Minutes - Executive Policy Committee – January 21, 2025

REPORTS

Item No. 14 Update on Encampment Clean-up Pilot

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and recommended to Council:

1. That the Encampment Clean-up pilot not be extended beyond October 2024, but that the Public Service leverage new partnerships with Main Street Project, Siloam Mission, and the Downtown Community Safety Partnership to work with these organizations on an as-needed basis for the collection of waste at encampment sites where possible.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Minutes - Executive Policy Committee – January 21, 2025

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Santos,

That the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in and forwarded to Council.

Carried

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On November 13, 2024, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and granted an extension of time of up to 60 days to report back on the encampment clean-up pilot project.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On April 25, 2024, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

1. That the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to enter into sole source agreements with Main Street Project, Siloam Mission and Downtown Community Safety Partnership to operate an encampment clean-up pilot project, through the end of October, using up to $170,000 within existing departmental resources and/or corporate efficiencies.

2. That the Public Service be directed to provide an interim verbal report on the progress of the pilot project at the May 22, 2024 and July 9, 2024 meetings of the Executive Policy Committee.

3. That the Public Service be directed to report back on the pilot project at the November 13, 2024 meeting of the Executive Policy Committee.

4. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Jamil Mahmood, Executive Director, Main Street Project submitted a communication in support of the matter.

The following persons submitted communications in opposition to the matter:

- John Giavedoni, Executive Director, Residents Of The Exchange District
- Laurie Nealin

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Update on Encampment Clean up Pilot

Critical Path: Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
C. Brens	S. Armbruster, Interim CAO	T. Graham	S. Armbruster, Interim CAO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On April 25, 2024, Council authorized the Chief Administrative Officer to enter into sole source agreements with Main Street Project, Siloam Mission, and the Downtown Community Safety Partnership to operate an encampment clean-up pilot project ("the Pilot") until the end of October 2024, using up to $170,000 within existing departmental resources and/or corporate efficiencies (final expenses were $23,804.51).

This report provides a final written update on the encampment clean up pilot for the period of June to September 2024.

During the reporting period, the Public Service's partners reported:

- collecting 16,107 total gallons of litter;
- collecting a significant amount of bulk waste (including 13 mattresses, 11 wooden pallets, three couches, one bed frame, and approximately 60 bike frames and tires);
- the removal of 145 sharps (including needles and pipes) and nine large knives;
- 68 total cleanups; and
- 239.5 house of paid staff time associated with the Pilot.

The Public Service's partners reported visible improvements in the cleanliness of the areas surrounding encampments and positive feedback from the local community. However, feedback received by the City through 311 or via direct communication with City Departments was typically not as positive, with residents continuing to express concerns related to garbage in or near encampments.

Further, Fire safety issues at encampment sites were not appreciably decreased during the reporting period and remain a significant life safety concern.

A review of the Pilot suggests that, while initiatives like the Pilot are important and improve the lives of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, they will ultimately not address the underlining causes of homelessness and ongoing concerns related to encampments.

The Public Service recommends that waste collection work continue with its partners on an as-needed basis, but that the Pilot not be extended any further.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Encampment Clean-up pilot not be extended beyond October 2024, but that the Public Service leverage new partnerships with Main Street Project, Siloam Mission, and the Downtown Community Safety Partnership to work with these organizations on an as-needed basis for the collection of waste at encampment sites where possible.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On April 25, 2024, Council directed the Public Service to provide a written report to Executive Policy Committee on the outcomes of an encampment clean-up pilot project that expired in October 2024, that was undertaken by the City with Main Street Project (MSP), Siloam Mission, and the Downtown Community Safety Partnership (DCSP).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no direct financial implications to the recommendations of this report. The Public Service will continue to explore new partnership opportunities with Main Street Project Silom Mission and the Downtown Community Safety Partnership for the collection of waste at encampment sites.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

History and Context

On April 25, 2024, Council authorized the Chief Administrative Officer to enter into sole source agreements with MSP, Siloam Mission, and DCSP to operate an encampment clean-up pilot project ("the Pilot") through the end of October 2024 using up to $170,000 within existing departmental resources from the Public Works Department and/or corporate efficiencies.

Council also directed the Public Service to provide interim verbal updates on the progress of the Pilot to EPC at its meetings in May and July. Council also directed the Public Service to provide a written report on the Pilot at the November 2024 meeting of EPC. This report addresses the final requirement of the April 2024 disposition and provides a summary of the Pilot and highlights outcomes and lessons learned.

Following Council direction, City staff met with representatives from MSP, Siloam Mission, and DCSP. At this meeting, a high-level plan was developed related to the implementation of the Pilot. This included the selection of key geographic areas of focus and the identification of roles taken on by each partner. In alignment with the proposal included with the City's April report, the Pilot focused on the following areas:

- Assiniboine Avenue (near 300 Assiniboine)
- Waterfront Drive
- Maple Street

As agreed to by the participating agencies, and for those encampments that were occupied, DCSP led and coordinated the distribution of garbage bags and weekly garbage collection within each of the above noted areas. Siloam Mission, through their Mission Off the Streets Team (MOST), participated in larger clean-up projects where there was significant debris and materials to be collected. MSP leveraged their outreach expertise and relationships with encampment residents to support thoughtful and effective collaboration between the residents and the clean-up staff. The City facilitated garbage collection, communication between partners, and the clean-up of vacated or unoccupied sites.

Beginning in July, and at the request of participating agencies, City staff established a regular weekly check-in with all partners involved in the Pilot to review each of the pilot areas, discuss sites, address logistical concerns, and work through any issues. These check-ins were created based on a need to enhance coordination between partners, and to ensure an appropriate sequencing of supports when entering encampments. In August the check-ins were reduced to twice per month as the program developed more regular operating processes.

Outcomes

Included below is data and narrative information related to the outcomes of the Pilot provided by the participating partners and City departments for the reporting period of June until September 2024. Data for October is not included as the original timing of this report required its submission prior to the end of October. It is important to note that while DCSP and Siloam Mission were both compensated by the City for their participation in the Pilot, MSP was not compensated for its role, although the City does fund the MSP outreach service.

The overall cost of the Pilot was limited to $23,804.51 during the reporting period. The cost of the pilot was lower than anticipated because it focused on three sites, the reporting period was short, and the costs were only to pay invoices received from DCSP, Ghost Garbage, and Siloam, for services rendered.

During the reporting period, DCSP identified that its Clean Slate team collected 16,107 total gallons of litter (or approximately 60,972 litres) in the form of buckets (256), garbage bags filled by encampment residents (1,054), and shopping carts (85). Staff also removed a significant amount of bulk waste from the pilot areas including 13 mattresses, 11 wooden pallets, three couches, one bed frame, and approximately 60 bike frames and tires. In total DCSP staff completed 64 cleanups, representing 154 hours of paid work through their Clean Slate team.

Siloam Mission identified that through its MOST team, it engaged in 68.5 paid hours of staff time associated with the Pilot. This included four large mindful cleanups. For the purposes of this report, a mindful cleanup is a cleanup of an encampment that is still occupied, and within which there are larger materials that need to be removed outside of the regular weekly cleanups completed by DCSP.

On average, Siloam Mission contributed 17 hours of paid staff time for each mindful clean-up. Over the course of the Pilot the MOST team also removed 145 sharps including needles and pipes, as well as nine large knives from the pilot areas.

MSP proactively engaged 137 times with encampment residents and program participants about the benefits of having a clean environment at the encampments, and provided supplies such as garbage bags, gloves, and garbage pickers.

Prior to mindful cleanups, MSP staff connected with community members to support them as needed to complete an initial clean-up of their site and plan for mindful clean-up together. On the day of the mindful, MSP would again attend prior to, or concurrently with the other participating partners, to offer final preparation support for community members on site, and to support staff from MOST and the City upon arrival. MSP staff also actively helped with cleaning and garbage collection, while brokering partnerships between residents and the participating partners. In one instance, MSP was able to engage with Winnipeg Waterways, who operate water taxi and boat tours in Winnipeg, to support a water side clean up, at no cost, along the river using boats to pull garbage from the riverbanks. This resulted in the additional collection a significant amount of waste, and 14 shopping carts, pulled from the rivers.

In addition to the above quantitative outcomes, DCSP and MSP reported visible improvements in the cleanliness of the areas surrounding encampments. This outcome reflected the data collected by DCSP which showed a reduction in the amount of weekly garbage collected over the course of the Pilot. Related to this, DCSP identified receiving positive feedback from the local community who live near by the three pilot sites. They reported that neighbors who had previously voiced concerns about cleanliness and safety at the pilot sites commented on the visible improvements in the area. In comparison however, feedback on the Pilot received by the City through 311 or via direct communication with City Departments was typically not positive, with residents continuing to express concerns related to garbage in or near encampments.

Despite the efforts of the partnering agencies noted above, the gathering of combustible materials located directly in encampments continued throughout the reporting period and remained an important fire safety concern.

One important issue that was affirmed through the Pilot is the need for increased coordination between City services, external partners, other levels of government and the community on the matter of encampments. This includes aligning the roles and responsibilities of all partners as well as reviewing and updating existing strategies.

Finally, and while not directly related to garbage removal, the Pilot highlighted two unanticipated but important outcomes.

First, as part of the Pilot both DCSP and Siloam Mission engaged social enterprise models through their Clean Slate and MOST teams. The Clean Slate program offered through DCSP provides employment opportunities for formerly at-risk community members and employs participants within the community. The MOST program offered through Siloam Mission, is a work opportunity within their employment program, serving as a supportive employment initiative for people currently experiencing or recently having experienced homelessness. Both the MOST and Clean Slate programs provide important opportunities for participants to build confidence, develop employment skills, establish a self-identified routine, and earn income. In this way the Pilot provided important work and experiences opportunities for participates of the Clean Slate and MOST programs.

Second, MSP, Siloam Mission and DCSP reported that there was an overall interest by encampment residents to create a collaborative approach to waste management within encampments, with each suggesting that encampment residents expressed a strong desire to actively manage the waste in their living areas. MSP also reported that people living unsheltered requested an expansion of the program to other areas in the City.

Conclusion

While the Pilot was successful in removing a significant amount of waste and garbage from encampments, which directly improved the living conditions for individuals living in the encampments, this was a temporary improvement, as garbage would reaccumulate shortly after it was collected. Feedback from the area residents was also mixed; the Public Service generally received negative feedback via 311 and direct communications to City Departments, while Partners reported overall positive feedback from locals living near the three pilot sites.

It is also important to note that fire safety issues at encampment sites were not appreciably decreased during the reporting period and remain a significant life safety concern. The Pilot created some unexpected and positive outcomes, including enhanced relationships between encampment residents and outreach agencies, and offered new work experience opportunities for participants in the Clean Slate and MOST programs.

The review of the Pilot and the above noted outcomes suggest that, while initiatives like the encampment cleanup pilot are important and improve the lives of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, they will ultimately not address the underlining causes of homelessness, and ongoing concerns related to encampments.

The Pilot demonstrated that, while the weekly cleanups and larger mindful cleanups were temporarily successful in the removal of waste, this model will require a sustained approach, and will have limited impact on issues related to fire safety. Moving forward, the recommendation is to continue to explore ways to leverage the new relationships developed with MSP, Siloam Mission, and the DSCP to work with these organizations on an as-needed basis for the collection of waste at encampment sites where operationally possible.

Requested Changes

At a briefing on October 16, 2024, an earlier draft of this administrative report was reviewed by Mayor's Office staff and the following revisions were requested:

- Highlight the feedback received from the area residents (both through partners and via direct communications to the City).
- Focus discussion regarding outcomes on quantitative information.

Requested Changes

At a Reports Briefing on December 19, 2024, an earlier draft of this administrative report was reviewed by members of the Executive Policy Committee and the following revisions were requested:

- Include the final cost of the pilot in the Executive Summary.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement

Date: November 8, 2024

Project Name:
Update on Encampment Clean-up Pilot

COMMENTS:

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

Randy Bernard

Randy Bernard, CPA, CMA
Manager of Finance & Administration (Campus)
Corporate Finance Department

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service
- Public Works Department

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

Good Health and Well-Being

4.3 Proactive Health Intervention
Utilize social determinants of health to understand and achieve poverty reduction, crime prevention and harm reduction. Practice early intervention and engage in community partnerships that fully leverage wrap-around supports, recreation and resources, and enable opportunities for all, and especially for those who are systemically disadvantaged.

4.9 Inclusive Public Places
Provide and promote the amenities, and the design and maintenance standards, necessary to ensure accessible, safe and sanitary conditions in gathering spaces frequented by the public.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and it was determined that the CAP is not applicable to this specific report.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

GOAL 4: Community Well-Being Supports for those in Greatest Need are Increased

10 Year Objectives:

A. The immediate needs of residents experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are met through collaboration with community partners and other levels of government.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Division: Community Development
Prepared by: Chris Brens
Date: 2024-12-10
File No: N/A

Attachments: N/A