

# Corporate Report

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<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	384-2024-City Manager's Office-Strategic Initiatives & Engagement	
<b>DATE PREPARED</b>	September 25, 2024	<b>FILE</b>
<b>MEETING DATE</b>	October 7, 2024	
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Enhanced Encampment Response – A Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan for Thunder Bay	

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

WITH RESPECT to Report 384-2024-City Manager's Office-Strategic Initiatives & Engagement, we recommend that the Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan (the Plan) as outlined in this report be approved;

AND THAT implementation of the Plan requiring approval or additional financial resources be brought back to Council as required;

AND THAT Administration provide progress updates to City Council as needed;

AND THAT a copy of this resolution and the Plan be sent to the Honourable Sean Fraser - Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada, and the Honourable Paul Calandra - Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing;

AND THAT a copy of this resolution and the Plan be sent to Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate;

AND THAT a copy of this resolution and the Plan be sent to the Honourable Patty Hajdu, MP Superior North and Indigenous Services Minister, MP Marcus Powlowski, MPP Kevin Holland, MPP Lise Vaugeois;

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

## **LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Within the Maamawe, Growing Together, City of Thunder Bay Strategic Plan 2023-2027:

**Strategic Direction: All Together. We honour the truth and reconcile for the future.**

GOAL: Strengthen the City's relationships with Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations to advance Truth & Reconciliation priorities together.

GOAL: Work toward inclusion, diversity, equity, and respect for all.

**Strategic Direction: Safety and Well-being. Our community is healthy, safe, and strong.**

GOAL: Improve access to supports for priority populations to narrow gaps in equity.

GOAL: Enhance safety and well-being at the community level through climate action and environmental design.

GOAL: Create and maintain strong neighbourhoods and Indigenized spaces where people connect and engage.

Additionally, this work connects with the following City Council approved strategic plans:

**Community Safety & Well-Being Plan**

Priority 2: Housing and Homelessness; Targeted Outcomes: Reduce Indigenous homelessness by 50 percent by 2027; Increase transitional and supportive housing opportunities in Thunder Bay

**Indigenous Relations & Inclusion Strategy**

Pillar 1: Respectful relations; 2. Honour & foster relations with Fort William First Nation, Metis, and local Indigenous Partners

Pillar 2: Responsive city; 5. Inclusive research & policy development

Pillar 4: Community prosperity; 9. Provide guidance to make City services responsive to needs of Indigenous Peoples; 10. Improve outreach & communications on City services; 11. Advocate & work with governments & local partners to improve outcomes

**Thunder Bay Drug Strategy**

Housing Pillar: Advocating for more supportive housing for people with complex needs; Contributing to the understanding of homelessness in Canada.

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

This report provides an overview of an enhanced encampment response through a proposed ten-part Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan (the Plan). It outlines a multifaceted approach for addressing homelessness and managing encampments in our municipality. It encompasses immediate interventions, systemic changes, and long-term strategies to reduce homelessness, improve public health and safety, and ensure dignified treatment of vulnerable populations. The Plan is centered around collaboration with community partners, enhanced sanitation, identifying designated encampment sites, and the development of temporary villages for shelter and support services.

**This ten-part Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan includes:**

- 1. Advocacy to Provincial and Federal Governments:** Continued efforts to secure long-term funding and policy support for housing solutions.
- 2. Community Partner Commitment:** Mobilizing community organizations to provide wrap-around services (healthcare, food, mental health support, etc.) to individuals in encampments.
- 3. Enhanced Cleanup and Sanitation:** Implementing regular cleanup and sanitation services to maintain health and safety in encampments.
- 4. Temporary Village:** Developing a temporary village with a capacity of up to 100 units, providing indoor sheltering options and access to essential services.
- 5. Designated Encampment Locations:** Up to three designating regulated encampment areas within the city's urban cores in accordance with the Council approved Distance Guidelines and with public engagement. Other encampments will be relocated.
- 6. By-law Assessment:** Review and recommend potential by-law provisions which enable encampments in accordance with the Plan. Such review would also ensure broader legal, regulatory, and constitutional compliance related to municipal actions towards encampments.
- 7. Encampment Response Team:** Establishing a dedicated team to monitor and support encampment compliance, and timely response to community and service provider concerns.
- 8. Lived Experience Advisory:** Engaging individuals with lived and living experience of unsheltered homelessness to guide decision-making and ensure efforts reflect the population's needs.
- 9. Communication and Engagement Plan:** Developing a robust and transparent communication strategy to keep the public and people living in encampments informed and engaged, fostering buy-in and collaboration.
- 10. Support for Long-Term Housing Strategies:** Aligning efforts with broader, long-term housing strategies led by the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) and other partners.

***DISCUSSION***

**2024 Update**

The unsheltered homelessness crisis continues to worsen across Ontario and in Thunder Bay. Locally, in 2024, the number of people living in encampments reached a peak of 200 unique individuals, which occurred much later in the year than previous years. This upward trend reflects not only the growing prevalence of encampments but also their persistence over time. It is thus reasonable to assume encampments will continue to follow an upward trend in 2025 unless immediate and innovative actions are taken.

Unmanaged encampments can pose serious health and safety risks to both their residents and the broader community as they often lack access to basic necessities such as clean water, sanitation, and adequate shelter. This may lead to higher incidences of public health and safety issues like infectious diseases, fire hazards, and rodents and other pests. The City does not consider encampments appropriate or dignified places for people to live, nor does it view encampments as a solution to homelessness. Encampments are a symptom of systemic failures that significantly impact municipalities, as they are the level of government left without sufficient resources to manage the issue on the ground.

Municipalities are obligated by law to uphold the human rights of encampment residents while also addressing public health and safety risks faced by those living there and the broader community. Recognizing these obligations, Council adopted a set of Distance Guidelines earlier this year to establish clear parameters for where encampments could be located. The Guidelines were designed to balance the public health and safety concerns of the broader community, while upholding individuals' rights to remain on public property in the absence of truly accessible indoor sheltering options. Their implementation has had mixed results.

One of the main strengths of the Guidelines has been their implementation through a voluntary, trust-based model, rather than a formal legal mechanism such as a by-law. Enforcement and compliance have been facilitated by the Lead Community Partner, whose longstanding relationships with encampment residents have resulted in many successful relocations. However, some individuals are not interested in engaging with the Lead Community Partner, and a very select few are unwilling to comply with the Distance Guidelines. Unengaged individuals in areas with competing uses are of particular concern and challenge. The adoption of the Guidelines has also led to a substantive increase in reports through dispatch, which has overwhelmed the Lead Community Partner's and Administration's capacity to respond in a timely manner as they lack sufficient human resources for a fully dedicated response.

Although the City anticipates significant progress over the coming years in housing availability, including supportive and transitional housing, immediate and innovative actions are required. An enhanced encampment response will provide interim solutions, such as indoor temporary sheltering options, and improve encampment site management so that resources are utilized most effectively. It also maintains a human rights-based approach that respects the dignity and needs of individuals living in encampments.

### **Human Rights-Based Approach to Encampments**

In April 2023, Council adopted a human-rights based approach, spearheading a broader movement among Ontario municipalities to address the needs of encampment residents with dignity and respect. This commitment aligns with recommendations from the Federal Housing Advocate's final report and positions Thunder Bay to benefit from significant encampment response funding. The 2024 federal [Solving the Housing Crisis:](#)

[Canada's Housing Plan](#) earmarks \$250 million, to be cost-matched provincially, for a total of \$500 million towards encampment responses. Eligibility to receive funds is contingent on adopting human rights-based community action plans.

The Plan aligns with a human rights-based approach to encampments by centering around core human rights principles as defined by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate's [final report](#) and other human rights guidance documents. The Plan also enhances Thunder Bay's capacity to secure funding from other orders of government for encampment response. Human rights principles are integrated via the following key elements:

### **1. Recognition of Encampment Residents as Rights Holders**

Encampment residents are recognized as rights holders. The Plan understands encampments as a symptom of systemic housing failures and an assertion of individuals' right to adequate housing. This principle is put into practice by integrating encampment residents into decision-making processes that affect their lives and upholding their right to shelter in the absence of truly accessible indoor sheltering options.

### **2. Meaningful Engagement and Participation**

The Plan upholds the principle of meaningful and effective participation by establishing a Lived and Living Experience Advisory Committee. This committee provides a formal platform for individuals with lived and living experience to have their voices heard and integrated into the Plan's future development and implementation.

### **3. Prohibition of Forced Evictions**

The Plan prohibits forced evictions of encampment residents, without providing access to viable indoor alternatives that meet their individual needs. This is operationalized through the identification of designated encampment sites and the implementation of a temporary mini cabin village model that offers immediate, safer, and supportive indoor sheltering options while long-term housing options are pursued.

### **4. Dignified Access to Services**

The Plan prioritizes public health and safety by providing dignified access to basic services such as sanitation, clean water, and waste management. This is achieved through enhanced cleanup and sanitation services and coordinated community partner response at designated encampment sites.

### **5. Respect for Indigenous Rights**

The Plan acknowledges the over-representation of Indigenous peoples living in encampments and respects the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples. This

acknowledgement prioritizes engagement with Indigenous leaders and representative organizations.

### **Ten-Part Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan (the Plan)**

This Plan outlines ten main goals and objectives that would solidify a more cohesive response to addressing unsheltered homelessness in the community. It will require an all-of-community collective impact approach, including leadership from City Council and City Administration, in its development and implementation. Administration believes that by bringing the patchwork quilt of initiatives together, it will enhance our response efforts, in turn 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.

The following is the overarching ten-part Plan:

#### **1. Continued Advocacy to Provincial and Federal Governments to Address Homelessness**

*Objective:* Sustained pressure on other orders of government to provide resources and make systemic changes that address housing insecurity and homelessness.

Continued advocacy to Provincial and Federal governments is essential to secure the long-term funding, systemic changes, and resources needed to effectively address homelessness. These other orders of government have the fiscal capacity and legislative power to implement systemic solutions, such as affordable housing programs, mental health services, and income support, that municipalities alone cannot provide. By maintaining ongoing dialogue and pressure, the municipality keeps homelessness as a top priority on the broader political agenda and strengthens partnerships that can deliver lasting, large-scale impact.

#### **2. Garner Community Partner Commitment for 360-Support to Encampment Residents**

*Objective:* A collaborative, multi-agency support system is in place for individuals in encampments.

The Plan focuses on bringing together municipal departments, community partners, and individuals with lived and living experience to work collaboratively. This comprehensive approach ensures that the City's efforts are not fragmented and that individuals in encampments receive holistic, 360-degree support – from healthcare and food to housing and employment services. A key focus of this work will include implementing data sharing agreements amongst all partners involved at all levels of the response, including front-line and system planning, to support evaluation and immediate, interim, and long-term efforts.

**3. Implement Enhanced Cleanup and Sanitation Support**

*Objective:* Health and safety risks associated with encampments are mitigated by meeting public health standards with regular, coordinated garbage collection and adequate sanitary conditions.

Encampments, especially those without proper sanitation and services, can pose public health and safety risks. The Plan prioritizes risk mitigation by enhancing sanitation efforts and garbage removal, thereby reducing the likelihood of infectious disease outbreaks, and environmental damage, rodent and pest infestations. This provides dignity to encampment residents and better public health and safety to both encampment residents and the broader community.

**4. Develop and Implement a Temporary Village to Support Up to 100 Units**

*Objective:* Temporary indoor sheltering units with comprehensive wrap-around services are provided as a Housing First approach to encampments.

Temporary indoor sheltering units with comprehensive wrap-around services offer a Housing First approach that prioritizes stable housing as the foundation for addressing homelessness. These units provide immediate, secure shelter while offering access to essential services such as hygiene facilities, healthcare, mental health support, and employment assistance. This approach not only improves residents' quality of life but also addresses the root causes of homelessness, helping individuals transition from temporary shelter to long-term housing. By stabilizing people in a supportive environment, the Housing First model reduces the need for reactive measures and leads to more sustainable outcomes.

**5. Identify Options for Designated Encampment Locations within Urban Cores**

*Objective:* 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.

Designated encampment areas support the efficient delivery of essential services like outreach, sanitation, and healthcare. This approach reduces the strain on community partners who would otherwise need to support individuals across multiple, unregulated locations. It also simplifies Administration by centralizing resources, making it easier to monitor conditions and support compliance. For encampment residents, these designated areas offer reliable access to critical services, improving health and well-being while fostering a more stable and supportive environment.

**6. Review Municipal By-Laws and Assess Public Space Use By-Law Implementation**

*Objective:* Drawing on a review of other municipal by-laws, assess the development and implementation of a public space use by-law that includes regulations on sheltering.

As municipal responses to encampments evolve across Ontario, by-laws regulating use of public spaces, which include encampment specific regulations, are being implemented in some communities. A review of such by-laws and legal implications would allow Administration to assess and consider the development and implementation of a similar by-law. The by-law would clearly establish and define how public spaces are to be used by all community members, including people living in encampments. This review may also lead Administration to consider the development and implementation of by-laws and policies related to accelerating non-market rental housing development and tenancy protections.

**7. Establish an Encampment Response Team to Support Compliance**

*Objective:* A specialized team manages encampment response, supports compliance, and provides connection to support services for encampment residents.

A specialized team dedicated to managing encampments ensures the municipality can more effectively respond to community complaints, maintain safety, and coordinate sanitation services like garbage collection and waste management. This focused team enables quicker, more organized responses to issues that arise, ensuring encampments are maintained in a safer and hygienic manner. By centralizing oversight, the team helps reduce the strain on other municipal departments and provides a structured, consistent approach to managing encampments while addressing community concerns in a timely and efficient way. The team would also lead the Lived and Living Experience Advisory Committee.

**8. Launch a Lived and Living Experience Advisory Committee to Guide Development and Implementation of an Action Plan**

*Objective:* The input of individuals with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness will be at the heart of decision-making processes.

Incorporating the input of individuals with lived and living experience of unsheltered homelessness ensures that efforts and decisions are grounded in the realities and needs of those directly affected. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into the challenges faced in accessing services, navigating systems, and overcoming barriers to stable housing. By integrating their voices in decision-making, more effective, humane, and responsive solutions that better address the root causes of unsheltered homelessness and improve the outcomes of implemented strategies are developed and implemented.



**9. Develop and Implement a Communication and Engagement Plan**

*Objective:* Key stakeholders, the public, community partners, and encampment residents are informed of the City’s unsheltered homelessness and encampment strategies, fostering buy-in and engagement.

A key aspect of the Plan is fostering understanding and engagement. By transparently communicating the City’s approach and allowing space for input from the public and community partners, the City can build trust with a diversity of stakeholders. A robust communication plan ensures that misinformation is minimized, and that the entire community understands the steps being taken to manage unsheltered homelessness.

**10. Support Long-Term Housing for All Strategies Led by the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration (TBDSSAB) and Other Partners**

*Objective:* Contribute to and enhance long-term housing strategies to provide permanent solutions for homelessness.

While encampments are a symptom of the housing and homelessness crisis, the Plan emphasizes both temporary solutions (such as the creation of a temporary village) and alignment with long-term housing strategies. By addressing both the immediate needs and systemic causes of unsheltered homelessness, the Plan ensures that the City is not only reacting to the crisis but also working towards its resolve.

**CONSULTATION**

**People with Lived and Living Experience in Encampments (PWLLE)**

Engaging with people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) in encampments on matters that impact their lives is a central tenant of a human rights-based approach. In keeping with the City’s commitment to a human-rights based approach, Administration engaged with a small number of PWLLE in encampments on the overarching components of this Plan, including the development of a formal PWLLE Advisory Committee.

Overall, the small group of individuals consulted were mostly supportive of the components of the ten-part Plan but did have lots of questions and some early considerations for implementation.

The following are the themes that resulted from discussions:

**Safety** – Safety continues to be a concern among encampment residents, suggesting the creation of complaint mechanisms to support conflict resolution, and the exploration of an emergency call system for more serious health and safety issues.

**PWLLE Input** – Encampment residents felt the establishment of an Advisory is very valuable and important, suggesting that two groups may need to be formed to effectively support individuals from both sides of town, and included ideas on accessibility to meetings and the connectivity between the two groups.

**Designated Sites** – Individuals engaged noted the need for the City to take into consideration the proximity of designated sites to key services used by residents. They also noted fear of being put on spotlight through the designation of sites, citing already feeling like people come by to view them like “zoo animals”.

**Temporary Village** – Residents engaged were all very supportive of this idea, some noting this would improve stability greatly. Individuals expressed prioritizing offering units to individuals most in need based on key risk factors.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATION***

Maintaining the current approach in 2024 will be funded within the approved operating budget. As previously reported, the full financial implications to support specially trained outreach workers, and related health and safety response measures is approximately \$450,000 and will be brought forward through the 2025 Budget process. The financial implications for implementing additional components of this Plan will be presented to City Council for approval as initiatives are formally developed.

### ***CONCLUSION***

This comprehensive Plan is not just a response to the unsheltered homelessness crisis; it is a strategic investment in the well-being of our entire community. By taking immediate action, collaborating with key partners, and focusing on long-term housing solutions, the municipality can significantly reduce unsheltered homelessness, improve public health, and create a safer, more compassionate environment for all residents.

By adopting this Plan, the municipality positions Thunder Bay to:

- Secure additional funding from Provincial and Federal governments by demonstrating leadership and proactive solutions.
- Leverage community partnerships, reducing the sole financial burden on the City.
- Actualize cost savings in the long-term by transitioning individuals from homelessness into stable housing.

It is therefore concluded that the City of Thunder Bay take a leadership role by adopting the ten-part Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan, fully and meaningfully engaging with people with lived and living experience of unsheltered homelessness,

Indigenous leadership and representative organizations, community partners, and the public to shape the full development and implementation the Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

June 27, 2022, Memorandum from C. Olsen, Manager – Community Strategies, was presented at Committee of the Whole on June 27, 2022, requesting an opportunity to provide an update relative to the ongoing collaborative approach responding to unsheltered homelessness in the community. Executive Director Holly Gauvin -Elevate NWO, and Staff Sergeant Jason Anderson – Community Outreach - Thunder Bay Police Service provided an overview relative to the above noted and responded to questions.

August 8, 2022, Memorandum from C. Olsen, Manager – Community Strategies, was presented to Committee of the Whole and a resolution was passed, and ratified at City Council on August 22, 2022 that approved the financial support for an Unsheltered Homelessness Pilot Project, maintaining peer involvement and appropriate amenities provided to Elevate NWO and authorized the General Manager of Development and Emergency Services and the City Clerk to execute necessary documents.

February 13, 2023, Susan Lester and Jeanne Adams appeared before Committee of the Whole and provided a PowerPoint presentation, relative to encampments on the McVicar Creek Recreational Trail, and responded to questions.

May 1, 2023, City Council ratified a resolution to adopt a human-rights based approach to responding to encampments, including a \$20,000 expansion in the Operating Budget for 2024, and directing Administration conduct community consultation to better understand the feasibility of designated/supported encampments, and to work with the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee to advocate to the provincial government.

September 25, 2023, Memorandum from C. Olsen, Acting Director – Strategic Initiatives & Engagement, was presented to Committee of the Whole and provided an update on the response to unsheltered homelessness, including preparations for the upcoming winter months.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

***REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED***

None

***REPORT PREPARED BY***

Cynthia Olsen, Director – Strategy & Engagement – City Manager’s Office  
Rilee Willianen, Drug Strategy Specialist – City Manager’s Office

***REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY***

John Collin, City Manager

Date (10/01/2024)