

Municipality of Chatham-Kent

Health and Human Services

Housing Services

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Kim Crew, Director, Housing Services - Operations

Date: August 11, 2025

Subject: Chatham-Kent's Municipal Encampment Protocol and By-Law

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The attached by-law contained in Appendix "A" of this report, being a by-law to regulate the use of certain public property within the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, related to the Municipality's Encampment Response Protocol, be approved.
2. By-law enforcement services for the Encampment Response Protocol be single-sourced to Royal Protective Services, at a total value not to exceed \$238,882, including HST, to be funded from the Housing Services Operation Reserve 17316.

Background

At its November 4, 2024 meeting, Council approved an [Interdepartmental Protocol for Responding to Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness on Public Land in Chatham-Kent \(Encampment Response Protocol\)](#). The protocol defines an encampment as "a temporary physical structure built as a shelter or dwelling and located on municipal property (that is not rented by the occupants of the encampment)."

The protocol, as approved on November 4, 2024, contains criteria that encampments must meet to avoid relocation and indicates that structures must not be located:

- On or within 100 metres from municipal playgrounds, water parks, splashpads, beaches, or sports fields.
- On or within 100 metres from any elementary schools, childcare facility, assisted living facility, or other health or social service facility providing support or care services to youth or vulnerable populations including shelters.
- Within 10 metres of any private property line.
- On or within 5 metres of sidewalks or pedestrian paths.
- On or within 25 metres of any cemetery.
- On or within 5 metres of an off-leash dog area.

- On or within 5 metres of any community garden.

At a special meeting held on July 28, 2025, Council considered a motion containing the following eleven recommendations regarding encampments in Chatham-Kent:

1. The current encampment protocols be amended for the City of Chatham to require encampments be:
 - a. 100 metres away from any private property line with a habitable residence;
 - b. 100 metres away from any business;
 - c. 25 metres away from construction sites; and,
 - d. 10 metres away from a recreational path.
2. Administration continues to work in collaboration with ROCK to engage with individuals and prioritise them for services and housing as they become available.
3. Administration voluntarily transitions as many homeless individuals as possible to the new transitional cabins program thereby diminishing the number of people in encampments.
4. Administration actively pursues all options to reduce and end encampments in Chatham-Kent. This will include, but not be limited to, exploring opportunities to immediately deliver permanent supportive housing, and increased transitional cabins. A report back from administration on possible options and costing be returned to Council as soon as possible. The same recommendations should be presented to the provincial and federal government for financial assistance.
5. Administration explore local housing options that could be quickly converted into supportive housing and report back on feasibility and costs.
6. The current encampment protocols be amended to include a provision that there is to be no more than one tent per person, and that all personal items be stored within a tent (with exception of a bicycle and small structures for pets); and items in contravention to this will be removed following notice. Administration be directed to enhance the frequency of refuse collection at encampment sites.
7. Administration bring back a by-law as soon as possible to allow for the enforcement of the approved protocols to begin.
8. Administration hire an additional temporary by-law officer to enforce these amendments. Administration to report back recommendations on numbers and costs based on the approved protocol amendments.
9. CK Police install CCTV cameras where operationally required at the sole discretion of Chatham-Kent Police.
10. Administration bring a report back to the September 8, 2025 Council meeting with a plan to engage partners from mental health, medical supports, addictions, housing, ROCK that could provide supports (including crisis support alongside

enforcements) to the people staying at encampments. This report should include creative solutions and best practice examples used across the province, and will also include related costs to CK.

11. Regular neighbourhood communication begins immediately with appropriate members of administration, residents and business owners in the 325 Grand Ave E, Chatham property area until further notice.

All recommendations, with the exception of recommendation number #1, were approved by Council on July 28, 2025. The following motion regarding recommendation # 1 was passed at the meeting:

“That recommendation 1 be referred to administration in order to ensure an informed and transparent decision process to the August meeting where Administration can report back with locations that fit within the setback radius; permitting the public to provide feedback and deputations on the implications of setback distances in the by law.”

Specifically, administration was asked to identify properties within Chatham that would fit within the setback distances identified in the protocol if the distance to private property was changed from 10 metres to 25 metres, 50 metres or 100 metres.

The purpose of this report is to:

- 1) Identify municipal properties that would meet each of the aforementioned setback distances.
- 2) Request that the by-law attached as Appendix A be approved.
- 3) Receive approval to single source by-law enforcement services.
- 4) Provide an update regarding increased refuse collection at the Public Utilities Commission encampment site.

Comments

Setbacks from Private Property

Chatham-Kent's Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping team analyzed all municipal land parcels in Chatham based on the parameters outlined in the recommendation, including all other parameters specified within the protocol.

In addition to the criteria outlined by Council, several logistical considerations must be taken into account when evaluating potential sites. The location should not be within a flood plain to ensure safety and long-term viability. It must be accessible to individuals with mobility challenges and capable of supporting the installation and servicing of portable washroom facilities (if needed). The site must also accommodate the placement of a dumpster, along with the necessary equipment for regular waste removal (if needed). Furthermore, it should be easily accessible to supportive social

service providers and emergency services, including police, fire, and paramedics, to ensure timely and effective response when needed.

After reviewing the list of land parcels against these additional needs, four parcels of land were consistently identified at the 25, 50, and 100 metre setback ranges, with corresponding decreasing space for an encampment.

325 Grand Avenue East

The Public Utilities Commission property, containing the Chatham Water Treatment Plant, located at 325 Grand Avenue East meets the 10 metre and 25 metre setback criteria and offers ample accessible space for both individuals and service providers. Importantly, this site is not situated within a flood plain, which makes it a safer and more stable option for long-term use. Any transition to a new use would require a coordinated and respectful relocation process for the individuals at the current encampment on this site, in accordance with existing protocols and community engagement practices. At a 50 metre setback, the available area for an encampment is compressed against the fence on the north and south sides of the fenced plant area. A 100 metre setback is not possible as it is within the fenced plant area. A map of this site is attached as Appendix B.

Water Tower Site, Richmond Street West

The Chatham Elevated Water Tower site at 545 Irwin Street, just north of Richmond Street also presents a viable option in terms of physical accessibility for individuals and service providers. The surrounding land is open and usable, which could support an encampment or service delivery. Despite these advantages, the site's distance from essential social services significantly reduces its appeal. As well, this site holds the largest bulk water station in Chatham-Kent with 6098 fills in 2024, and is frequently accessed by heavy trucks and equipment such as transports with tankers, tractors, and vector trucks. Individuals may be reluctant to relocate to this area due to the isolation and lack of proximity to supports they rely on, which could impact both initial uptake and long-term stability. Once factoring in the turn around loop for water haulers' significant safety concerns, the potential of an encampment at this site is severely limited and not recommended. A map of this site is attached as Appendix C.

Thames Grove Conservation Area, located on Grand Avenue East

The Thames Grove Conservation Area, located south of Grand Avenue East at 34 Kingsway Drive, offers sufficient space across all setback ranges. However, the site poses several challenges. The area lies within a flood plain, raising concerns about safety during periods of heavy rainfall, deep snowfall, or seasonal flooding. Additionally, this site is host to a disc golf course, which spans a majority of the area, including a naturalized area. The course has active usage, including organized leagues. This means that the site cannot be considered as an encampment location due to the proximity to a sports field. A map of this site is attached as Appendix D.

O'Neill Nature Preserve

The lands comprising the O'Neill Nature Preserve (formerly known as Paxton's Bush) have been excluded from this analysis as it is Administration's recommendation that outdoor sheltering by unhoused persons should not be permitted on this property due to the fact that these lands were transferred to the Municipality subject to specific legal conditions governing their use. These conditions provide specific limitations on use of the property, including that the property is to be used for specific passive uses, which do not include outdoor sheltering.

By-Law and Enforcement

As specified in recommendation #7, Appendix A contains the proposed by-law to regulate the use of certain public property within the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, related to the Encampment Response Protocol. Administration requests approval of this by-law to ensure that the parameters identified within the Municipality's Encampment Response Protocol can be enforced.

Recommendation #8 identifies the need to hire by-law officers to enforce an encampment by-law. Administration recommends single-sourcing by-law enforcement to Royal Protective Services to December 31, 2026. This single source would meet section 'h' of the Procurement By-law #205-2023, where an unforeseeable situation of urgency exists and competitive methods of purchasing would result in the Municipality's inability to obtain the deliverable in time. For clarity, this exception cannot be used where the urgency was foreseeable. Cost details related to the by-law enforcement services are outlined in the Financial Implications section of this report.

Refuse Collection at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) Water Treatment Plant Site

Once it became known that individuals had established an encampment on the PUC Water Treatment Plant site, Administration made arrangements for a large garbage dumpster to be placed on site to minimize refuse in the area and for the dumpster to be emptied twice weekly. As specified within recommendation #6, staff have increased the refuse collection at this location to three times per week effective July 31, 2025. The costs associated with the increased refuse collection are minimal and will be funded through previously approved operating budgets.

By-Law and Encampment Protocol

Should Council decide to make any amendments to the existing Encampment Protocol, outlined in the attached by-law regulating the use of certain public properties within the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, a formal motion must be passed to approve those changes.

Council Term Priorities

This report supports the following Council Term Priorities:

			
Deliver Excellent Service	Promote Safety & Well-Being	Grow Our Community	Ensure Environmental Sustainability
	2a		

Consultation

The Manager of Data and Integration, Information Technology and Transformation along with a GIS Mapping Technician verified and reviewed mapping data to determine land parcels within the specified parameters.

Legal Services prepared the draft by-law and reviewed the list of land parcels provided in this report.

Planning Services was consulted on the land parcel analysis process.

A Budget Analyst has reviewed the Financial Implications section of this report.

The Manager of Purchasing and Accounts Payable was consulted on the procurement process.

The Manager, Corporate Communications, has reviewed the communications plan.

Communication

Communication on Council or administration-driven encampment-related updates will be provided through the Encampment Updates Let's Talk Chatham-Kent page as well as media releases and social media posts. Community engagement will be considered on an as-needed basis depending on unfolding circumstances. Engagement with local outreach groups, such as R.O.C.K. Missions, will be undertaken to ensure full scope communication is provided.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)

The issue of homelessness in Chatham-Kent is complex and growing. Increasing numbers of individuals are experiencing homelessness, many for the first time, due to rising housing costs, limited shelter capacity, and systemic barriers. Those residing in encampments often include Indigenous peoples, racialized individuals, 2SLGBTQIA+ persons, and people living with disabilities, mental health conditions, or substance use

challenges. These populations face compounded vulnerabilities that require a response grounded in principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ).

Repeated displacements of homeless encampments may lead to significant unintended consequences. These moves disrupt access to essential services, sever fragile support networks, and increase the risk of harm to individuals already in crisis. In addition, such actions may deepen mistrust between encampment residents and municipal authorities, making future engagement and service delivery more difficult.

A DEIJ-informed approach does not ignore community concerns. Instead, it seeks to balance those concerns with the rights and dignity of all residents. This includes exploring alternatives to displacement, such as transitional cabins, culturally safe outreach, and trauma-informed care. It also involves engaging encampment residents in decision-making processes and recognizing that homelessness is not a personal failure, but a systemic issue. By embedding DEIJ principles into the response, Chatham-Kent can move toward solutions that are not only more compassionate but also more effective and sustainable.

Financial Implications

Administration has received cost estimates from Royal Protective Services for by-law enforcement. The estimated costs for two security guards at 40 hours per week each plus the use of a vehicle until December 31, 2026 totals \$ 238,882 including HST. After accounting for the HST rebate, the net cost to the GL would be \$215,121. This amount would be funded through the Housing Operations Reserve (17316).

If approved, administration will review and analyze by-law enforcement needs throughout 2026 and will include recommendations within the 2027 municipal budget process as required.

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Consulted and confirmed the content of the consultation section of the report by:

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Attachments: Appendix A – By-Law to regulate the use of certain public property within
the Municipality of Chatham-Kent for the protection of persons and
property and to promote safe use and enjoyment
Appendix B – Map of 325 Grand Avenue East, Chatham
Appendix C – Map of 545 Irwin Street, Chatham
Appendix D – Map of 34 Kingsway Drive, Chatham

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