

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Wednesday, May 15, 2024
Subject	Mayoral Direction B4 – Temporary Structured Encampment

Recommendation

1. That the report titled Mayoral Direction B4 -Temporary Structured Encampment dated May 15, 2024, be received.
 2. That staff be directed to forward a copy of this report to the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee for information.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding the provision and financial implications of a temporary structured encampment site as directed by [Mayoral Direction-B4](#), from February 28, 2024.

Key Findings

Homelessness is a systemic crisis that calls for an economic, social and health policy response. The City of Guelph and the County of Wellington work collaboratively with community health and social service providers on interventions and longer-term strategies to support ending homelessness. Work also continues with provincial partners and local groups to examine system-level interventions that adapt and respond to social and health equity issues. Our community, like many across the country, continues to experience challenges with housing affordability and housing stability. The current market, alongside existing government funding programs, does not deliver enough housing that is at a level of affordability to meet community needs.

Although the City continues its work on the development of more affordable housing options, the responsibility for the delivery of homelessness and housing stability services lies with the County of Wellington as Guelph’s Consolidated Municipal Services Manager (CMSM).

Staff do not recommend taking any further action on the provision of a temporary structured encampment site as this is outside the scope of the City of Guelph’s mandated municipal services, is not recommended by our CMSM, and would have to be funded as a discretionary social service creating additional budget pressures. No funding is currently allocated within the 2024-2027 multi-year budget for this

service, and no grant funding opportunities from upper levels of government to put towards a temporary structured encampment site program are available.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This report aligns to Future Guelph, Guelph's 2024–2027 Strategic Plan through the theme of people and economy where our goal is to support community well-being.

Future Guelph Theme

People and Economy

Future Guelph Objectives

People and Economy: Support community well-being

Financial Implications

Given that this report recommends no further action, there are no financial implications associated with this report.

Report

Background

This report responds to [Mayoral Direction-B4](#), from February 28, 2024 in accordance with Part VI.1 of the Municipal Act directing staff to undertake investigative next steps related to the provision a temporary structured encampment site. As included within the Mayoral direction, this report identifies sites for consideration for a temporary structured encampment site, infrastructure and operational services that will be required on site, a breakdown of costs for initial infrastructure and ongoing operations, and results of engagement with persons with lived and living experience and community partners.

Through the Mayoral direction, staff were requested to prepare and present the following information:

1. Potential sites/locations, considering both city owned and non-city owned sites.
2. Funding, including the option for community fundraising, and any available grants programs from upper levels of government.
3. Purchasing process and costs for materials or completed "tiny home structures".
4. A review and costing of necessary services for a temporary structured encampment site, taking into account the needs (through engagement) of those with lived and living experience as outlined in a human rights-based approach.
5. That the City request commitments from the County of Wellington, as CMSM, local healthcare providers and other community partners to provide ongoing supports for, and/or operation of, a future temporary structured encampment.
6. That due to the urgency of the homelessness crisis, that this report be presented as soon as possible.

Potential Sites and Locations

City staff reviewed all City-owned and controlled properties as possible locations for a temporary structured encampment site while considering the needs and preferences of individuals experiencing homelessness in terms of location and amenities. Key factors considered included access to public transit, access to community amenities such as community centres and libraries, as well as access to social services providers to facilitate the provision of wrap-around services for people residing in the temporary structured encampment site. Because of the size of the property needed, parks were considered the most suitable for this use. Outdoor spaces such as parks can provide safety and security at all times (24/7) due to their inherent visibility, and by providing 24/7 access to belongings and beds, unlike traditional shelters. Outside spaces also provide comfort for a number of cultural groups, notably those who identify as Indigenous given the relationship this group has with land and home. Due to the separate exercise being undertaken in response to [Mayoral Direction 2024-B3](#) (Strategic Real Estate Partnerships on Underutilized City Owned Assets), parking lots were not considered at this time.

Parks

Factors considered included proximity to the downtown core; whether the topography was suitably flat and open; programming and usage; cultural and environmental significance of the sites; distance from schools, private property, playgrounds, pools, splash pads, public pathways and sidewalks; security and visibility issues; and accessibility for emergency services.

Four parks were identified, all of which are located within 600 metres of the downtown core. They are all either fully owned by the City of Guelph or are owned in partnership with the Grand River Conservation Authority. All four parks have adequate space that is generally flat and open that would be suitable without significantly impacting existing programming and are not culturally or environmentally significant in a way that would be detrimental to considering them for this use.

As referenced within our Council-approved Park Plan, parks are defined as areas of land set aside primarily for human enjoyment, recreation and connection to nature. Conversion, even for a short time, of any park to support a temporary structured encampment will cause misalignment with this definition and impact a wide variety of park users, stakeholders and associations across the city. This impact will not only be experienced during the period when a temporary structure encampment is in use but also after use as it will take time to restore park assets to their intended states. Associated costs, resources and time to return park assets to their intended use are difficult to determine at this time though staff expect these to be significant and further strain the ability to meet service delivery standards and community expectations.

At this time, as no public consultation has taken place and no further action is being recommended, the four parks have not been specifically identified in this report. Should Council direct staff to further consider the usage of parks for a potential temporary structured encampment, staff would undertake a fulsome public engagement process to identify the potential park locations and seek community feedback. Engagement would include those with lived and living experience who might utilize the encampment, impacted park users as well as adjacent businesses and residents.

Non-City-owned lands

In addition to the review of City-owned land, staff made a call for proposal on March 27, 2024, to private landowners who may be interested in donating land for a period of no less than three years to facilitate a temporary structured encampment. Private lands were also reviewed based on location, access to amenities and provision of social services.

The call for proposals included promotion on the City's website and social media channels. In addition, direct communication with the development community and community organizations took place to further discuss non-City-owned land opportunities. The call for proposals generated significant media attention as well.

After a review of private land submissions, staff determined there were no suitable submissions to bring forward.

Additionally, Infrastructure Ontario undertook a review of its land holdings in Guelph and met with City staff in response to the call for proposals. Through their analysis, it was determined that Infrastructure Ontario does not have a suitable site in Guelph to locate a temporary structured encampment.

Funding for Temporary Structured Encampments

A temporary structured encampment requires significant up-front capital investment to prepare a site and build or purchase homes, as well as ongoing operating funding for the services and amenities provided to residents of the encampment.

A preliminary estimate of the up-front cost based on information obtained from other municipalities is approximately \$2.5 million for 50 modular units, or approximately \$50 thousand per unit. Ongoing operating costs vary based on the services provided but are estimated to be in the range of \$40–50 thousand per unit, annually (\$2–2.5 million per year for 50 units). Should Council wish to proceed with a temporary structured encampment, staff recommend undertaking a competitive purchasing process for the capital acquisition which is estimated to take three to four months to complete.

Staff are not aware of any grant funding currently available from upper levels of government to support an encampment of this nature. Other municipalities (which are also CMSMs) have leveraged the Homelessness Prevention Program to support capital investments. In Guelph, this funding is administered through the County of Wellington as the social services provider. Providing funds for ongoing operating costs would be the responsibility of the City, even if the County of Wellington acted as the conduit for engaging service providers. There are no capital or operating funds currently included in the 2024–2027 multi-year budget for a project of this nature.

Included within the 2024 Provincial budget, significant commitments are being made for permanent solutions for individuals and families facing unstable housing conditions and dealing with mental health and addictions challenges by investing an additional \$152 million over the next three years towards various supportive housing initiatives. This commitment will alleviate the pressures on social housing waitlists and by-name lists for individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity who require permanent housing solutions.

The City of Guelph and the County of Wellington continue to make significant strides in comparison to other mid-sized municipalities when it comes to the development of permanent supportive housing solutions. Over the course of this year, an additional 60 permanent supportive housing units and 12 transitional housing units are expected to open. These developments continue to build on the successes of 2023, where 48 permanent supportive housing options were opened. These units will be an option for individuals who may have been living unsheltered or individuals who cannot or will not immediately stay in shelter.

Community Fundraising

Staff consulted with the Home for Good campaign's lead partners from the United Way and the Guelph Community Foundation. The Home for Good campaign has seen success to date with their campaign but has not yet reached their final \$5 million target. Approximately \$2 million is yet to be raised, of which \$1 million is needed to support ongoing capital maintenance expenses for the existing supportive housing projects, and another \$1 million is being sought as seed money for future possible permanent supportive housing projects. There is a concern that any new community fundraising campaigns for a temporary structured encampment would erode efforts from the Home for Good campaign meeting its campaign targets, with the most urgent need being the capital maintenance funding commitments to the existing supportive housing projects.

In a more general way, there is concern that there has been a reduction in overall donations in the not-for-profit sector throughout the province and specifically in Guelph. Further, both the United Way and Guelph Community Foundation are seeing increasing pressures as they try to meet their own organization's fundraising needs while still continuing to keep up the momentum for the Home for Good campaign. Until the commitments have been fulfilled for the needs of the existing supportive housing projects (the remaining \$1 million that is outstanding), it is not recommended to launch another community fundraising campaign for a temporary structured encampment.

Necessary Services for Temporary Structured Encampments

As the City is committed to a human rights-based approach to housing and housing stability, the City is responsible for ensuring that everyone living in a temporary structured encampment has access without discrimination to services needed to protect their physical and mental health, which includes access to water, food, sanitation, heating and cooling, accessibility supports as well as healthcare and harm reduction services. These services are required should the City move forward with a temporary structured encampment site.

Following consultation with community partners, additional recommendations for wrap-around services that would be required for the ongoing operations of a temporary structured encampment site included the following:

- Housing Focused Outreach Staff
- Mental Health Crisis Support Staff
- 24/7 Security
- 24/7 Support Staff
- Primary Care Medical Staff to address acute needs
- Intensive Case Management
- Pest Control Services

- Pet Care services (optional)

A key takeaway from this consultation was the consensus amongst the providers that the physical space itself is not as important as the wrap-around services that are being provided within the space. Individuals experiencing homelessness who may access this type of temporary living accommodation will require services that are tailored to their unique needs to successfully transition to permanent housing solutions.

Consultations with Persons with Lived and Living Experience

As included within the Mayoral direction, City staff were directed to engage with persons with lived and living experience to get a better understanding of the needs and expectations for a temporary structured encampment site. After consultation with the County of Wellington and Stepping Stone, it was determined that given the tight timeline to meaningfully engage, that the engagement take place through an informal process with surveys being completed by Stepping Stone community outreach and shelter staff.

The informal engagement took place during the week of April 8, 2024. Community outreach staff from Stepping Stone surveyed approximately 30 individuals during their outreach routes. Additional surveys were completed at the Stepping Stone overnight shelter. Following this engagement, staff concluded that roughly 50 per cent of respondents would be open to moving into a temporary structured encampment site and that a majority of respondents believe the site should take a low-barrier approach to guests, pets and substance use. Key wrap-around services that were identified within the surveys were consistent with the feedback received from community partners and healthcare providers.

It is important to note that this type of informal engagement is not typically how staff would meaningfully engage with persons with lived and living experience. However, due to the time constraints this was the only viable option. Should Council move forward with a temporary structured encampment site, staff would want to undertake more meaningful engagement that is consistent with the City's Community Engagement Policy. This would include multiple engagement and focus group sessions that span weeks and/or months in conjunction with the County of Wellington and community providers. The County of Wellington is in the process of setting up a lived experience advisory table which will be a valuable resource when completing meaningful engagements moving forward.

Commitments to support a Temporary Structured Encampment

In addition to the engagement that took place with persons with lived and living experience through community outreach, City staff also consulted with several local healthcare providers and other community partners to gauge commitment for ongoing supports for, and operation of, a future temporary structured encampment.

Through this consultation, it was noted that no single service provider has the capacity with current staffing and financial resources to be the sole operator of a 24/7 temporary structured encampment site. Additional financial resources would be required to contract a service provider to do this work.

The health and community partners engaged through this consultation continue to provide essential services for the city's most vulnerable on a daily basis. At this consultation, there was agreement that additional resources from other levels of

government are required to eliminate and reduce chronic homelessness due to the current state of homelessness and lack of affordable housing options. Advocacy efforts will continue with higher levels of government for enhanced investments to support growing needs.

Additional Information

The City and the County have been making great advancements and investments to the number of permanent transitional and supportive housing units being brought online in our community. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is an evidence-based and cost-effective solution for people who are chronically homeless and/or highly vulnerable because of long-term concerns such as mental illness, developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, substance use disorders and chronic health conditions. Similar services would be required at a temporary structured encampment site for the safety of residents within the encampment and in surrounding areas.

Permanent supportive housing solutions for individuals facing these challenges is being recognized by higher levels of government as a significant gap in the current housing continuum. Following the Provincial budget announcement in March, the Province is investing an additional \$152 million over the next three years towards various supportive housing initiatives. This investment, along with the current projects in development will present a variety of permanent supportive housing solutions that can stabilize individuals who have been living outside, individuals who cannot or will not immediately stay in a shelter and need stabilization supports, individuals who need permanent housing and individuals who need 24/7 medical supports. This funding will enable many of the transitional and supportive housing units that have been recently completed or are currently under construction to be opened, providing many people who would otherwise have been potential residents of a structured encampment with a more permanent option.

Financial Implications

Given that this report recommends no further action, there are no financial implications associated with this report.

Consultations and Engagement

Community consultations and engagement are detailed in the body of the report.

Attachments

None.

Departmental Approval

None.

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