

Corporate Report

REPORT NUMBER 143-2025-Growth-Strategy & Engagement		
DATE PREPARED	April 15, 2025	FILE
MEETING DATE April 28, 2025		
SUBJECT	Report Back – Temporary Village Initiative – Site Location Comparison	

RECOMMENDATION

WITH RESPECT to Report 143-2025-Growth-Strategy & Engagement, we recommend that Kam River Heritage Park be approved as the site for the Temporary Shelter Village Initiative;

AND THAT Appropriation Change Order 07-2025 be approved;

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 response to Council's direction, Administration conducted a comparative analysis of two sites for the Temporary Shelter Village: Kam River Heritage Park and 1111 Fort William Road. The analysis considered feedback from various groups, operational and technical considerations, alignment with site selection criteria and additional key factors, and cost.

Administration recommends Kam River Heritage Park as the Village's site due to its municipal ownership which expedites the process and close proximity to many essential supportive services. The site's existing use as an encampment location provides an opportunity to improve cleanliness, address public health and safety risks, and reduce social disorder in the area.

Recent cost optimizations and \$2.8 million secured external funding further strengthen its viability. While both sites present similar safety considerations, Kam River Heritage Park's advantages and lesser degree of opposition from consultation commentary, at the time of writing, make it the stronger option.

DISCUSSION

In response to Council's direction, Administration has undertaken a comparative analysis of two locations for the Temporary Shelter Village ("the Village"):

1. Kam River Heritage Park (Kam River Site)
2. 1111 Fort William Road (LRCA Site)

The comparative analysis was structured around alignment with established site selection criteria and other key considerations. The analysis also considered feedback from various groups and community partners, including people with lived experience. Detailed comparison results are provided in *Appendix A: Comparative Analysis for Temporary Village Sites*.

Comparative Analysis - Key Findings

Following Council's decision not to proceed with Administration's initial site recommendation, Kam River Heritage Park was not reintroduced because its estimated costs exceeded Council's approved budget. However, when Council later directed a comparative analysis and recommendation between the two sites, Administration reviewed the project scope for the Kam River site and made adjustments, including reducing the number of units and revising the site layout. These changes bring the estimated capital and construction costs down to \$5.5 million. Costs for the LRCA site are estimated at \$5.0 million and both sites have similar estimated annual operating costs of \$1.5 million.

Although Kam River Park is marginally more expensive, its operational and strategic advantages, highlighted below, outweigh the difference in cost. Additionally, the City has secured \$2.8 million in external funding to reduce the municipal contribution by roughly half.

Both sites are comparable in terms of their ability to accommodate 80–100 units, emergency services access, and readiness for construction. They also require similar safety and maintenance measures due to their proximity to water. However, compared to 1111 Fort William Road, Kam River Heritage Park demonstrates stronger compatibility across the following criteria.

- **Municipal Ownership:** Kam River Site is municipally owned, providing immediate control which expedites the process. 1111 Fort William Road requires lease negotiations, final Board approval, and possible Ministerial approvals, which carries the risk of delaying construction.
- **Proximity to Support Services:** Kam River Site is within 650m to 1.5km of 14 key supportive services and is very close to a major public transit hub. In contrast, 1111 Fort William Road is farther from supportive services, with only two within 1.5km of the site, and less bus route access than Kam River.

- **Proximity to Historical Encampment Areas:** Kam River Site is already an established encampment site providing continuity and familiarity to prospective residents and the surrounding area. The site is also more secluded which provides privacy to Village residents, which was noted as an important consideration from community partners and people with lived experience. The LRCA Site is near, but not the location of, existing encampments.
- **Alignment with Growth Goals:** Kam River Site's estimated \$2.0 million investment in infrastructure upgrades support future park revitalization efforts which aligns with future growth goals. The LRCA Site as non-municipal property neither supports nor inhibits growth goals.
- **Perceived Economic Impact:** Compared to the LRCA Site, the Kam River Site offers more potential to reduce perceived negative economic impacts given its natural buffers to business areas. Moreover, the Village would replace an existing unmanaged encampment, which is anticipated to improve cleanliness, address public health and safety risks, and reduce social disorder in the area.

Site Recommendation – Kam River Heritage Park

Overall, Kam River Heritage Park emerges as the preferred option due to its stronger alignment with key criteria, such as existing use as an encampment and proximity to critical supports. The site is also anticipated to reduce social disorder in the area by replacing an existing encampment. While both sites require risk mitigation, Kam River's advantages, supported by a higher degree of positive feedback from consultation efforts, make it Administration's recommendation for the Temporary Shelter Village.

CONSULTATION

Commentary Received

At a Member of Council's request, Administration sought direct commentary via email on both sites from: Thunder Bay Police Service, Thunder Bay Fire Rescue, Superior North EMS, CPKC Rail, Thunder Bay Rowing Club, Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA), and Fort William Business Improvement Area (FW BIA).

In addition, Administration sought direct commentary from Skyline Retail Asset Management Inc., and Community Partners, including People with Lived Experience; and received direct commentary from one business owner in the Thunder Centre.

The timeframe to provide feedback was limited and thus, at the time of writing, the Thunder Bay Police Service, Thunder Bay Rowing Club, and Fort William Business Improvement Area have not provided commentary. Any feedback received in advance of April 28, 2025, will be relayed to Council at Committee of the Whole.

Emergency Services

Administration received comment from Thunder Bay Fire Rescue (TBFR) and Superior North Emergency Medical Services (SNEMS). Their feedback is summarized below.

Both Kam River Heritage Park and 1111 Fort William Road present similar risks related to proximity to waterways. TBFR and SNEMS note that neither site is safer than the other in this regard, and that they both require safety and security risk mitigation measures.

TBFR noted that emergency response times are comparable at both locations. The tunneled access point at Kam River Park meets Pumper 1 clearance requirements, which is the primary response vehicle into the area. Moreover, 10 out of 13 response vehicles meet clearance requirements, with two vehicles that may pose winter access challenges if the passage is not clear of snow and ice build up – this can be mitigated with regular maintenance. In the event tunnel access is restricted, there is an at-grade access point off Duncan St that has negligible impacts on response times.

SNEMS noted that 1111 Fort William Road may allow for slightly faster hospital, safe sobering site, and withdrawal management facility access. Kam River Park has two sufficient access points and is familiar territory for paramedics due to its ongoing use as an unmanaged encampment location, which may present operational benefits

Overall, both sites require water safety and security measures and regular site access maintenance, with no clear advantage for emergency services at either location.

Businesses and Representative Organizations

Administration received commentary from a large retail landowner and one business owner in the Thunder Centre. Their feedback is summarized below.

A business owner sent a direct communication to Administration strongly opposing the Temporary Village at 1111 Fort William Road due to their perception of negative impacts on local businesses, increased stigma, and proximity to schools and retail stores. They support Kam River Heritage Park as it is not in a commercial area, already serves as an encampment, offers greater privacy and dignity for residents, and is closer to key social services. The owner also notes that strong opposition previously led Council to pivot from the 1111 Fort William Road site. They also believe the minimal cost difference does not justify the perceived risks to the Intercity business area.

A major retail landowner near 1111 Fort William Road also strongly opposes the Temporary Village at this site, citing ongoing security concerns such as loitering, theft, vandalism, and hazardous waste. They highlight the site's proximity to businesses that sell alcohol and cannabis, as well as several family-oriented retailers and a public school, expressing concern for both shelter residents and the broader community. The

landowner acknowledges the need for supportive housing but believes this location poses unacceptable risks to safety and the area's economic vitality.

Community Partners and People with Lived Experience

A survey was distributed to organizations across various sectors, including those supporting Indigenous peoples and people with lived experience of homelessness. Organizations were encouraged to assist their clients with lived experience in completing the survey to achieve a diversity of perspectives.

A total of 111 responses were received, of which 67% favoured Kam River Heritage Park and 33% preferred 1111 Fort William Road.

Commonly cited reasons for supporting Kam River Heritage Park included its proximity to numerous supportive services, existence as an established encampment, less impact on businesses and residential areas, and the stability it offers to those already living there. Respondents also noted that the site is largely out of public view, has cultural significance for some, and emphasized the benefits of enhancing the health and safety of the area by replacing the existing encampment.

CPKC Rail

CPKC reviewed the Kam River Heritage Park site and noted objections based on safety and security concerns. Administration inquired about safety and security measures to address concerns. CPKC was unable to provide specific safety and security recommendations within the limited timeframe as input would be needed from various internal stakeholders. Administration is committed to ongoing collaboration with CPKC and will continue to work together to identify appropriate mitigation strategies should Council approve the site.

Lakehead Region Conservation Authority

The LRCA notes that any development at Kam River Heritage Park requires a permit due to proximity to the floodplain and erosion hazards. Their review of the conceptual site layout indicates some revisions may be necessary to meet setback and elevation requirements. The LRCA is open to working with the City to address these issues and indicates a permit is likely to be approved if all regulatory requirements are met following a detailed site plan review.

Broader Public Engagement

Due to time constraints, it was not feasible to include a sample of residents or businesses adjacent to each site in this consultation. However, Administration has conducted extensive public engagement on this file over the past 18 months, resulting in over 2,000 points of contact and consistent feedback across sessions. This input has

been carefully considered and used to inform risk mitigation measures throughout the project.

Consistent themes from these consultations include:

- The urgency to address encampments and frustration with delays
- Concerns regarding community safety and well-being
- The importance of access to supports, services, and public transit
- Potential impacts on neighbourhoods and businesses
- The need to reduce stigma and support community integration
- Concerns about project costs and clarity on government responsibility

Next Steps

If Council approves Kam River Heritage Park as the Village's location, Administration will continue to undertake public engagement efforts through a variety of communication methods such as in-person meetings, illustrative videos, infographics, podcast appearances, social media posts, and a dedicated webpage with staff contact information. Administration will also continue implementing the Enhanced Encampment Response Action Plan, which includes identifying designated encampment locations for Council's decision.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

The 2025 Capital Budget included the \$5.0 million Temporary Village project financed by the Renew Thunder Bay Reserve Fund as contemplated in Report 395-2024 Temporary Village Initiative – Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan. The estimated cost of the project, if located at Kam River Park, is \$5.5 million, which exceeds the budget cap set by Council.

Subsequent to the 2025 Budget approval, the City was successful in securing \$2.8 million in external funding towards the construction of the Temporary Village. Budget appropriation 07-2025 presented as Appendix B, increases the total project Budget to \$5.5 million and establishes the external funding source. The municipal contribution from the Renew Thunder Bay Reserve Fund would be reduced from \$5.0 million to \$2,699,513. If approved, \$2,300,487 of the budget commitment would be released back into the Renew Thunder Bay Reserve Fund.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Administration's comparative analysis demonstrates that while both sites could accommodate the Village, Kam River Heritage Park offers stronger alignment with site selection criteria and project objectives. The site's municipal ownership, proximity to numerous supportive services, established use as an encampment, and consultation

efforts all reinforce its suitability. Recent cost optimizations and secured external funding further strengthen the case for this location.

Should Council approve Kam River Heritage Park as the site, Administration will continue engaging with the public through various communication tools, and continue working collaboratively with key stakeholders and community partners to address safety, security, and operational concerns.

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 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.

April 7, 2025, Corporate Report 057-2025 from R. Willianen, Encampment Response Lead was presented and recommended that a portion of 1111 Fort William Rd be approved as the site for the Temporary Shelter Village Initiative. City Council amended the resolution to identify the Cumberland Site as the location. The amendment was approved by City Council.

April 14, 2025, City Council did not ratify the amendment identifying the Cumberland Site as the Village's location. City Council directed Administration to report back on April 28, 2025, with a comparison and recommendation between 1111 Fort William Rd and Kam River Heritage Park.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Appendix A: Comparative Analysis for Temporary Village Sites

Appendix B: Appropriation Change Order 07-2025

REPORT PREPARED BY

Rilee Willianen, Encampment Response Lead – Growth

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Kerri Marshall, Commissioner - Growth

Date (04/25/2025)