



The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Health and Social Services Committee
From: Commissioner of Social Services
Report: #2025-SS-2
Date: March 6, 2025

Subject:

Durham Region Encampment Strategy

Recommendation:

That the Health and Social Services Committee recommends to Regional Council: That the Durham Region Encampment Strategy, as included in Attachment #1 to this report, be endorsed.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Durham Region Encampment Strategy as recommended in the Durham Integrated Homelessness System Action Plan. This report focuses specifically on the development, management, and implementation of the Durham Region Encampment Strategy. It highlights actions taken to address homelessness, including the complex dynamics of encampments on both public and private land from a regional perspective.
- 1.2 The Encampment Strategy establishes that the Regional Municipality of Durham (Region) does not endorse or approve of encampments. The Region aims to address encampments by expanding shelter, supportive and deeply affordable housing options; coordinating health, social and justice system services to support community wellness and following human rights legislation and expectations set out by upper levels of government and the Human rights commission to support people experiencing active homelessness.
- 1.3 The strategy is designed to clarify the process for addressing encampments while respecting the unique By-Laws across the eight Local Area Municipalities. Encampments often arise due to the limited availability of affordable housing options. The plan emphasizes a collaborative, human rights-based approach to ensure the dignity and well-being of individuals in encampments while transitioning

them into more stable accommodation solutions and dismantling encampments from communities.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Region serves as the Service System Manager, legislated by the province, and as the Community Entity, designated by the federal government, responsible for the planning and coordination of homelessness support services.
- 2.2 Despite ongoing efforts, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness continues to rise, with escalating complexities such as mental health challenges and addiction. Encampments have become a visible reality due to the ongoing shortage of affordable housing.
 - a. The Regional By-Name List has reached 787 based on the [December 2024 Built for Zero Report Card](#), with 80% of those individuals considered to have mid to very high acuity.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 [Presentation: January 2024 – Integrated Homelessness System Action Plan](#)
- 3.2 [2023-INFO-11: A Review and Renewed Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System for Durham Region](#)
- 3.3 [2023-SS-6: Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System Update](#)
- 3.4 [2023-SS-9: A Second Updated on Durham Region Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System](#)
- 3.5 [2024-INFO-40: Update on Durham Region Integrated Homelessness System Action Plan](#)

4. Encampments on Public and Private Lands

- 4.1 Homeless encampments are found across both public and private lands in Durham. While encampments are not considered a solution to homelessness, the Region has implemented strategies to stabilize these encampments, address immediate needs, and provide pathways to permanent solutions. A human rights-based approach ensures that individuals are treated with respect and dignity.

Summary of Encampment Management

4.2 Encampment on Public Land

- a. Durham Region Social Services:
 - Track encampment locations and monitor health and safety issues

- Collaborate with Fire, By-law, Paramedics, and Primary Care Outreach Program to support the unhoused community
 - Lead safety education initiatives for encampment residents
 - Offer housing-focused supports and lead initiatives for housing solutions
- b. Local Area Municipalities (including By-law):
- Identify and track encampment locations, monitoring health and safety issues
 - Provide notice of encampment removals
 - Respond to breaches of local By-laws
 - Lead active clean-up of encampment sites and surrounding debris
 - Support dismantling and cleaning of abandoned sites, collaborating with Regional Street Outreach Program (RSOP)
 - Communicate community By-laws, rights, and policies to the public
- c. Local Area Municipalities Fire:
- Provide fire-specific safety education to those living in encampments
- d. Durham Region Police Services:
- Responding to reports of potential criminal activity in or around encampment sites
 - Enforcement of trespass notices issued by by-law
- e. Primary Care Outreach Program:
- Support in tracking and recording any health and safety issues in encampments
 - Support the mental health and well-being of encampment residents

4.3 Encampment on Private Land

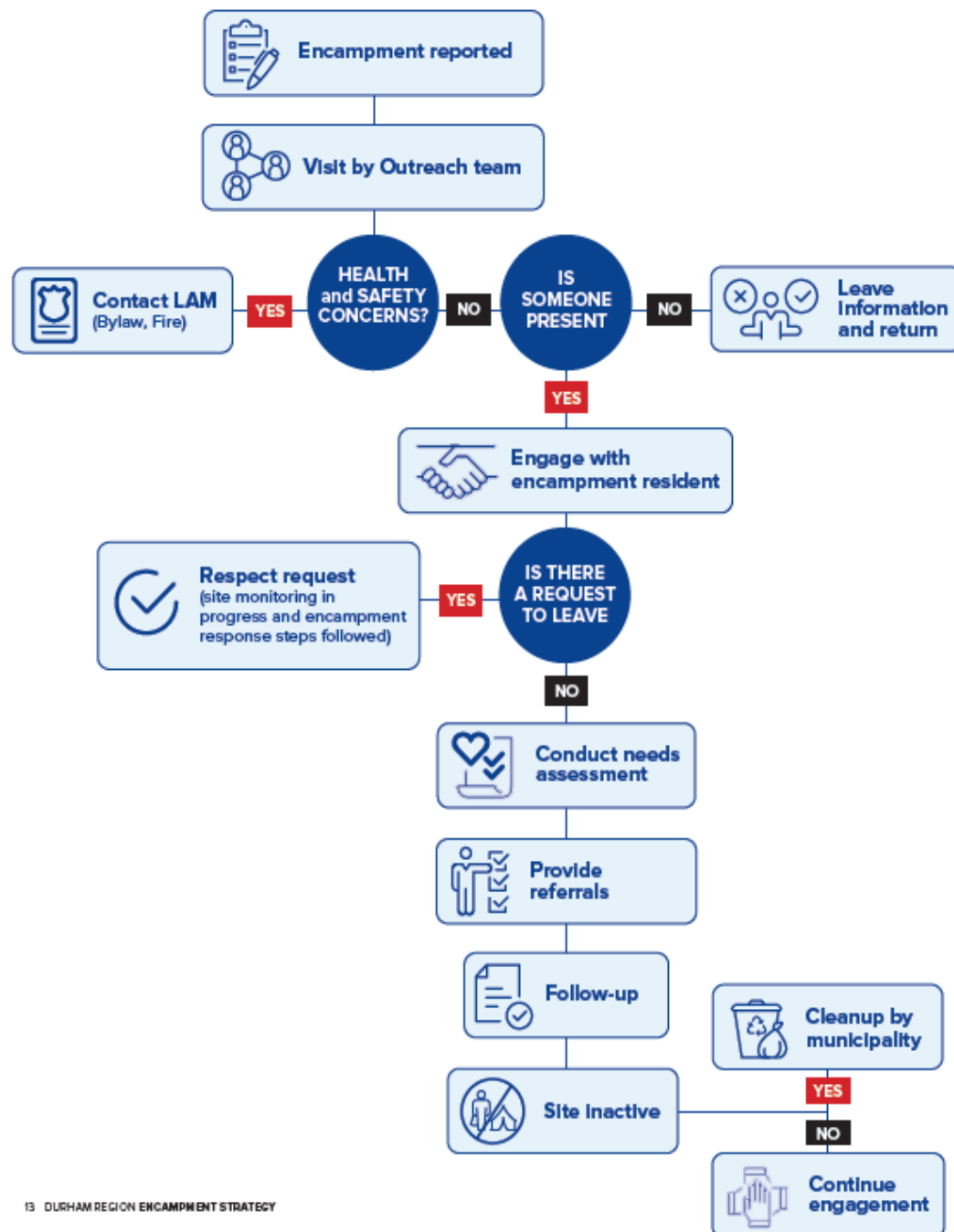
- a. Private Property Owners:
- Identify and inform the Region of encampments
 - Provide notice for removal
 - Clean-up and dismantle abandoned encampments
- b. Durham Region Social Services:
- Track and identify encampments, address health/safety issues
 - Collaborate with Fire, By-law, Paramedics, and PCOP to support the health and well-being of the unhoused community
 - Lead safety education and housing support initiatives
 - Lead in offering housing focused supports

- c. Local Area Municipalities (Including By-law):
 - Respond to breaches in local By-laws
 - Mass communication of community by-laws, rights, and policies
 - Coordinate joint inspection of the encampment with RSOT and DRPS, if necessary
 - Notify the registered owner of municipal by-law contravention(s) on the property to have the encampment removed
 - Provide basic information to the property owner on how to deal with people experiencing homelessness on private property
 - If necessary, work with or without property owner to relocate individuals on private property
 - Cleaning of debris and garbage in areas surrounding the private property
- d. Local Area Municipalities Fire:
 - Provide fire-specific safety education to those living in encampments
- e. Durham Region Police Services:
 - Responding to reports of potential criminal activity in or around encampment sites
- f. Primary Care Outreach Program:
 - Support in tracking and recording any health and safety issues in encampments
 - Support the mental health and well-being of encampment residents

5. Encampment Reporting Process

5.1 Process Overview

- a. Encampment reported
- b. Visit by Region of Durham Street Outreach team
- c. Health and safety concerns assessed
- d. Engagement with encampment resident
- e. Needs assessment and referrals provided
- f. Follow-up and site monitoring



6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic directions and priorities in the Durham Region 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:

- a. Healthy People, Caring Communities – which includes implementation of preventive strategies to support community health, collaborate with partners to address complex social issues, and integrate and coordinate service delivery for positive life outcomes. Strong Relationships – which includes

enhancing inclusive community engagement, collaborate with local municipalities and partners for coordinated services and ensure accountable, transparent decision-making while responsibly managing resources. .

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Durham Region's homelessness response continues to evolve, with the implementation of this encampment strategy playing a crucial role in stabilizing the unhoused population and reducing the visibility of encampments. This strategy does not endorse encampments as a solution but manages the unhoused individuals with an aim to eliminate the need for encampments.
- 7.2 Durham Region will continue to support individuals experiencing homelessness in a respectful and dignified manner.
- 7.3 The endorsement of this strategy is essential to ensuring that the encampment response is consistent, coordinated, and effective in creating pathways to stable housing for all individuals in need.

8. Attachments

Attachment #1: Durham Region Encampment Strategy

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Stella Danos-Papaconstantinou
Commissioner of Social Services

Recommended for Presentation to
Committee,

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer



Durham Region

Encampment Strategy

January 15, 2025



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Introduction

Homeless encampments are a complex social issue impacting personal, social and economic facets of life in Canada. Responding to homeless encampments is a priority for The Regional Municipality of Durham to support the well-being of all residents of the community. Hence an evidence-based Encampment Strategy will offer a road map to addressing the current reality and moving beyond in Durham Region.

This Strategy will present a twofold approach. First, **managing the current situation**. Whether ideal or not, encampments are a reality with the growing unhoused community and Durham Region is committed to managing the current state with area municipalities and community partners to stabilize and decrease the unhoused population while ensuring people's human rights are respected and protected. Second, the next steps will be recommended focusing on how Durham Region can **move beyond encampments** and support all community members to have a form of adequate housing available to them.

Part A:

Managing the current state

Homeless encampments are an unacceptable housing option, and ensuring affordable housing for all Durham residents is a priority and goal for the Region. However, homeless encampments are a current reality until sufficient affordable housing options are available.

First and foremost, encampments are a problem. This strategy does not endorse encampments as a solution, nor does it promote outdoor living. Homeless encampments are a symptom of a greater systemic issue across Canada, and Durham Region is no exception. The lack of affordable and attainable housing across the housing spectrum in Canada is a social and economic crisis that leaves many individuals unhoused and in need of support. This Encampment Strategy, while not endorsing encampments, takes a human-centred approach and endorses the well-being of all people in Durham Region.

What is an encampment?

The Canadian Human Rights Commission defines encampments as “temporary outdoor campsites on public property or privately owned land. These informal settlements result from a lack of accessible, affordable housing.”¹ While this federal understanding of a homeless encampment lays the foundation for defining an encampment, through further engagement across the region, and in consideration of regional policies and goals, it is essential to provide a regional definition of homeless encampments.

Through engagement with the community, several notions were raised regarding what an encampment entails. First, the question was raised as to whether an encampment constitutes a single tent, a community of tents, the encroachment of public space, repurposing public space for the purpose of shelter, or even a vehicle. Moreover, does the number of people within these structures stipulate whether it is an encampment? Does the structure itself, whether a tent or semi-permanent structure decide what is an encampment? All questions were raised and discussed to best arrive at a regional definition.

Based on research and consultation feedback, it is recommended that for the purposes of this Homeless Encampment Strategy, a homeless encampment is defined as encroaching or making exclusive occupancy of a space, constituting one or more people with personal belongings that have a high degree of mobility. The structure type does not influence if it is an encampment, whether it is a tent or a more semi-permanent structure. A homeless encampment entails a degree of mobility of personal items, that an individual can gather and transport with them. Due to federal and provincial definition differences, some data variations may occur in the reporting of encampments.

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The problem

Background

One of the most pressing issues currently faced by municipalities across Ontario and Canada is encampments. Homeless encampments have always existed. They predate the pandemic, opioid crisis and housing crisis. There is an underlying, historical and structural cause of homelessness. However, the pandemic has exacerbated the severity of public health concerns, making encampments increasingly visible across the country.² In a survey conducted, in 2022 by Infrastructure Canada, results indicated that 68 of 72 (94 per cent) of the communities who responded, reported having homeless encampments.³

Due to the lack of adequate housing available, people are choosing to create shelters outdoors for them to live.⁴ According to a study conducted by OrgCode in 2023, Durham Region had a shortfall of over 200 beds with space and services appropriate to meet individuals' needs.

The crisis of homeless encampments has individuals' rights brought to the attention of the federal government through the Federal Housing Advocates report published in February 2024.⁵ The report further illustrates the need to uphold Canada's human right to housing to systematically combat the broader systemic failures to provide safe, affordable, adequate housing to unhoused individuals; both market and non-market housing, with the necessary support systems. This is echoed by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), which reported that in 2023, over 1,400 homeless encampments were documented across various communities, reflecting systemic failures in housing, health and social

services.⁶ The report emphasizes the need for substantial investment and policy changes from provincial and federal governments, as municipalities struggle to manage the crisis with limited resources. AMO advocates for a balanced approach that respects human rights while addressing public safety concerns, stressing that municipalities must comply with legal obligations while managing the unique challenges posed by encampments.

In Durham Region, there have been varying approaches to addressing encampments. Each local area municipality (LAM) has developed by-laws regulating public spaces and parks to direct where, when and what types of activities and actions are permissible in public spaces. Responses have varied across the Region, from highly enforced by-laws regarding encampments (including immediate dismantling), to a more human rights-focused approach, concentrating on supporting the transition of individuals out of the encampment. In any situation, due to the human right to housing passed into federal legislation, and several recent case law decisions surrounding encampments, Durham Region and LAMs need to review their approaches to address the legal and policy obligations dictated by the courts and federal law.

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The data

Durham Region system data, including the Built for Zero updates, indicates a continuous increase in homelessness and encampments. As of September 2024, there were 811 people experiencing homelessness, 419 of them identified as being chronically homeless (homeless for six months or longer).⁷ From January 2024 to September 2024, the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness has increased by 64 per cent.⁸ It is important to note that these figures are drawn from Durham Region's By-Name List (BNL), which includes only the people who have consented to their names being added. The actual figures for homelessness and chronic homelessness are much larger.

Specific to encampments, Durham Region continues to see more people joining and/or creating new encampments. As of September 2024, Durham Region has identified 35 known active encampment locations: 10 in Ajax, six in Bowmanville, 14 in Oshawa, one in Pickering and four in Whitby. The number of active encampments across Durham Region continuously fluctuates and these figures only represent this specific point in time. Based on Durham Outreach feedback, most sites range from two to five people. Moreover, observations of the sites include a significant amount of garbage and a number of sites with an open fire. The 35 active sites do not include 28 additional sites that were deemed abandoned or those identified as living in vehicles.

Moreover, from January to September 2024, the Region of Durham Primary Care Outreach Program (PCOP) services supported 426 unique clients (up 62 per cent from 2023), 160 of them being new clients. Most clients with age data available are between 30 to 49 years old (113 individuals) and are male (153 individuals). Overall PCOP services to the unhoused community in Durham

have increased drastically, aligning with the increased number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the community.

Durham Outreach Services, from January 2024 through August 2024, accounted for a total of 6,808 interactions. Specific to encampments, there were 302 interactions with 405 individuals.

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A Human Rights-Based Approach

Taking a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to address homeless encampments is crucial to pursuing a human-centred homeless encampment response, as it ensures that the dignity, autonomy, and fundamental rights of individuals experiencing homelessness are respected and protected. By prioritizing individuals' human rights, the Durham Region Encampment Strategy will be compassionate and effective at addressing the root causes of homelessness rather than merely its visible symptoms. This approach also fosters an inclusive society, promoting social justice and equity by ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are not marginalized or criminalized. It encourages the development of long-term, sustainable solutions that integrate the needs and rights of individuals experiencing homelessness within the broader community, ultimately leading to more humane and just outcomes for all.

In 2019, the Government of Canada enacted the National Housing Strategy Act,⁹ which made it the policy of the federal government to recognize housing as a human right in line with Canada's international commitments.¹⁰

Court decisions have recognized a limited right to shelter on public lands in specific circumstances, subject to reasonable limits prescribed by law. By implementing a HRBA, this Encampment strategy effectively supports the federal National Housing Strategy to progressively realize the right to housing in Durham Region.

A Human Rights-Based Approach is a policy framework that promotes human rights standards to help ensure everyone's rights are respected.

What is a Human Rights-Based Approach?

A Human Rights-Based Approach is a policy framework that promotes human rights standards to help ensure everyone's rights are respected.¹¹ A HRBA helps a policy focus on fairness and prevent inequitable treatment of vulnerable groups, by emphasizing people's empowerment and recognizing individuals as inherent rights-holders.¹²

Moreover, a HRBA to this Encampment Strategy comprises of five key human rights-based values: human dignity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability.¹³

Human Dignity means recognizing individuals as rights-holders and grounding practice in human rights.¹⁴

Non-discrimination protects individuals, in similar cases, from being treated differently without valid or reasonable justification, or when the means used are disproportionate to the intended goal.¹⁵

Participation entails private citizens getting involved in, directly or indirectly, activities to influence government action.¹⁶

Transparency is the process of information sharing.¹⁷

Accountability refers to actions or interventions that hold government officials responsible to their people.¹⁸

Individual rights and community interests

Protecting individual rights and community interests is especially pertinent when addressing the issue of homeless encampments in Durham Region. Individuals experiencing homelessness possess the same fundamental human rights as everyone, including the right to personal safety, privacy and dignity, which are fundamental in a HRBA. These rights ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness can access essential services, legal protection, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives without discrimination or harassment. Upholding these rights is crucial for fostering a compassionate and equitable society where every individual's worth is recognized.

As we see currently in communities across Durham Region and other municipalities, the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness often come into tension with those of others and the interests of society (such as the interest of the community in clean, safe public spaces). For instance, the presence of homeless encampments in public spaces can raise concerns about public health, safety and the use of communal resources. Communities have a legitimate interest in maintaining clean and safe environments, which sometimes leads to policies that restrict where individuals experiencing homelessness can sleep or congregate. These measures, while intended to protect the community, can inadvertently infringe upon the rights of those experiencing homelessness, limiting their freedom of movement and access to public spaces.

From one perspective, policies should not criminalize homelessness or impose undue hardships on those already vulnerable. Measures such as providing adequate shelter, health care and social services respect the dignity and rights of encampment residents while addressing their immediate needs.

Reasonable limits to advance society's interests involve regulating the use of public space in a manner that is respectful of all citizens.

The legal and policy framework plays a critical role in mediating these conflicts. Courts often have to interpret whether laws aimed at regulating homelessness are constitutional, ensuring they do not disproportionately violate individual rights. Legislation should aim to protect the rights of those experiencing homelessness while promoting the welfare of the broader community.

As well, courts in Canada have been clear that the public is entitled to enjoy safe public spaces including parks, downtowns and sidewalks. The presence of an encampment in spaces used by the public is not permitted and Courts have upheld the rights of municipalities, acting on the part of their residents to preserve public spaces for public use. Where the public, through their municipality, seeks to preserve public spaces they must take reasonable steps to ensure that anyone who is displaced from their shelter to preserve a public space has access to an adequate and accessible alternative for shelter.

By respecting the dignity of individuals in homeless encampments and addressing their needs through inclusive and supportive policies, society can create a more equitable environment for the Durham community.

Building the encampment strategy

Community Engagement and Consultation

In preparing this Strategy, extensive community consultation has driven the approach and Regional actions. The engagement process included key informant interviews and focus groups with local municipal staff (fire, by-law, community services, elected officials) Regional services (social services, legal, health, Durham Regional Police Service), and The Gap Committee in connection with the unhoused community. Key messages gathered during the consultation process included:

- The need to protect people's basic human rights.
- A lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities.
- Growing negative community stigma and perceptions.
- A lack of available housing options.
- Inadequate shelter facilities.
- Growing structural violence in institutions.
- A lack of adequate housing across the housing cycle.
- The need for more community-based support.
- A critical need for more mental health and addiction support.

Best Practices

Through the consultation process, recommendations and action items were developed and are based on evidence gathered by and with the community, and informed by an analysis of best practices from across Canada. Highlights of best practices include the following communities:

- The Region of Waterloo's Erbs Road Shelter and Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.
- The City of Kingston and Hamilton's Encampment Response Teams.
- The City of Hamilton's plan to deliver a sanctioned encampment.
- The City of London's Encampment Implementation Table.
- The City of Toronto's Encampment Office and interagency approach.
- The City of Brantford's Encampment Network Housing By-law Pilot Program.

Common themes noted in the best practices review include:

- The importance of holistic system transformation through a broad housing continuum with supports.
- Integrated systems planning.
- Community and lived expertise leadership.
- Collaborative leadership.
- Focus on human rights and addressing root causes.
- Focus on improving system connections.
- Comprehensive support services and delivery options.

Encampment response process

As part of its immediate efforts to support encampment residents and surrounding communities, Durham Region has created encampment responses to inform processes and standards for local actions (see Encampment Reporting Process, Page 13). The encampment response protocols are initiated whenever **a report is made by emailing homelesshelp@durham.ca or calling 311 ext. 5510, or the Regional Street Outreach Team (RSOT) identifies an encampment in person**. Similarly, LAMs will follow the same reporting procedures when they identify a homeless encampment.

The current response to a public property encampment includes:

1. The RSOT, in coordination with the local area municipal team, visits the site to connect with the resident(s) of the encampment.
2. **Upon arrival, RSOT will evaluate the health and safety** of the encampment, whether the site is in a dangerous or inappropriate space. If they observe any immediate threats or harm (criminal activity, fire hazards, access to basic needs, whether the site impedes public use of transit shelters or playgrounds, is on a floodplain or snow route), then Outreach will work to expedite contact and address immediate concerns.
 - a. If there is an identified breach in by-law, local area municipal by-law enforcement will be contacted.
3. **If there is no one present at the time of the visit**, the RSOT will leave one of the Homeless Help magnets or flyers and often a bottle of water. The team will add the location to shift notes for the next team to continue to try to engage with resident(s).
 - a. If there was no one present in the encampment upon the initial visit, the second RSOT visit will gauge if the site is active or abandoned based on the contents of the site and whether the information or water that was left is still there the next day. If the previously left contents are still there, the RSOT will continue to monitor the site over the next few days to see if the information and water stay in the same place and for other forms of activity. If RSOT indicates the site is abandoned, they will notify LAM for cleanup.
 - b. If the information or water is not there, or there are other signs of activity that indicate someone is likely staying there, Outreach will continue attending the site in hopes of connecting with the resident(s).

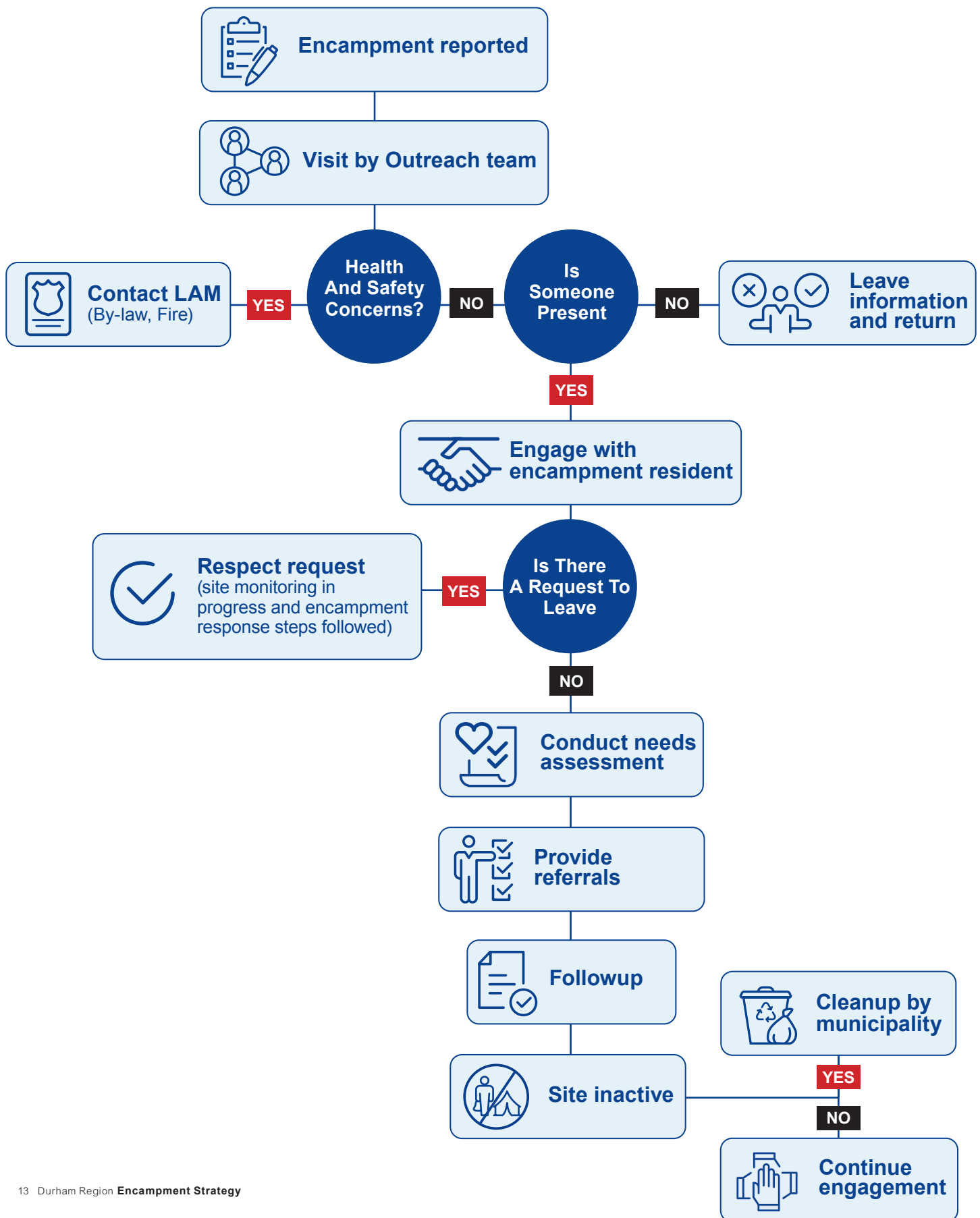
4. **If someone is present and is welcoming of the team**, the team engages to introduce themselves, begin establishing rapport, and conduct a short needs assessment to determine the appropriate referrals and supports required. Based on individual(s) goals and requested supports, the RSOT will work with PCOP, the Mental Health Outreach Program and community partners to complete referrals. The RSOT will continue to meet with resident(s) to complete wellness checks and assessment of circumstances. These ongoing efforts focus on supporting the overall mental health and well-being of those living in encampments.
 - a. As well, the Outreach team will complete Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and By-Name List (BNL) intake for anyone present, explain that Durham Region is a housing-focused community, and provide information on available resources to help people exit homelessness.
 - b. The RSOT will share their initial assessment with LAMs and recommend interim services needed at the site, suggest timelines to relocate people and co-ordinate dismantling of the encampment.
5. **If someone is present and asks the RSOT to leave**, the team will respect their choice and leave. If the request to leave is friendly, the team will attempt to briefly state who they are and ask if the residents are open to them returning in the future to discuss supports.
 - a. If yes, the team returns to the site another time and continues to share information about supports they provide and makes attempts to build trust/rapport.
 - b. If no, the team respects their wishes and may leave contact information should they require anything. The team will continue to monitor the site and may return if circumstances change or requests from by-law/LAM for support in attending the site are received.
6. **If a request to leave is aggressive in nature**, the team will leave immediately without discussion for safety reasons. The site will be monitored from a distance.
 - a. Durham Region Police Service may only be called if there is a report of potential criminal activity in or around the encampment site.
7. **If a request to support the relocation of an encampment is received**, the RSOT will follow the above steps but provide the message to residents that they have been asked to leave by by-law/municipality and provide information/referrals for local shelters. The team does not enforce any requests to relocate but provides information and supports for potential alternative accommodations. The RSOT will also make attempts to co-ordinate to attend sites with by-law at the time they plan to clear the site.

8. **If a followup is required**, the RSOT will provide an update to supervisors after visiting the site to ensure it is inactive.
9. **Encampments will only be dismantled** when there is a clear, human rights-based reason, and when all reasonable efforts to offer alternatives, including shelter, have been exhausted. The RSOT will do an assessment of available services and support to ensure that individuals are not displaced without appropriate alternatives.
 - a. If an individual refuses shelter, the process will involve ongoing engagement, offering additional support, and exploring all available resources. In cases where housing cannot be found immediately, alternative solutions will be explored, including temporary safe spaces and additional case management support. Dismantling will not occur without ensuring that individuals are provided with options for safety and stability, and efforts will be made to maintain ongoing communication and support.¹⁹
10. **Once deemed inactive**, and individuals have been safely relocated, the LAMs will lead the effort of cleaning up the site and debris in the surrounding vicinity. LAMs, RSOT, John Howard Society, and On Point Program (On Point) support SHARPs and hazardous waste disposal.

The current response to an encampment on private property includes:

1. Same steps one to six as the public property encampment.
2. **If a request to support the relocation of an encampment is received**, the property owner will provide a notice of encampment removal. Working with the property owner, the RSOT will make attempts to co-ordinate to attend sites with bylaw at the time they plan to clear the site.
3. **Once deemed inactive**, the property owner will lead the effort of cleaning up the site and RSOT will co-ordinate with the LAM to clean up the debris in the surrounding vicinity. LAMs, RSOT and On Point support SHARPs and hazardous waste disposal.

Homeless encampment reporting process



Roles, responsibilities and resources

This Strategy aims to offer guidance and structure for encampment response in Durham Region. The Regional Municipality of Durham, as the Service System Manager, values partnership and the extensive work being undertaken by local municipalities and community partners to address homeless encampments, and this strategy seeks to support those efforts and inform policy action. An extensive policy review was completed and outlined federal, provincial, regional and local government action to inform the best course of action in responding to homeless encampments while respecting the jurisdictional boundaries of other levels of government.

Through this analysis and a review of activities in Durham Region, a summary is provided below of roles and responsibilities. Responses require collaboration and coordination of several parties, as noted, for effective interventions.



This Strategy aims to offer guidance and structure for encampment response in Durham Region. The Regional Municipality of Durham, as the Service System Manager, values partnership and the extensive work being undertaken by local municipalities and community partners to address homeless encampments, and this strategy seeks to support those efforts and inform policy action.

Roles and Responsibilities Summary

	Encampments on Public Land	Encampments on Private Land
Private property owners		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and informing the Region of a homeless encampment on their land. Provide notice of encampment removal. Cleanup area on private property, including the dismantling and removal of an abandoned encampment.
Durham Region Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification and tracking of encampment locations, including health and safety issues. Work alongside Fire, By-law, Paramedics and PCOP, to support the health and well-being of the unhoused community. Lead Regional initiatives to provide safety education for those living in encampments. Lead in offering housing-focused supports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking and documenting encampment locations, and any health and safety issues. Work alongside Fire, By-law, Paramedics and PCOP, to support the health and well-being of the unhoused community. Lead Regional initiatives to provide safety education for those living in encampments. Lead in offering housing-focused supports.
Local Area Municipalities (including By-law)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification and tracking of encampment locations, including health and safety issues. Provide notice of encampment removal. Respond to breaches in local by-laws. Lead in active encampment site cleanup, including debris in the surrounding area. Upon request, support dismantling and cleaning of abandoned encampment sites, with the help of Durham Outreach. Mass communication of community by-laws, rights and policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to breaches in local by-laws. Mass communication of community by-laws, rights and policies. Co-ordinate joint inspection of the encampment with RSOT and Durham Region Police Service (DRPS), if necessary. Notify the registered owner of municipal by-law contravention(s) on the property and have the encampment removed. Provide basic information to the property owner on how to deal with people experiencing homelessness on private property. If necessary, work with or without property owner to relocate individuals on private property. Cleaning of debris and garbage in surrounding areas surrounding the private property.
Local Area Municipalities Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide fire-specific safety education to those living in encampments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide fire-specific safety education to those living in encampments.
Durham Region Police Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will respond to requests for assistance in accordance with the law and operational considerations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will respond to requests for assistance in accordance with the law and operational considerations.
Primary Care Outreach Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support in tracking and recording any health and safety issues in encampments. Support the mental health and well-being of encampment residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support in tracking and recording any health and safety issues in encampments. Support the mental health and well-being of encampment residents.

Durham Region current actions in progress

In response to the growing challenges posed by encampments, Durham Region has implemented a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach, highlighting four strategic priorities: legislation, policies and rights, community-building and engagement, programs and services, and housing options. These strategic priorities guide Durham's efforts to address the needs of those living in homeless encampments.

Actions in Progress Responding to Homeless Encampments

Community-building and engagement



- Developing a community education campaign.
- Sharing stories of resilience videos.
- Increasing community outreach.
- Implementing quarterly encampment bulletins.



Programs and services

- Enhancing case management services.
- Improved co-ordination across agencies.
- Rapid rehousing programs.
- Enhancing outreach and engagement teams.
- Data-driven decision making.

Housing options



- Reducing shelter barriers.
- Expanding emergency shelter, supportive and transitional housing options.



Legislation, policies and rights

- Co-ordinating policies to streamline responses.



Community-building and engagement

initiatives include the development of a community education campaign for both housed and unhoused residents to reframe discussions around homeless encampments and provide information on available supports for the unhoused. Information will be accessible on the Region of Durham's Homeless Shelters website, and a "Stories of Resilience" video series has been launched to reduce stigma. Community engagement will also involve presentations, visits to local businesses, and monthly bulletins for LAMs to share updates on regional, provincial, and national efforts and data related to homelessness and encampments. Additionally, quarterly meetings with local area municipal staff are scheduled throughout 2024 and beyond.

Housing options initiatives include reducing barriers in shelters to improve accessibility and safety, with the introduction of coed and pet-friendly sites in Durham. Regional staff are actively exploring opportunities to expand emergency shelter, supportive and transitional housing.

Programs and services are increasing with ongoing efforts to enhance services to support people with mental illness and addictions by expanding existing services and applying for new provincial initiatives. Furthermore, staffing capacities are growing through expanded outreach services, added training opportunities, and the creation of a new role dedicated to co-ordinating community supports.

Legislation, policies, and rights efforts are underway to collaborate with LAMs to co-ordinate policies and streamline responses to encampments, enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness.

Part B:

Moving beyond encampments

In co-ordination with the Integrated Homelessness System Action Plan for Durham Region, the following steps will guide the Region in supporting the unhoused community as they transition away from encampments.

In collaboration with the LAMs and community housing providers, the Region recognizes the need to provide supportive housing options that address known issues for some residents, including individuals with disabilities, who would be unable to access the traditional model of community housing. As well, residents with mental health conditions need further support to transition to housing. There is a structural barrier to housing that exists for persons with a disability related to their mental health and new models for housing, like shelters with access to care and supportive housing with appropriate treatment options, are a fundamental part of a lasting solution to homeless encampments.

Steps to Move Beyond Homeless Encampments in Durham Region

Expedite Action Plan recommendations

Implementing the Integrated Homelessness System Action Plan to enhance temporary and supportive housing.

Collaborate on service planning

Working with municipalities to ensure service planning meets community needs.

Partner with municipalities for land use

Collaborating with local municipalities to expedite planning approvals and utilize surplus land for housing.

Conclusion

Addressing homeless encampments requires a comprehensive and balanced approach that not only manages the immediate needs of the unhoused community but also works towards long-term solutions. The recommendations provided in this strategy focus on stabilizing and supporting individuals currently living in encampments while respecting their human rights. At the same time, the Region of Durham must accelerate efforts to create affordable and supportive housing options through collaborative partnerships with the federal and provincial governments, LAMs and community partners. By integrating these two components - managing the present challenges and building for the future - Durham Region can work toward eliminating encampments and ensuring that all residents have access to safe, adequate housing.

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