

Proposed Use of Public Spaces Engagement Summary Report

Introduction

This appendix documents the consultation undertaken by the City to inform the development of the proposed *Use of Public Spaces By-law*, with a particular focus on encampment-related considerations. The engagement approach was designed to gather perspectives from those most directly affected, those providing services and supports, Indigenous leadership, and the broader community.

The appendix presents detailed findings from Phase One targeted engagement and Phase Two survey-based consultation. While the results are not intended to represent statistically significant sampling, they provide valuable insight into priorities, concerns, and lived realities that shaped the proposed regulatory approach.

A high-level synthesis of this input, including key themes, areas of alignment and difference, and how feedback informed the proposed by-law, is provided in the main report. This appendix is included to provide additional detail and ensure transparency in the City's engagement process.

Phase One Consultation – 2025

Phase One engagement focused on early, targeted consultation to inform the foundational approach to the proposed *Use of Public Spaces By-law*, particularly as it relates to encampment actions and enforcement principles. The intent of this phase was to gather practical, lived, and service-sector perspectives to help shape early policy direction prior to broader public consultation.

In late 2025, the City engaged with organizations providing direct services to people living in encampments, Indigenous representative organizations, front-line outreach workers, and people with lived and living experience of homelessness. These discussions were exploratory in nature and emphasized understanding on-the-ground realities, safety considerations, communication needs, and appropriate supports.

Input from Phase One directly informed the development of the draft by-law concepts advanced to Phase Two consultation and is described in more detail below.

People with Lived Experience Preliminary Engagement

The City engaged directly with approximately 50 people with lived and living experience of homelessness and encampments, facilitated by the City's Encampment Response Team. Outreach was conducted in person through existing connections, including engagement while riding the Care Bus, allowing participation that was accessible and grounded in lived experience.

This preliminary engagement was intended to gather insight into how proposed public space rules and enforcement processes may be experienced on the ground, and what conditions are perceived as reasonable, safe, or harmful by those most directly affected. Not all survey questions were mandatory, and as a result the themes and percentages presented below reflect the views of respondents who answered each specific question, rather than all individuals engaged. The following key themes emerged from this input:

- **Notice and Enforcement Timelines**
Just over half of the respondents (approximately 52%) indicated that notice should be determined on a case-by-case basis, rather than standardized (approximately 26%). Feedback on specific timeframes commonly ranged from 24 hours to one week.
- **Support During a Notice or Enforcement**
Most respondents identified Outreach Workers (62%) and the Encampment Response Team (52%) as preferred supports to be present during an encampment notice or action. Fewer respondents indicated other supports such as a trusted agency (40%), peer support (26%) or nurse (24%) would be desired.
- **Support Needed During Relocation**
Having a safe place to move to (67%), time to pack (56%), clear communication (54%) and a ride to another location (54%) were among the top ranked responses to feeling supported during a relocation.
- **Trauma Informed & Respectful Engagement**
Respondents indicated that calmness (67%), respect (62%), and not being rushed (51%) as the top three terms that would describe trauma-informed care. Further, respondents identified outreach workers (59%), the encampment response team (46%), and putting up posters/signs (54%) as their preferred method for receiving updates.

Front-line Outreach Worker Preliminary Engagement

An online survey was used to engage 15 front-line outreach workers, primarily through the Outreach Workers' Network. Their input reflects direct, day-to-day experience working with people living in encampments and provides practical insight into safety concerns, site conditions, and service needs. The following themes emerged from this input:

- **Service Provider Notification**
There was no clear preference for when services providers wished to be informed of potential or imminent enforcement or closure of an encampment. Results ranged from immediately, when risk is increasing, at the first serious safety incident, when residents are given written notice, and only when enforcement is likely.
- **Involvement During Priority Responses**
Service providers unanimously (100%) indicated that the City's Encampment Response Team and front-line workers with established relationships with encampment residents should be involved in the response to support people.

- **Encampment Action Approach**

Most respondents (67%) indicated that a standard approach with flexibility based on risk is applied to all encampment actions. Further, all (100%) respondents indicated that clear, calm communication is critical during encampment actions.

- **Supports During Relocation**

It was unanimously agreed (100%) that having a safe place to relocate was important. And there was high support for access to health/medication, transportation, access to food/water, follow-up after relocation, access to harm reduction supplies, having a support worker present, access to cultural supports and potential storage for personal belongings.

Service Provider and Indigenous Leadership Preliminary Engagement

In December 2025, City staff convened a full-day, in-person facilitated session with representatives from 18 community organizations, including director-level participation from Indigenous leadership and agencies providing direct services to people living in encampments. The session was structured in two parts: a review of early identified potential designated encampment sites, and a discussion of early concepts for the proposed Use of Public Spaces By-law, including encampment-related actions and enforcement processes.

The following key themes emerged from the discussion related to encampment actions and enforcement:

- **Early Notification and Coordination**

Emphasis on early identification of encampments requiring relocation and proactive, coordinated planning with service providers. Timely information sharing was identified as critical to assessing risks, identifying supports, and preventing escalation.

- **Individualized, Needs-Based Approach**

Strong consensus that decisions should be guided by individualized risk and needs assessments, rather than standardized or prescriptive timelines.

- **Prioritization of Voluntary Approaches**

Engagement and voluntary relocation were consistently identified as the preferred approach, supported by trusted relationships, clear communication, and access to appropriate services.

- **Proportionate, Last-Resort Enforcement**

Enforcement should only be considered where health or safety risks cannot be mitigated, and must be trauma-informed, culturally safe, and proportionate. Non-uniformed, non-police involvement was strongly preferred, with escalation only where necessary.

- **Clear and Respectful Communication**

The importance of face-to-face, plain-language communication delivered by individuals with established rapport was emphasized, with a focus on maintaining dignity, transparency, and choice.

- **Practical Supports for Relocation**
The need for supports such as transportation, belongings storage, access to health care and harm reduction services, cultural and spiritual supports, and accommodation for pets and partners was highlighted. Participants noted the complexity of these supports and the need for adequate resourcing.
- **Systems Coordination and Continuous Improvement**
The importance of clear roles, protocols, and a coordinated systems approach was emphasized, including defined stages of response, risk assessment tools, communication templates, debrief processes, and information-sharing mechanisms that respect confidentiality.

Overall, participants reinforced that a coordinated, compassionate, and service-driven approach is essential to supporting effective encampment relocations.

Phase Two Consultation – 2026

Building on the foundational input gathered through Phase One engagement, Phase Two consultation focused on testing high-level draft provisions of the proposed by-law and gathering feedback from people with lived experience and the broader public. While the results do not represent a statistically significant sample of the broader population, they provide valuable insight into priorities, concerns, and areas of alignment and difference among respondents.

The survey was available from March 2 to March 15, 2026. It was administered online through the City's Get Involved platform, with paper copies available at City Hall and all four branches of the Thunder Bay Public Library.

In parallel, a paper-based survey was conducted with people with lived experience of homelessness and administered in person by the City's Encampment Response Team to support informed and accessible participation. Initial efforts to engage individuals directly at encampment locations during daytime hours were adapted to better reflect on-the-ground realities. To maximize participation, surveys were conducted at homeless service organizations, including the Salvation Army and Dew Drop Inn on the north side, PACE, Grace Place, and Shelter House on the south side.

People with Lived Experience - Survey Results

A total of 93 surveys were completed by people with lived experience. Among respondents, 69% reported direct experience living in an encampment, and 57% identified as Indigenous, underscoring both the relevance of the feedback and the importance of culturally informed approaches.

Overall, responses demonstrated strong alignment with principles of shared responsibility, safety, and respectful use of public spaces:

- 97% indicated it is important to protect public spaces from damage

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- 96% agreed that activities should not create health or safety risks for others
- 100% supported proper disposal of garbage and waste
- 88%–89% supported maintaining accessibility, including not blocking sidewalks, roads, or visibility

There was similarly strong support for clear and consistent rules governing public spaces:

- 100% supported prohibiting violent or threatening behaviour and preventing dumping
- 85% supported rules regarding permitted types of temporary shelters
- 86% supported limits on storing large amounts of materials
- 91% supported measures to reduce fire and heating risks
- Views were more mixed on prohibiting unauthorized utility use (53% support), reflecting differing perspectives on access to basic services

Respondents also expressed broad support for managing the scale and location of encampments:

- 96% supported preventing blockages of sidewalks, trails, and entrances
- 90% supported restrictions in unsafe or high-risk areas
- 94% supported minimum distances from sensitive land uses
- 87% supported limits on the space occupied by tents and belongings
- 71% supported limits on the number of tents in a single area

With respect to encampment relocation and enforcement processes, there was strong and consistent support for a compassionate, coordinated, and service-oriented approach:

- 95% supported advance notice prior to relocation
- 89% supported clear written communication
- 99% supported connection to outreach and services
- 96% supported consideration of individual needs
- 86%–89% supported assistance with storage and moving belongings
- 95% supported transportation assistance where needed
- 95% supported follow-up after relocation
- 97% supported coordination with service providers in advance
- 93% supported flexible timelines based on individual circumstances (e.g., weather, health)

Overall, 90% of respondents supported or somewhat supported moving forward with a by-law to establish rules for the use of City public spaces. Taken together, the results indicate that people with lived experience broadly support clear and enforceable rules when paired with fairness, flexibility, safety, and access to services, and when implemented in a way that respects dignity and individual circumstances.

Summary of Open Feedback - People with Lived Experience

Written input from people with lived experience focused less on specific by-law provisions and more on sharing lived realities of encampments, including safety, access to basic needs, service gaps, and interactions with outreach supports. This feedback provides important contextual insight into how public space rules may intersect with on-the-ground experiences.

There was a strong emphasis on safety, dignity, and access to basic necessities in encampments. Participants identified safety and security – both personal and public – as a priority, including interest in consistent, 24-hour safety presence to prevent conflicts and ensure shared use of spaces.

Access to basic amenities was a dominant theme. Respondents emphasized the need for reliable access to washrooms, water, electricity, lighting, sleeping supplies, and improved-quality tents, as well as extended service hours and more indoor options during non-winter months. Cleanliness and hygiene were also identified as critical, with calls for regular garbage and recycling services and maintaining encampments in a respectful, orderly condition.

Participants expressed support for existing outreach efforts, including the City’s Encampment Response Team and mobile services such as the Care Bus and SOS, and suggested expanding these services. There were repeated requests for more addiction and health supports, delivered in a non-judgmental manner, and for culturally appropriate services, including Indigenous-led healing practices.

Additional feedback underscored the importance of respect for individuals, surrounding areas, and the broader community. The need for better coordination with housing and social service partners was also mentioned. Participants noted the value of meaningful engagement, suggesting improved consultation tools and opportunities for positive, community-building activities.

General Public - Survey Results

A total of 163 responses were received through the public survey. Overall, results indicate strong support for clear rules governing the use of City public spaces, with a particular emphasis on safety, accessibility, and protection of public assets.

Respondents demonstrated high levels of agreement with core principles related to responsible use of public spaces:

- 94% identified it as important to protect public spaces from damage
- 96% agreed activities should not create health or safety risks
- 98% supported proper disposal of garbage and waste
- 92%–93% supported maintaining accessibility, including not blocking roads, sidewalks, or visibility

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There was similarly strong support for clear and enforceable rules:

- 96% supported prohibiting violent or threatening behaviour
- 98% supported rules to prevent dumping
- 90% supported clear rules for permitted types of temporary shelters
- 92% supported limits on storing large amounts of materials or belongings
- 79% supported prohibiting unauthorized use of water or electricity

Respondents also expressed strong support for measures to reduce risks and manage encampment impacts:

- 90% supported rules to reduce fire and heating risks
- 94% supported preventing encampments from blocking sidewalks, trails, entrances, or alleyways

Support remained generally high, though slightly lower, for measures related to encampment size and density:

- 82% supported limits on the number of tents in a single area
- 81% supported limits on the space occupied by tents and belongings

Location-based restrictions were more consistently supported:

- 89% supported minimum distances from sensitive land uses
- 88% supported restrictions in unsafe or high-risk areas

In contrast, views were more mixed regarding enforcement-related relocation processes and associated supports:

- 68% supported connection to outreach or services
- 63% supported advance notice
- Lower levels of support were observed for:
 - Clear written communication (48%)
 - Coordination with service providers (53%)
 - Consideration of individual needs (43%)
 - Transportation assistance (47%)
 - Follow-up supports (45%)
 - Assistance moving belongings (38%)
 - Storage of belongings (23%)
- 15% indicated that none of the listed measures should be required
- A small number of respondents (11%) selected “other” and reflected a wide range of perspectives, including calls for immediate enforcement and removal, expectations for personal responsibility, concerns about neighbourhood safety, as well as perspectives emphasizing compassion, cultural and peer supports, and minimizing harm.

Views were also divided regarding flexibility in relocation timelines:

- 43% supported flexible timelines based on circumstances (e.g., weather, health)
- 42% disagreed
- 15% were unsure

Overall, 85% of respondents supported or somewhat supported moving forward with a by-law to establish rules for the use of City public spaces. Taken together, the results indicate broad public support for clear, enforceable standards that prioritize safety, accessibility, and protection of public spaces, alongside more varied perspectives on the scope and nature of supports associated with enforcement actions.

Summary of Open Feedback - Public Survey

Written comments from the public reflected strong interest in ensuring that municipal public spaces remain safe, clean, accessible, and available for shared community use. Many respondents emphasized that public parks, trails, waterfront areas, and green spaces are intended for recreation and gathering, and expressed concern that the presence of encampments has, in some locations, reduced public access or created safety, sanitation, and environmental risk concerns – particularly for children, seniors, families, and nearby residents.

A recurring theme was the need for clear, consistent, and enforceable rules. Many respondents expressed frustration with what they perceive as insufficient enforcement of existing by-laws and stressed that new rules must be practical, well-communicated, and supported by adequate enforcement capacity. There was strong support for consistent application of rules to all users of public spaces, alongside expectations for accountability and consequences where rules are not followed.

Encampment location was a prominent issue. Many comments opposed encampments in parks, playgrounds, trails, waterfronts, residential areas, and other high-use or sensitive locations, and expressed support for limiting encampments to designated areas or prohibiting them in public spaces altogether. Environmental impacts, including garbage, human waste, and fire risks, were frequently cited, along with calls for improved sanitation infrastructure, waste management, lighting, and fire-safety measures where encampments in public spaces are permitted.

While views on enforcement and relocation varied, several respondents emphasized that any enforcement-related actions should be realistic, adequately resourced, and clearly defined. At the same time, many comments acknowledged that encampments reflect broader housing and social service gaps, and noted that sustainable solutions require coordination with housing, mental health, addictions, and outreach services. Overall, public input highlighted a desire for a balanced approach that protects public safety, access, and environmental integrity, while addressing homelessness through clear rules, effective enforcement, and complementary investments in services and housing.