

Appendix A

Protocol for Responding to Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness on Private (Non-Municipally Owned) Land in Chatham-Kent

INTRODUCTION

Due to a lack of affordable housing and healthcare supports, encampments of people experiencing homelessness on public lands have become a reality in Chatham-Kent. This protocol is intended to provide a general framework for managing encampments on non-municipal properties. While it is the right of the landowner to have people vacate their property if desired or necessary by law, the municipality is aware that many property owners wish to do so in a way that offers emergency housing assistance or other needed services to individuals on their property. This protocol provides an optional framework and support and is not intended to replace the processes of other organizations or levels of government.

At any time, a property owner or designate may call Police to remove an unwanted person from their property. If the matter is not urgent, this would be through the non-emergency Police Services phone line at 519-436-6600. For urgent situations or emergencies, 911 should be called.

Property owners can designate anyone to watch over their property and represent them for the purpose of this protocol by providing a letter to Chatham-Kent Police Services.

Helping people living in encampments to have a planned exit with outreach supports, helps them stay connected to their service providers, preserves their belongings preventing loss of important personal items and ultimately assists them in the journey to become sustainably housed.

Definitions (for the purposes of this document)

- Encampment - An outdoor location with a visible structure such as tents, shanties, lean-tos or shacks, where one or more people of no fixed address live. Also referred in this document as persons or individuals camping.
- Private Property – any property not owned by the Municipality of Chatham-Kent
- Property Owner – refers to landowners or any designated property manager

- Outreach workers / Outreach – refers to individuals trained and experienced in helping people who are unhoused that are employed or contracted by the Municipality of Chatham-Kent’s Housing Services division
- Diversion – is a series of questions to assess the persons who are camping with other options for accommodations

Steps for Outreach Supported Exits from Private Property

- 1.) The property owner calls the Program Manager of Homelessness Prevention (or designate) to notify them of the encampment and provides details on the location, their own contact information and permission for outreach workers to enter the property in an effort to assist the person who is camping.
 - a. Additionally, orders could be posted by Building Development Services on private property regarding an encampment on private land contravening a clean and clear by-law. In which case, Building Development Services offers the supports of Outreach and Housing Services as outlined and if accepted, notifies the Program Manager of Homelessness Prevention.
- 2.) The manager organizes an outreach worker to attend the site as soon as possible, attempting to meet the person staying at the location.
- 3.) Outreach workers visit the site within 7 days to make contact with the individuals who are camping and advise that they will need to move within 7 days.
 - a. The outreach workers will strive to build rapport with the person camping and provide short term supports that may include food, hygiene products or harm reduction supplies.
 - b. They will advise of the upcoming need to move and practice diversion to see what other options the person has for accommodations and offer emergency housing options.
 - c. They will offer to help the person to plan for exiting the property including plans for their belongings and connect them to a housing specialist with Housing Services for longer term housing solutions.
 - d. They will attend the property on ‘moving day’, review the plans and assist the person with moving.
 - e. If the person refuses to move, Police will be called by the property owner to enforce exit from the property.
 - f. Outreach workers will attempt to assist the individuals from the encampment with moving to a safe alternative location.

- g. Outreach workers will encourage and support clean up of the site by the person(s) camping, but ultimately the property owner will be responsible for final clean up after the person has exited.

During the process, the outreach workers will inform the property owners of non-confidential pertinent information (ie: the person(s) camping has agreed to move on a specific date, and vacated the property).

People experiencing homelessness cannot be forced to accept services, except in very rare circumstances. Thus, if the persons trespassing are not interested in connecting with outreach staff for supports and/or unwilling to vacate the private property, police enforcement is the only means to move them.

Potential challenges with leaving an encampment on private property for an extended period of time:

- Significant garbage and other waste is likely to be left on site if there is no simple way to remove it and/or no washroom facilities accessible nearby
- Complaints from neighbouring properties or businesses could occur
- Unwanted guests or pets may also attend the site
- Unwanted behaviors or illegal activities may also occur
- All costs associate with necessary clean up on the property are the responsibility of the property owner and if not completed within an agreed period of time will be completed by the municipality and charged back through property taxes.

Every encampment and person staying in a camp is unique and the vast majority only have a lack of affordable housing as a common characteristic.

This protocol is an appendix to the 'Interdepartmental Protocol for Responding to Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness on Municipally Owned Land in Chatham-Kent' that provides additional information including core principles.