

# Corporate Report

**REPORT NUMBER** 057-2025-Growth-Strategy & Engagement

**DATE**

**PREPARED**

March 4, 2025

**FILE**

**MEETING DATE**

April 7, 2025

**SUBJECT**

Report Back – Temporary Village Initiative – Site Location

## **RECOMMENDATION**

WITH RESPECT to Report 057-2025-Growth-Strategy & Engagement, we recommend that a portion of the lands owned by the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA) and municipally known as 1111 Fort William Rd., Thunder Bay, be approved as the site for the Temporary Village Initiative, subject to the execution of an acceptable lease agreement, approval from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks if required, and final approval of the LRCA’s Board of Directors;

AND THAT Administration proceed to negotiate the required lease agreement with the LRCA;

AND THAT the Director, Strategy & Engagement have delegated authority to make decisions regarding operationalizing the Temporary Shelter Village Initiative;

AND THAT the Director, Strategy & Engagement be authorized to execute documents for the Temporary Shelter Village Initiative and for the duration of the project, on terms satisfactory to the City Solicitor and City Manager;

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**

In October 2024, Council approved the City's 10-part *Enhanced Encampment Response – A Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan for Thunder Bay*. The cornerstone of the plan is the Temporary Village Initiative (the Village), which received conditional approval from Council pending approval of a site recommendation.

In November 2024, Council did not approve the Village site recommendation and directed Administration to revisit the site selection process. In response, Administration undertook a robust process to reassess alternative municipally-owned properties. Concurrently, a public call for private land for lease, purchase, or donation was also launched. To widen the scope, Administration launched a survey seeking suggestions on site locations from the public, which highlighted mixed views on the Village.

These efforts failed to yield any strong alternative municipally-owned options. Through internal discussions and insights from public engagement, a property – 1111 Fort

William Road (the Property) – owned by the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA), was identified as the most viable option. It closely aligns with site selection criteria and addresses a few common concerns and suggestions. The LRCA Board has approved, in principle, leasing the Property to the City of Thunder Bay, subject to the execution of an acceptable lease agreement, approval from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks if required, and final approval of the Board of Directors.

If Council approves the site recommendation, Administration will proceed with lease negotiations and collaborate with the LRCA on public engagement. The City's engagement efforts will prioritize informing the public and engaging with service providers and Indigenous leaders to gather meaningful input on the Village's development and implementation. Feedback received will be used to address concerns raised and support the Village in being responsive to community perspectives.

## ***DISCUSSION***

Over the winter, two large fires at encampments resulted in serious injury and loss of life. These tragedies underscore the serious risks faced by individuals living in encampments over the colder months. To prevent further harm, there is a need for swift and decisive action to provide safer alternatives. Additionally, the City has been approved to receive significant funding which is contingent on meeting firm project deadlines. These new developments reflect the need to approve a site recommendation without further delay.

### **External Funding Update**

The City has been informed that it has been approved to receive \$2,800,487 in funding toward capital costs associated with the Village. This represents over half of the estimated capital and construction costs. Full access to this funding is contingent on beginning construction within 120 days of the agreement's signing (March 21, 2025) and completing construction of at least 80 units and ancillary structures by December 31, 2025.

Administration remains committed to actively pursuing additional external funding opportunities to minimize the municipality's financial contributions to the Village. Ongoing discussions are taking place with other orders of government and charitable organizations with regards to additional funding sources. Administration will provide Council with updates as necessary.

### **Reassessment of Site Options**

In response to Council's direction to reassess alternative municipally-owned property for the Village, Administration undertook a robust process that included both an internal review and public engagement. To start, Administration launched a public survey

inviting respondents to suggest potential locations for the Village – results are summarized in the *Consultation* section. Concurrently, Administration issued a call for private property owners willing to lease, donate, or sell land for the Village. Of the few responses received, none were viable. Administration also independently explored land available for purchase that met previously identified selection criteria. However, the options were ultimately found to be cost-prohibitive.

Alongside public engagement, Administration also conducted an internal comprehensive reassessment of municipally-owned properties with several Divisions participating – Engineering, Development Services, Parks & Open Spaces, Recreation & Culture, Strategy & Engagement, and Thunder Bay Fire Rescue. To compile a realistic and reasonable list of properties, the following were excluded:

- Properties with playgrounds or recreational equipment
- Properties smaller than 0.55 acres to accommodate a minimum of 45 units
- Properties subject to ongoing negotiations for future residential or commercial development
- Properties the City is leasing or licensing to other parties
- Properties known to be uninhabitable due to environmental or hazardous conditions
- Properties with confirmed future municipal uses

Administration initially reviewed over 50 municipally-owned sites identified by Realty Services. Through a screening process, sites that did not meet baseline technical or operational requirements were removed from further consideration. From that list, Administration ranked 29 municipally-owned sites against the previously established site selection criteria based on a scoring rubric, technical feasibility, and operational considerations.

### **Ranked Properties List Results**

The reassessment of municipally-owned properties did not yield any strong options for the Temporary Village Initiative, as outlined in *Appendix A – Ranked Properties List*. It is important to emphasize that a high ranking does not automatically indicate the most suitable site. While the scoring rubric provided a valuable assessment, professional expertise and judgment were applied to determine the best recommendation. Factors such as operational feasibility, financial implications, and the potential impact on surrounding neighbourhoods were all carefully evaluated. As a result, sites with fewer anticipated operational and community-related challenges have been prioritized for further consideration.

Sites located near or within high-density residential areas would likely face considerable challenges, including anticipated community opposition, reduced public support, and limited opportunities to mitigate negative impacts on neighbouring properties. While these sites achieved high technical rankings, Administration concluded that the risks and challenges of municipally-owned properties significantly embedded within

residential neighbourhoods outweighed their technical rating. As a result, the following properties, despite their rankings, are not recommended:

- 107 Enniskillen Ave – 82% ranking
- 223, 219 Tupper St & 224 Camelot (one lot) – 80% ranking
- Alma Adair Park (625 Waterloo St S) – 72% ranking
- 234, 252 & 218 Empire Ave W (one lot) – 70% ranking
- 1000 Athabasca St – 70% ranking

In addition, several other properties ranked similarly or slightly lower than the recommended site. While these locations are not directly embedded within residential neighbourhoods, they are either in close proximity to schools or require significant and potentially cost-prohibitive site preparation. Considering these factors, Administration does not recommend the following additional properties:

- Treed Property Beside Salvation Army – 76% ranking
- Treed Property Adjacent to Hillyards Lands Off-Leash Dog Park – 73% ranking
- 122, 150 Empire Ave E – 70% ranking

Furthermore, 114 Miles St E (87% ranking) is not recommended due to Council's previous decision. Kam River Park (74%) continues to not be recommended given that, as previously reported to Council, its costs related to site preparation are prohibitive.

### **Site Recommendation – 1111 Fort William Road**

Subsequent to Administration's robust reassessment which failed to yield any strong municipally-owned options, internal discussions and insights from public engagement results led to the identification of a property at 1111 Fort William Road (the Property) owned by the Lakehead Region Conservation Area (LRCA).

The Property is not included in the ranked properties list because it is not municipally-owned. However, in applying the same criteria, the Property receives a 71% ranking. Although this site ranks 8<sup>th</sup> overall, it does not carry the same degree of risks or limitations identified above. Instead, it reflects a balanced approach, prioritizing the safety and well-being of Village residents and the broader community.

Administration approached the LRCA with a request to consider entering into a lease agreement with the City for the purpose of locating the Village on the Property. The LRCA's Board approved in-principle the City's request, subject to the execution of an acceptable lease agreement, approval from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks if required, and final approval of the LRCA's Board of Directors.

The Property aligns well with the site selection criteria. Further details as they relate to the Property and site selection criteria are below.

1. **Municipally Owned:** Although the Property is not municipally owned and the City must enter into a lease agreement, at nominal cost, it means that no existing municipal uses or development plans are disrupted. Additionally, partnering with the LRCA demonstrates a community-based and collective impact approach.
2. **Proximity to Supportive Services:** Multiple supportive services and public transit stops are within walking distance which supports residents in transitioning out of the Village and into appropriate housing.
3. **Historical Encampment Areas:** The Property is near areas with known encampment-related activity which increases the likelihood of individuals accepting offers to reside in the Village.
4. **Sufficient Space:** The Property can comfortably accommodate up to 100 units, hygiene and laundry facilities, office and communal space, an outdoor gathering space, and staff parking.
5. **Readiness for Construction:** Existing services (power, sewer, and water) are within reasonable distance and the Property is relatively flat and clear. Light grading to the site will provide positive drainage. The site has a high degree of readiness for construction which helps the project stay within budget and on track with its anticipated timelines.
6. **Alignment with Growth Goals:** Since the Property is not municipally owned, its use does not interfere with the broader growth plans or other municipal priorities.
7. **Safety Considerations:** The Property is adjacent to a busy road and bordered by a sidewalk. To enhance pedestrian safety, Administration will assess the feasibility of installing a pedestrian crosswalk to provide safe access to and from the site. A security camera associated with the City's Eye on the Street program is also nearby and has a full view of the property.

Furthermore, opaque fencing will be installed around the Property to deter onlookers and limit access to the Neebing-McIntyre Floodway. An 8-foot-high privacy fence will also be installed to create a barrier between the Village and a nearby residential property.

8. **Emergency Access:** The location is easily accessible for emergency services and first responders. A regulation fire lane for emergency vehicle access will be on the Property.
9. **Active Uses:** Since the Property is not municipally-owned, there are no active municipal uses.

The Property also offers other features that enhance its suitability. Its central location helps address public feedback and split opinions related to North and South site

options. The site is not located directly within a residential neighbourhood which reduces the potential for conflicts, and the adjacent Neebing-McIntyre Floodway provides a natural buffer to the Thunder Centre which reduces potential disruptions.

### **Next Steps**

If Council approves the recommended site, Administration will proceed with lease negotiations and collaborate with the LRCA on public engagement. Administration will prioritize educating the public and engaging with service providers and Indigenous leaders to gather meaningful input on the Village's development and implementation. While all feedback will be welcomed, the site selection itself will not be the primary focus of the City's engagement efforts. Rather, we will use the public engagement to inform, and to develop ideas to mitigate specific concerns that may be expressed.

## **CONSULTATION**

### **General Feedback**

A dedicated email was created and promoted as a mechanism for citizens to provide open feedback on the Village. So far, 15 responses have been received. The input received echoes key themes from the survey results, including opposition to the Village, support for the original site recommendation, a preference for permanent, long-term housing solutions, and interest in repurposing or renovating existing buildings.

### **Survey Results Summary**

To gather public input on site options, a survey was conducted from December 2, 2024, to January 15, 2025. A total of 473 survey responses were received (469 electronically and 4 in hard copy), alongside 43 submissions via an interactive map tool. The survey collected qualitative data through three open-ended questions about anticipated benefits, suggested locations, and additional feedback.

It is important to note that the survey was self-directed rather than a random sample of the population. As such, the results are not statistically significant and cannot be generalized to the entire population of Thunder Bay. They represent the views of those who chose to participate.

### **Key Findings**

*1. How do you think a temporary shelter village will benefit our community?*

- 127 responses (27%) expressed they saw no benefit in the Village, with concerns about its effectiveness, cost, and the risk of it becoming permanent.

- 129 responses (27%) highlighted the Village as a secure, warm, and dignified living space for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- 86 responses (18%) noted its potential to connect residents with essential services.
- 75 responses (16%) emphasized the Village's role in providing stability and improving overall well-being.
- Additional perceived benefits included reducing encampments (63 responses, 13%), improving public cleanliness (58 responses, 12%), reducing public health and public safety risks (48 responses, 10%), and serving as a transitional step to permanent housing (46 responses, 10%).

2. *Where in Thunder Bay do you think the temporary shelter village should be located?*

Of the 516 responses (473 survey + 43 map tool), results demonstrate varied opinions on location:

- 186 responses (36%) suggested areas or locations on the South side.
- 134 responses (25%) suggested areas or locations on the North side.
- 52 responses (10%) proposed central locations.
- 59 responses (11%) stated the Village should not be built anywhere
- 35 responses (7%) suggested repurposing existing buildings instead of constructing a new site.

Of the 257 respondents who identified specific sites, the most frequently mentioned locations were:

- 114 Miles Street E – 71 responses (28%)
- Former Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital grounds – 48 responses (19%)
- Kam River Park – 37 responses (14%)
- Current River Park – 16 responses (6%)

Beyond identifying potential locations, responses also highlighted several key factors that should guide the final site selection:

- 124 responses (24%) emphasized the importance of proximity to supportive services and public transit
- 61 responses (12%) expressed concerns about locating the Village near parks, schools, daycares, or residential neighbourhoods
- 39 responses (8%) suggested avoiding locations near businesses and tourism areas

3. *Any other feedback?*

Due to the broad nature of this question, responses varied widely. This section summarizes the key themes that emerged.



- **Divided Opinion** – Responses were split on the Village and the City's approach. Supporters saw it as a life-saving intervention offering stability, dignity, and services. Opponents viewed it as a "hand-out" that could increase homelessness and public safety concerns.
- **Urgency & Delays** – Some expressed frustration over implementation delays and rejection of the previous site recommendation. Concerns about worsening winter conditions, encampment safety, and recent deaths were cited as reasons for immediate action.
- **Temporary Nature** – Some feared the Village would become permanent, referencing past projects. Others felt it should be a permanent solution.
- **Alternative Approaches** – Suggestions included repurposing vacant buildings, expanding emergency shelters, or directing funds to existing housing organizations instead of building temporary shelters.
- **Financial Considerations** – While some opposed municipal funding, other opposed without federal or provincial support. Some supported increased budget allocations for individuals experiencing homelessness.
- **Safety & Security** – Concerns about theft, drug activity, and vandalism were raised. Respondents suggested 24/7 security and police presence, though some believed a well-managed Village could improve safety over unmanaged encampments.
- **Access & Residency** – Suggestions included prioritizing long-term Thunder Bay residents and requiring participation in treatment, work programs, or life skills training. Cleanliness, behaviour, and rule enforcement concerns were also raised, with calls for eviction as a consequence for repeated violations.
- **Systemic Issues** – Responses highlighted that homelessness as a symptom of broader policy failures, and urged greater investment in affordable housing, mental health, and addiction services.

For comprehensive and additional findings, see *Appendix B – Detailed Survey Results*.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION**

The 2025 Capital Budget included the \$5.0 million Temporary Village project, funded through the Renew Thunder Bay Reserve Fund. Administration has secured a \$2.8 million third-party contribution, reducing the amount required from the Reserve Fund. Efforts to secure additional external funding are ongoing to further lessen the financial impact on the Reserve Fund. A budget appropriation reflecting this change will be presented to Council at a later date.

The \$2.8 million contribution is contingent on meeting project deadlines. Further delays in site selection could jeopardize the City's ability to meet key milestones and put this funding at risk.

Costs related to executing the lease with the LRCA and the potential installation of a pedestrian crosswalk will be covered within the previously approved Village budget. If unforeseen circumstances or cost escalations make the budget caps for infrastructure, construction, or operations unworkable, Administration will return to Council for further direction.

### **CONCLUSION**

The process to identify alternative site options revealed the complexities and challenges of balancing community concerns with site selection criteria. While no site will satisfy all perspectives, Administration is committed to ongoing engagement with the public to mitigate concerns from the community.

Moving forward with the Village's site selection is needed to proceed with LRCA negotiations, receive significant funding toward the project, and provide immediate relief to the crisis while long-term solutions are pursued. To that end, Administration recommends Council approve 1111 Fort William Road as the site for the Village as it represents the most viable path forward.

### **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.

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.

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

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Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, and provincial and federal members of parliament

October 21, 2024, Corporate Report 394-2024 from R. Willianen, Encampment Response Lead was presented and recommended that the Temporary Village Initiative be approved conditional on final site approval by City Council, and that Administration conduct further analysis and time-limited consultations on the two proposed site locations.

November 25, 2024, Corporate Report 425-2024 from R. Willianen, Encampment Response Lead was presented and recommended that 114 Miles St E be approved as the site for the Temporary Shelter Village Initiative. City Council did not accept the recommendation and referred the report back to Administration to determine alternate sites that are achievable within the approved Operating and Capital cost envelopes, in ranked priority, with the level of alignment based on the existing site selection criteria.

### ***REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED***

Appendix A – Ranked Properties List  
Appendix B – Detailed Survey Results

### ***REPORT PREPARED BY***

Rilee Willianen, Encampment Response Lead – Growth

### ***REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY***

Matt Pearson, Acting Commissioner- Growth

03/31/2025