



# Committee of the Whole Report

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<b>REPORT NUMBER</b> 209-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement	
<b>DATE PREPARED</b> March 16, 2026	<b>FILE</b>
<b>MEETING DATE</b> May 6, 2026	
<b>SUBJECT</b> Designated Encampment Sites – Special Committee of the Whole	

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

WITH RESPECT to Report 209-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement, we recommend that Site A – Current River Park as described in this report be recognized as a designated encampment site, subject to final floodplain mapping to establish final site boundaries;

AND THAT Site B – Freedom Park as described in this report be recognized as a designated encampment site;

AND THAT Site F – Simpson as described in this report be recognized as a designated encampment site;

AND THAT Budget Appropriation 13-2026 be approved to establish and fund the Designated Encampment Fencing capital project in the amount of \$208,500;

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

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report advances Part 5 of the Council-approved 10 Part Enhanced Encampment Response Plan, which directs the selection and implementation of designated encampment sites. The report recommends three sites – Current River Park, Freedom Park, and Simpson – as designated encampments (see Attachment A for preliminary site boundaries).

Designated encampment sites are a temporary, managed response to outdoor sheltering. They are not a replacement for housing. Their purpose is to improve outcomes, coordinate services, and better manage the use of public spaces while longer-term housing solutions continue to advance in the community.

Council-approved Distance Guidelines and Guiding Criteria informed the identification and evaluation of potential locations, supported by a broader scan of more than 1,200 municipally owned properties. Seventy-five sites were advanced for further analysis, and six sites were advanced for technical analysis and multi-stakeholder consultation.

The recommended sites have the strongest overall alignment with the Council-approved criteria, particularly in relation to service access, operational feasibility, and existing encampment activity. Site-specific considerations have been identified and can be managed through design measures (e.g., fencing, defined layouts), operational controls (e.g., monitoring, maintenance), and coordinated service delivery.

The recommendations have been informed by prior consultation on designated and sanctioned encampments, and a recent robust two-phase multi-stakeholder consultation process. Perspectives varied, with stronger support generally observed for sites with existing encampment activity and service access, and more concern raised for sites near sensitive uses or with possible community impacts.

## ***DISCUSSION***

Identifying designated encampment sites advances work under the City's Enhanced Encampment Response Plan (10-Part Plan), approved by Council in October 2024. This report responds to *Part 5 – Identify options for designated encampment locations within Urban Cores* of the 10-Part Plan.

This report focuses on the identification and evaluation of potential locations, and the selection of three recommended sites that best align with Council-approved tools, technical analysis, and multi-stakeholder consultation.

### **Site Identification & Evaluation**

The City's Distance Guidelines (Attachment B) and Guiding Criteria (Attachment C) were first applied to properties with known encampment activity. Six sites with the strongest overall alignment were identified as potential options (Attachment D). All sites generally meet the Distance Guidelines, though not all fully satisfy the Guiding Criteria.

The six potential sites were further evaluated with input from City divisions and staff from statutory local boards, including the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA) and Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS). Feedback is summarized at a high level.

Sites that meet most or all the criteria may still present operational and safety considerations. Identified considerations have been assessed in context, with a focus on the City's ability to mitigate risks through design, operational controls, and ongoing site management.

In parallel to technical analyses, the sites were also advanced for multi-stakeholder consultation. High-level results are summarized for each site, with further findings provided later in this report, and in greater detail in *Attachment E – Designated Encampment Sites Consultation Findings*.

A two-step review of over 1,200 municipally owned properties was also completed. Properties were screened out if they were smaller than 0.9 acres; required significant site preparation; were rural or semi-rural; were within 500 m of the Temporary Village; were subject to grant-funded development, existing agreements, or active negotiations; or were identified as Opportunity Sites or prime industrial lands.

This yielded 75 properties that were subject to further screening using the Distance Guidelines and Guiding Criteria (see Attachment F). None were determined to have sufficient alignment to be advanced for consultation. These properties have not undergone the same level of technical review and would require additional analysis if Council chooses to pursue them.

## **Site A – Current River Park (Recommended)**

### ***Technical Analysis***

#### Guiding Criteria Alignment

The Current River Park site has a history of encampment activity over the years and is sufficient in size. Roadway and parking lot access, and the site's flat terrain support emergency response, operational feasibility, and year-round operability. The site is close to transit, and several social services are within 1.5 km. There is no active programming on this part of the site, though the park is available for booking. Utilization rates are very low, with only one recorded booking since 2023.

#### Environmental Findings

A Due Diligence Risk Assessment (DDRA) related to soil contaminants of concern did not identify any unacceptable risks to human health, but it noted that ground-level produce gardens should be restricted.

#### Site-Specific Considerations

Through site-specific review, it was identified that the area's existing floodplain mapping is outdated, having last been completed in 1985. Preliminary updated floodplain mapping was provided and reviewed. Based on this information, the proposed area has been slightly shifted northwest, outside the preliminary floodplain boundaries (final site boundaries to be confirmed upon completed floodplain analysis).

The site is a mostly grassy area that limits accessibility in the context of mobility, and the surrounding road network lacks sidewalks and controlled crossings. The proximity to water, including the dam, presents potential safety risks. A multi-use trail currently runs through the proposed area. The cricket pitch in the park is well used, but the site is removed from the pitch.

These considerations can be mitigated through site design and operational measures, including:

- Directing individuals with accessibility needs to designated encampment sites that better meet those needs.
- Temporarily re-routing the walking trail to bypass the encampment area.
- Installing fencing and signage near water and dam access points.
- Maintaining site monitoring and coordinated service delivery.
- Installing fencing with privacy screen to enhance a sense of safety and security within and around the site.
- Restricting ground-level produce gardens.

### ***Consultation Findings***

Feedback on this site was mixed across groups. Public survey results were divided, with slightly more opposition than support and a mid-range ranking overall, while business owners expressed relatively low concern. People with lived experience showed strong support and ranked the site first, whereas service providers indicated moderate support. Drop-in event feedback showed lower overall agreement. The Waterfront BIA Board suggested this site instead of Freedom Park, and rail companies raised no concerns.

### ***Recommendation***

This site is recommended due to its strong alignment with the Guiding Criteria and site-specific considerations that can be mitigated through design and operational measures.

## **Site B – Freedom Park (Recommended)**

### ***Technical Analysis***

#### Guiding Criteria Alignment

The Freedom Park site has a long history of encampment activity and is close to the Waterfront Transit Terminal and multiple social and health care services. Roadway access and the site's flat and compact terrain support accessibility considerations, operational feasibility, emergency response, and year-round operability. The surrounding road network supports pedestrian safety with sidewalks and controlled crossings. There is no active programming on the site, and it cannot be booked for events.

### Environmental Findings

A DDRA related to soil contaminants of concern did not identify any unacceptable risks to human health but noted that ground-level produce gardens should be restricted.

### Site-Specific Considerations

Based on input from City divisions and statutory local boards, the proposed site has been refined to exclude the area North of the overpass. This adjustment reflects site access considerations identified through recent operational experience and an access and egress review. The site's size remains sufficient without the area North of the overpass.

The site is near watercourses, and beside a busy roadway, an unfenced rail corridor and LRCA regulated area which presents safety risks. It is also located near high-use waterfront and event spaces. Considerations can be mitigated through site design and operational measures, including:

- Reinforcing safe pedestrian behaviour through design, fencing, signage, and education with encampment residents.
- Installing fencing with privacy screen to create barriers between road and rail infrastructure. It will also enhance a sense of safety and security within and around the site.
- Restricting ground-level produce gardens.
- Maintaining site monitoring and coordinated service delivery.
- Establishing a process whereby event organizers can request on site support during events by assigning community-oriented City staff as scheduling allows (e.g., Encampment Response Team).

### ***Consultation Findings***

Feedback on this site varied between groups, with public survey results showing lower agreement and a lower overall ranking. Business owners expressed the highest level of concern among sites. In contrast, people with lived experience and service providers showed moderate to high support, ranking the site second and third respectively. In-person engagement reflected lower agreement. The Waterfront BIA Board raised concerns related to safety, surrounding land uses, and potential impacts on tourism and businesses. CPKC noted objection to this site due to safety concerns.

### ***Recommendation***

This site is recommended due to its strong alignment with the Guiding Criteria and site-specific considerations that can be mitigated through design and operational measures.

## **Site C – Island Drive Park (Not Recommended)**

### ***Technical Analysis***

#### Guiding Criteria Alignment

The Island Drive Park site includes sufficient site size and layout to support providing basic services. The area has no active programming and cannot be booked for events. The site has limited past encampment activity. Dirt paths support some accessibility considerations and operational feasibility. However, most of the site's terrain is uneven and naturalized, presenting year-round operability and access challenges for emergency responders on foot. The closest transit stop is 1.3km away and there are no social or health care services within 1.5km.

#### Site-Specific Considerations

The site is adjacent to an LRCA regulated area identified for riparian habitat improvement. Several species at risk have been observed on-site, further promoting this area for restoration. Safety concerns include proximity to deep water, heavy industrial land use (former thermal power station), and hydroelectric and water pollution control plant infrastructure. The surrounding road network lacks sidewalks and controlled crossings, and limited alternative route options in the event of a prolonged road closure.

While the following mitigation measures could be explored, combined associated costs exceed reasonability for temporary use:

- Installing permanent fencing around identified hazards and infrastructure.
- Confirming environmental conditions and remedial work prior to any use.
- Improving terrain conditions with grading and maintenance, which may negatively impact species at risk.
- Maintaining strong site monitoring and coordinated service delivery.

### ***Consultation Findings***

Feedback on this site was generally low across most groups. Public survey results showed limited support and moderate opposition, with a mid-range overall ranking, while business owners expressed the lowest level of concern compared to other sites. People with lived experience indicated mixed views and ranked the site lowest, and both service providers and in-person engagement reflected low levels of support. CPKC noted objection to this site due to safety concerns.

### ***Recommendation***

This site is not recommended due to environmental sensitivity and safety risks that would be costly to mitigate.

## **Site D – Kam River Heritage Park (Not Recommended)**

### ***Technical Analysis***

#### Guiding Criteria Alignment

The Kam River Heritage Park site has a long history of encampment activity, and sufficient size and layout to support providing basic services. The City Hall Transit Terminal is nearby, and multiple social and health care services are in the area. Roadway access, paved parking lots, and paved paths beside greenspace support accessibility considerations, operational feasibility, emergency response, and year-round operability. There is no active programming on the site, and it cannot be booked for events. The location also provides some separation from residential areas, reducing the likelihood of conflict.

#### Site-Specific Considerations

The site is adjacent to a rail yard and watercourse, presenting safety risks. It is also beside an LRCA regulated area identified for riparian habitat improvement. Additionally, the site was previously withdrawn from consideration for the Temporary Village due to cost-prohibitive safety mitigation measures required to satisfy external partners, such as funding dedicated resources to patrol the watercourse.

Although this option was previously withdrawn in the context of the Temporary Village, it was reconsidered for designated sites due to the more limited scale and context-specific nature of this model. Designated encampments are intended to accommodate fewer individuals with reduced infrastructure and staffing, allowing for more proportionate risk management. However, despite the smaller scale, external partner concerns and the mitigation measures required to address them have remained largely consistent, resulting in costs that continue to be prohibitive.

### ***Consultation Findings***

Feedback on this site was generally positive across most groups. Public survey results showed the highest level of agreement and ranked second, while business owners ranked the site second in terms of causing concern. People with lived experience indicated moderate to high support, and service providers showed the strongest support, ranking the site highest. In-person engagement also reflected relatively high agreement, though activity-based feedback was less favourable. CPKC noted objections to this site due to safety concerns. Additional stakeholder feedback included a letter expressing opposition from the Thunder Bay Rowing Club.

### ***Recommendation***

This site is not recommended, as the cost to mitigate safety risks is not justified for a space without consistent staff supervision or structured programming.

## **Site E – McKellar & Vickers (Not Recommended)**

### ***Technical Analysis***

#### Guiding Criteria Alignment

The McKellar & Vickers site has sufficient size and layout to provide basic services. It does not have active programming or bookable events. The site has limited evidence of past encampment activity, and road access at the site's edges. A road traverses the property, but its condition cannot safely support emergency response vehicles. Most of the site's terrain is uneven and naturalized, presenting year-round operability and access challenges for emergency responders on foot. Several transit stops are nearby while no social or health care services are within 1.5km.

#### Site-Specific Considerations

The site's safety risks are characterized by an unfenced rail corridor and light industrial area with heavy large vehicle activity. The site's unmaintained and uneven terrain restricts accessibility in the context of mobility. Additionally, it directly borders private property without any physical separation, increasing the risk of unintentional encroachment.

Potential mitigation measures include:

- Installing permanent fencing along the rail corridor.
- Rehabilitating existing thoroughfare to improve access and egress.
- Improving terrain conditions with grading and maintenance.
- Maintaining strong site monitoring and coordinated service delivery.
- Installing fencing with privacy screen to enhance a sense of safety and security within and around the site.

### ***Consultation Findings***

Feedback on this site was generally unfavourable across most groups. Public survey results showed the lowest level of agreement, with the site ranked last overall, while business owners expressed a moderate level of concern. In contrast, people with lived experience indicated moderate to high support, though the site ranked lower relative to other options. Service providers and in-person engagement reflected low overall support. CN does not recommend this site due to safety concerns. Additional stakeholder feedback included a letter expressing opposition from Sysco Thunder Bay.

### ***Recommendation***

The site is not recommended as its considerations are more difficult and costly to mitigate compared to other options.

## **Site F – Simpson (Recommended)**

### ***Technical Analysis***

#### Guiding Criteria Alignment

The Simpson site has a long history of encampment activity and is close to the City Hall Transit Terminal and multiple social and health care services. Roadway access and the site's flat and compact dirt terrain support accessibility considerations, operational feasibility, emergency response, and year-round operability. The surrounding road network supports pedestrian safety with sidewalks and controlled crossings. There is no active programming on the site, and it cannot be booked for events. The site is slightly smaller than ideal (approximately 0.9 acres) but is workable with intentional site design.

#### Environmental Findings

A DDRA identified a small area of concern where soil contamination could pose a risk to human health. As per the report's recommendation, steps will be taken to reduce potential exposure, such as raising tents in the affected area to allow for airflow and reduce potential exposure to vapours.

#### Site-Specific Considerations

The site's health and safety risks include its adjacency to a railyard and former industrial land uses. These risks can be effectively managed by mitigation measures, including:

- Anchoring plastic pallets in the affected area to provide airflow as recommended.
- Repairing existing fencing separating the site from the railyard.
- Installing fencing with privacy screen to enhance a sense of safety and security within and around the site.
- Maintaining strong site monitoring and coordinated service delivery.

### ***Consultation Findings***

Feedback on this site was generally strong across most groups. Survey results showed the highest level of agreement and the site ranked first overall, while business owners expressed a moderate level of concern. People with lived experience indicated high support and ranked it third overall, and service providers showed moderate to high support, ranking it second. In-person engagement reflected moderate agreement, with strong relative rankings. CPKC objects due to rail-safety concerns. The Fort William BIA Chair expressed no concerns, noting the site's long use as an encampment area.

### ***Recommendation***

This site is recommended due to its strong alignment with the Guiding Criteria and site-specific considerations that can be mitigated through design and operational measures.

## **Conclusion**

The recommended sites result from a process that combined Council-approved tools, comprehensive technical analysis, and robust consultation. Based on this work, it is recommended that the following be approved as designated encampment sites:

- Site A – Current River Park
- Site B – Freedom Park
- Site F – Simpson

While each site presents unique considerations, analysis confirms they can be appropriately mitigated through targeted design and operational measures. Informed by multi-stakeholder feedback and technical analysis, the installation of fencing at the designated sites to mitigate safety risks, define site boundaries, and support effective site management is also recommended. Establishing site-specific emergency response protocols with relevant partners will also be undertaken.

## ***CONSULTATION***

The consultation process was extensive and built on prior engagement related to designated and sanctioned encampments. Phase One focused on people with lived and living experience, front-line workers, service providers, Indigenous leadership, and community organizations. That feedback consistently emphasized proximity to services and transit, safety, dignity, sanitation, outreach supports, emergency access, and manageable site size, while reinforcing that designated encampments should be viewed as temporary, harm-reduction responses within a broader housing crisis.

Phase Two broadened consultation to include the wider community, business owners, people with lived and living experience, service providers, a public drop-in session, and targeted stakeholder outreach. Across these efforts, clear patterns emerged in both levels of agreement and site rankings. Sites such as Simpson and Kam River Heritage Park consistently received the highest levels of support and ranked among the top options across multiple groups, while McKellar & Vickers and Island Drive Park were consistently ranked lowest and received the least support. Current River Park and Freedom Park generated more mixed responses.

Across all engagement streams, common themes included safety, cleanliness, crime, impacts on businesses and public spaces, and the need for clear management measures such as providing sanitation services, waste collection, site monitoring, and defined rules. Targeted stakeholder feedback also highlighted site-specific constraints, including concerns from business areas about economic and tourism impacts, and objections from rail infrastructure stakeholders.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION**

The City currently provides site-support services at various encampment locations, including access to toilets, clean water, and waste removal. With the consolidation of services to 3 designated sites, these services can be delivered within existing budgets.

The Simpson Site would require cold-rated and fire-rated pallets to be installed in the area of concern identified by the DDRA. The estimated cost associated with the pallets is \$15,000 plus HST, which can be absorbed within anticipated in-year operating budget variance.

All three sites would require fencing and privacy screening, with an estimated delivery and installation cost of \$200,000 plus HST. As this would be a capital project, financing must be considered in accordance with the Budget Policy 05-02-01.

During the annual budget deliberation process, several capital projects were deferred to align the budget with Council's mandate. To maintain consistency with that approach, if this project is to be prioritized, it is recommended that an approved 2026 capital project be deferred or cancelled to accommodate this work, rather than accessing a reserve or reserve fund. Notwithstanding this approach, Administration has determined that this project does not align with the approved mandate or usage of any City reserve or reserve fund.

Administration has identified the 2026 Mission Island Bridge Construction project, in the amount of \$208,500, as a capital project that could be reprioritized. This 2026 capital funding represented an initial contribution toward the overall bridge construction project. While additional funding was approved in 2027, significant further funding is still required in subsequent years before commencement of construction. The intention was that funds be accumulated incrementally until full project funding was achieved. It is noted that Mission Island Bridge design work was also included in the 2026 Capital Budget and would continue as planned.

Attachment G presents Budget Appropriation 13-2026 which would establish the Designated Encampment Site Fencing capital project, defer the 2026 Mission Island Bridge Construction project, and reallocate the associated project financing accordingly.

### **BACKGROUND**

February 17, 2026, Corporate Report 110-2026 from R. Willianen, Supervisor – Encampment Response was presented and recommended Guiding Criteria to assist with identifying options for designated encampments be approved.

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 presented 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 – Preliminary Designated Sites Mapping  
Attachment B – Distance Guidelines  
Attachment C – Guiding Criteria  
Attachment D – Reference Document – Six Potential Sites  
Attachment E – Designated Encampment Sites Consultation Findings  
Attachment F – Properties Considered and Not Advanced for Further Consultation  
Attachment G – Budget Appropriation 13-2026

***REPORT PREPARED BY***

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***REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY***

Kerri Marshall, Commissioner - Growth

Date (04/30/2026)