basis.
- It is recommended that encampments or structures are not to be placed against, under, or be attached or tied to any building, structure, or tree. All temporary shelters or tents should strive to be freestanding. Assessments on impacts to City-owned infrastructure will take place on a site-by-site basis.