

---

**For Information**

---

**REPORT TITLE:** Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols

**FROM:** Andrea Warren, Acting Commissioner of Human Services

---

**OBJECTIVE**

To update Regional Council about the work underway to create a homeless encampment policy and joint protocols.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- The number of homeless encampments across Peel Region has grown significantly in recent years.
  - In response, the Region, together with several stakeholders, is creating an encampment policy and joint protocols that will incorporate a human rights-based approach.
  - The encampment policy and protocols are one of many projects underway to change how services are delivered to the homeless in Peel, which include enhancing and expanding the shelter system, re-designing the outreach program, implementing an integrated model of health care services for the homeless, providing more drop-in supports in known hotspots and improving access to housing subsidies and supports.
  - The encampment policy and protocols will be ready for Council approval in the fall of 2024.
  - This report provides Council with an update on the project and work completed to date.
- 

**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The National Right to Housing Network states: “A growing number of people in Canada are having to live in tents or informal shelters to survive due to a lack of affordable housing, limited support services, and nowhere safe to go. These outdoor tents and informal shelters are called homeless encampments.”<sup>1</sup>

Like many communities in Ontario and in Canada, the number of homeless encampments in Peel Region has significantly increased year-over-year. This is due in part to the housing affordability crisis, insufficient supportive housing, a surge in the number of asylum claimants seeking services in Peel, and other pressures in Peel’s emergency shelter system.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: [housingrights.ca/encampments-in-canada/](https://housingrights.ca/encampments-in-canada/)

**Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols**

As indicated in the “Homelessness Policy and Programs” report to Regional Council dated October 26, 2023, more investment is needed in homelessness prevention, emergency response, and supportive housing to end chronic homelessness. The report also noted a need for a Council-endorsed encampment policy and protocols, to better manage the growing number of encampments in Peel.

A project to create a new encampment policy and protocols began in April 2024. This report provides Council with an update on this work.

**2. Encampments in Peel Region**

In 2022, Peel Outreach responded to 125 encampment locations during the year. In 2023, Peel Outreach responded to 258 encampment locations during the year. Table 1 provides a summary of Peel Outreach and Welcoming Streets<sup>2</sup> interactions for 2023.

**Table 1: Peel Outreach and Welcoming Streets Homeless Encampment and Non-Unique Interactions, 2023**

Location	Total # of encampments	% of encampments	# total client interactions**	# total interactions** with businesses	% interactions in Peel, individuals vs. businesses
Brampton	122	47%	831	600	40% individuals 60% businesses
Mississauga	133	52%	1,232	345*	60% individuals 37% businesses
Caledon	3	1%	1	0	0
Total, 2023	258	100%	2,064	945	100%

\*For Q3 and Q4 only because the Mississauga place-based team started in Q3 of 2023.

\*\* It is possible to have several interactions with the same business or client, so total interactions do not equate to total # of clients or total business interacted with

**3. Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols**

The Region of Peel, together with the Town of Caledon, City of Brampton, City of Mississauga, Peel Regional Police, OPP, the Canadian Mental Health Association Peel-Dufferin (CMHA) local conservation authorities and community agencies, is creating a Council-endorsed homeless encampment policy and joint protocols that will incorporate a human rights-based approach. The first meeting of the Peel encampment working group and steering committee was held on April 12, 2024.

Until the policy and protocols are complete, key stakeholders in Peel will continue to respond to homeless encampments using a variety of approaches. Please refer to Appendix I for more information.

<sup>2</sup> Welcoming Streets is a program that operates in downtown Brampton, funded by Peel Region and operated by the City of Brampton. The program supports businesses impacted by street homelessness.

## Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols

### a) Objectives, Deliverables, and Timelines

Staff seek to achieve the following objectives from this collaborative work:

- More coordinated and timely service provision for people living in encampments to reduce the precariousness of their living conditions.
- Increased resident and business satisfaction about the approach and tools used to address encampments.
- Increased community awareness of the factors that can cause homelessness and what concerned citizens can do.
- Safe public spaces with a balanced approach to use
- Reduced concerns from residents and businesses about loitering, vandalism and garbage on private property
- Improved communication and data sharing amongst service providers

These objectives will be measured and evaluated to ensure the policy and protocols are responsive and focused on continuous improvement.

Project deliverables include:

Deliverable	Timeline
Interim Measures to address encampments along Etobicoke Creek Trail in Brampton and at Dundas St. Shelter in Mississauga	Spring, Summer, Fall 2024
Progress Report to Regional Council	Spring 2024
Jurisdictional scan, literature review and legal review	Spring 2024
Surveys/interviews with the homeless living rough and workshops with residents/businesses in homeless hotspots including Brampton, Malton, Cooksville, Port Credit and Meadowvale.	Spring, Summer 2024
A council-endorsed overarching vision and policy for homeless encampments in Peel Region	Fall 2024
Joint protocols for responding, managing, and enforcing front-line responses for homeless encampments on public and private property by Fall 2024	Fall 2024
An implementation plan (including budget implications, metrics, training, communications, staffing, recruitment, etc.) rolled-out by the end of 2024, to ensure the new policy and protocols are operationalized in 2025.	Fall 2024
Policy and Protocols Operationalized	Winter 2025

### b) Stakeholder engagement

In order to develop the encampment policy and protocols, staff from the Region of Peel are collaborating closely with the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga, the Town of

## **Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols**

Caledon, Peel Regional Police, Ontario Provincial Police, Canadian Mental Health Association of Peel-Dufferin, Regeneration, the Compass, Moyo Health and Community Services, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Credit Valley Conservation Authority, Ontario Ministry of Transportation, as well as those who live in encampments.

A steering committee will provide guidance and direction to the working group. Through unified leadership, the work will enable partners to develop a greater understanding of encampments in Peel and how to better address street homelessness with an all-of-community response and with the support of regional and local councils. Select working group members are co-hosting engagement workshops for Peel residents and businesses who may be impacted by encampments. The first workshop was held in downtown Brampton on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Staff is organizing additional workshops to be completed by the end of June in the areas of Malton, Cooksville, Port Credit, and Meadowvale. The working group is also developing standardized communications and has created a website that is hosted by the Region that will allow residents to stay informed and provide voluntary feedback on this work.

Recognizing the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness and people who live in encampments, meaningful and ongoing engagement that is human rights focused and dignified is a top priority. Service providers such as Regeneration and the Compass are assisting with surveys for clients at their drop-in locations, as is Peel Outreach during their visits to encampments. There will also be opportunities for one-on-one interviews and focus groups. In addition, staff will be providing an update to the Region's Lived Experience Roundtable. The working group will ensure that the feedback of people living in encampments is considered in its key decisions.

The goal is to develop a balanced, human rights-based approach and respect for the needs of those residing in encampments as well as community members living and sharing the same community spaces, while aligning with all applicable legislation. The intent is to provide streamlined, collaborative, and consistent direction to all partners who respond to homeless encampments in Peel Region.

### **4. Other Inputs**

#### **a) Jurisdictional Scan**

The working group is reviewing approaches to homeless encampments in other jurisdictions. In absence of a coordinated intergovernmental response, resources dedicated to encampments varies, as do the approaches. Table 2 briefly highlights initial elements of protocols from several Ontario municipalities.

## Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols

**Table 2: Protocols/Encampment Supports in Select Ontario Jurisdictions**

Jurisdiction	Street Outreach Program Y/N	Key Protocol(s)	Encampment Supports
City of Toronto	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No fire equipment provided.</li> <li>No fuel to be stored onsite.</li> </ul> <p>A staff report on the City's encampment approach is expected in Q2, 2024.</p>	<p>Housing First approach</p> <p>Working with partners to provide essential supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streets to Homes Outreach Program</li> <li>Parks Outreach and Response</li> <li>Fire Safety Education</li> <li>Toronto Paramedic Services and Inner-City Health Associates</li> <li>Mental Health Supports</li> <li>Toronto Public Health</li> </ul>
City of Ottawa	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'No go zones': e.g., monuments, heritage sites, schools, playgrounds, outdoor recreational facilities</li> <li>Vacate notice issued with outreach supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared app as a tool to monitor real-time location of sites (GIS mapping tool)</li> <li>Support services: shelter placement, safe return to previous housing, harm reduction</li> <li>Emotional &amp; physical support present if dismantling required</li> </ul>
City of Hamilton	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit of 5 tents/encampment</li> <li>Minimum distance from recreational assets and private property</li> <li>Housing Focused Street Outreach workers using dedicated comms materials for residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note: City has paused decision on sanctioned encampments sites; may implement 3-5 dedicated locations where essential services are provided</li> </ul>
City of London	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The City's Encampment Response Plan focuses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service depots provide service daily for 90 mins per day as an emergency response that</li> </ul>

## Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols

Jurisdiction	Street Outreach Program Y/N	Key Protocol(s)	Encampment Supports
		<p>on implementing service depots.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service depots coordinate numerous essential services and social supports.</li> </ul>	<p>provides basic needs, e.g., safe and clean drinking water; hygiene and sanitation; resources and support to ensure fire safety; waste management and garbage collection systems; social supports and services; personal safety of residents</p>

### b) Ombudsman Toronto Report (2023) of its Investigation into the City of Toronto’s Clearing of Encampments in Summer 2021<sup>3</sup>

Peel’s work will be informed by this report, which investigated the City of Toronto’s response to clearing encampments in 2021, which occurred in Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra, and Lambton Stadium parks. The investigation examined the City’s planning of clearings, stakeholder engagement, and communication with the public as well as their policies and procedures. The report released 23 recommendations and found that the City of Toronto’s focus on expediency over the needs of individuals caused undue harm and confusion to encampment residents, and that the city has a particularly high duty of fairness to those living in encampments. The report stated the lack of engagement and communication on clearings was found to be unfair and showed lack of commitment to honouring a human rights approach and to serving vulnerable populations with dignity and respect.

### c) Federal Housing Advocate’s Final Report<sup>4</sup>

Also important to Peel’s work is the Federal Housing Advocate’s report. The Federal Housing Advocate (FHA), supported by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, is an independent, nonpartisan watchdog, empowered to drive meaningful action to address housing need and homelessness in Canada. In February 2024, the FHA’s final report on encampments recommended to the federal government that it establish a National Encampments Response Plan by August 31, 2024. Of note, the federal Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities is to respond to the report with 120 days (which will be June 12, 2024).

Representatives from the Office of the FHA delegated to Council on March 21, 2024, to share the report’s recommendations. At that time, Council passed a resolution for Peel Region to join the advocacy efforts of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to the federal government, urging for a housing and homelessness plan developed in

<sup>3</sup> //www.ombudsmantoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Investigation-into-the-Citys-Clearing-of-Encampments-in-2021.pdf

<sup>4</sup> housingchrc.ca/sites/housing/files/2024-02/Final%20report%20-%20Federal%20Housing%20Advocate%27s%20review%20of%20encampments%20-%20EN\_1.pdf

## Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols

consultation with municipalities, provinces, and stakeholders. Canada's Housing Plan, released in April 2024, includes an additional \$1 billion for the Reaching Home program and \$250 million in support for homeless encampments.

The role of the federal and provincial/territorial governments is particularly important given that municipalities are on the frontlines in responding to the crisis but lack the resources or powers to address the scale or complexity of the issues. The FHA report stated that the response plan should address basic necessities for encampments, end forced eviction, work with all levels of government and provide support to municipalities, respect and uphold Indigenous and human rights, provide permanent housing options, and address root causes of encampments. The report's Calls to Action were developed from extensive consultation with encampment residents, community organizations, and municipalities across Canada.

## RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Developing a homeless encampment policy and joint protocols requires enhanced cooperation, collaboration, and commitment from a wide array of municipal partners and other stakeholders. Pressures faced by staff from across these groups is significant. Encampment residents are also experiencing incredible barriers to finding and securing safe, affordable, and appropriate housing options, particularly in the communities of their choice. Views on homeless encampments can be polarizing and divisive; this work is essential to mitigating the risks posed by encampments and how to respond compassionately with a human rights-based approach. As well, the number of people experiencing homelessness, and the number of people living in encampments in Peel is expected to continue to increase.

Investing in emergency responses helps to meet basic needs and provide crisis response and supports to people experiencing homelessness; however, to end chronic homelessness, additional and larger investments in homelessness prevention and permanent housing solutions are required. For the foreseeable future, the Region will not be able find or provide enough suitable affordable and/or supportive housing solutions for all unhoused people in Peel. It is essential that all levels of government work together to develop and implement proactive solutions to the housing and homelessness crisis.

## BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

The passing of the *Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023* on June 8, 2023, formalized a plan to dissolve the Region of Peel effective January 1, 2025. On December 13, 2023, the provincial government announced that Peel will not be dissolved, and that new legislation will be passed in 2024 to repeal or amend Bill 112. On April 10, 2024, Bill 185, *Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act*, was tabled to amend various acts including the *Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023*. Bill 185 will amend the *Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023* confirming that Peel will not be dissolved, and includes a recalibrated focus on options to support building more housing faster. The full implications of the *Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023* as amended by Bill 185 cannot be determined at this time.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report has no financial implications. Operationalizing the new policy and protocols may have financial impacts which will be highlighted in the fall report to Regional Council.

## Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols

### CONCLUSION

In response to the significant increase in the number of encampments in Peel Region, staff is working closely with municipal partners, police, and others to develop a new encampment, policy and protocols. Staff will bring a report to Council in the Fall of 2024 with a recommended policy and set of joint protocols. This project is an important component of the work underway to enhance how services are delivered to the homeless in Peel which also includes making enhancements to the Peel Outreach program, co-designing an integrated model of health care services for people experiencing homelessness in Peel, and developing community capacity in local neighbourhoods to provide supports and relief to people experiencing street homelessness.

### APPENDICES

Appendix I – Current Responses to Homeless Encampments in Peel Region

---



---

Andrea Warren, Acting Commissioner of Human Services

*Authored By: Erin Mifflin, Advisor*