APPENDIX B – Encampment Response Protocol

City of Winnipeg Encampment Response Protocol

Updated October 27, 2025

Summary

The Encampment Response Protocol ("Protocol") is the City of Winnipeg's ("City") operational guide to addressing non-emergency issues pertaining to encampments on public properties. It outlines procedures for engagement, assessment, and coordinated response to encampments and is guided by the City's Encampment Policy and relevant by-laws. The Protocol is an operational plan under the authority of the Chief Administrative Officer; it will be updated regularly as processes are evaluated and issues relating to encampments evolve.

The Protocol is not applicable to the regulation of encampments on private property or to situations that involve emergencies, life safety or criminal matters. Neither the Protocol nor the Encampment Policy impact the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) or Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service (WFPS)'s response to calls for service.

The Protocol is divided into four sections: 1) **Coordination**, 2) **Three-level Prioritization**, 3) **The Response Process**, and 4) **Internal and External Responsibilities**.

1. Coordination

Management of the City's operational response to issues relating to encampments will be the responsibility of an *Encampment Coordination Table* (ECT), reporting to the City's Chief Administrative Officer.

ECT membership will include the following City departments and divisions: WFPS; Public Works (PW); Planning, Property, and Development (PPD); Community Development (CD); WPS; Winnipeg Transit; and any other departments as required from time to time (e.g. Legal Services, Corporate Communications, Licensing and By-law Enforcement, Community Safety Officers).

The general tasks of the ECT include:

- Meeting weekly or as necessary to consider encampment-related issues;
- Triaging and planning responses to encampment-related issues based on priority factors, as guided by a three-level prioritization approach (detailed below);
- Coordinating on-the-ground encampment activities among relevant departments;
- Establishing procedures for documentation, evaluation, and reporting related to encampment response activities.

Three-Level Prioritization

The City will employ a tiered approach to resource allocation in managing encampments on public property. This model prioritizes health and safety risks, proximity to sensitive public spaces, and the degree of community impact. Enforcement levels are guided by site characteristics, scale, and urgency of response.

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Level 1 – Urgent Coordinated Response (High Risk / Sensitive Public Properties)

Description:
Encampments that pose an immediate risk to public safety, are located on or adjacent to sensitive public property, or obstruct essential services.

Criteria include (and "Sensitive Public Property" defined as):

- Located within 50 metres of:
  - Playgrounds, pools, spray pads, or outdoor recreation facilities designed for children, families, or seniors; and
  - Schools, daycares, or personal care home facilities;
- Where a hazard or obstruction exists for vehicular, cycling, or pedestrian traffic;
- Located within medians, traffic islands, underpasses, or within 30 metres of Transit shelters, bridges, docks, or piers;
- Within 50 metres of a rail line or crossing;
- Sites where life safety concerns are present, such as:
  - Unsafe structures;
  - Active fire, flood or electrical hazards;
  - Floodplain, riverbank erosion, storm drain proximity); and
- Encampments causing service disruption to City operations or emergency access routes.

Goals: Protect public safety, prevent harm, and ensure rapid restoration of sensitive or high-risk areas.

Level 2 – Coordinated Response (Moderate Risk / Large Encampments on Non-Sensitive Properties)

Description:
Encampments on public property not classified as sensitive but that involve multiple occupants, significant debris, and other documented concerns.

Criteria include:

- Encampments with permanent unpermitted structures;
- Evidence of illegal dumping, debris accumulation, or environmental contamination (e.g., biohazards, fuel spills, waste buildup);
- Signs of fire risk that require urgent action to mitigate but WFPS does not have scene control;
- Encampments interfering with park maintenance, trail access, or public use of open spaces;
- Presence of non-structural hazards, such as rodents, unsanitary waste, or used needles;
- Vulnerable occupants requiring case coordination (e.g., youth, seniors, persons with mobility limitations); and
- Repeated failure to comply with posted notices or outreach offers.

Goals: Reduce health and safety risks, support relocation to safer alternatives, and restore public property.

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Level 3 – Monitored Response (Low Risk / Small Encampments)

Description:
Small, low-impact encampments with minimal health, safety, or nuisance concerns located on non-sensitive public property.

Criteria include:

- Small-scale encampments;
- Located on non-sensitive public property (e.g., open areas, park peripheries, non-operational rights-of-way);
- Minimal community complaints or evidence of nuisance activity;
- No visible hazards (no open flames, structural instability, or environmental degradation);
- No interference with City services, operations, or public access; and
- Outreach engagement ongoing and occupants are connected or willing to connect with supports.

Goals: Ensuring ongoing safety and cleanliness of public property.

The Response Process

The following outlines the standard sequence of actions and coordination protocols for each level of encampment response. In certain instances the specific circumstances of an encampment will require that the following process is followed in different order. Note that immediate actions related to health, life safety, or criminal activity concerns are managed separately from this protocol. These situations often require urgent intervention and are addressed through existing practices. However, as the same resources may be involved, immediate life-safety responses can result in delays to other encampment response activities.

Level One:

1. **Identification**
   - Encampment identified through 311, inspection, or City staff observation;
   - ECT assesses for risk (size, safety hazards, environmental impact) and prioritization.
   - ECT flags encampments as “Level 1” based on location and risk criteria.

2. **ECT Coordination**
   - On-site inspection by City staff qualified to inspect and enforce relevant laws, WFPS, and Mobile Outreach Support (MOS);
   - Assessment for:
     - Immediate hazards (fire, structural, environmental);
     - Proximity to sensitive spaces;
     - Number of occupants and structures; and
   - Document with photos and incident report.

3. **Mitigation**
   - Emergency services engaged if imminent danger exists (e.g., open flame, active fire, blocked emergency access).
   - MOS establishes contact offering supports, referrals, and voluntary relocation options.

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- ECT determines an appropriate notice period required before enforcement, taking into account:
  - Any appeal period that may apply (if a by-law is relied upon), and/or any amount of time necessary to allow the residents the opportunity to be heard by decision-makers
  - How entrenched the encampment is (more entrenched encampments may require more notice)
  - Any disabilities or particular needs of the residents that would slow their ability to pack and move
  - Whether voluntary movement can be obtained in a reasonable time (voluntariness to be preferred over forceful eviction)
- Temporary barriers or signage installed if required.

4. **Notification**
   - MOS attends to provide information on available shelters, transportation, and timelines.
   - Provide encampment occupants warnings and notice of coming enforcement.
   - Documentation of engagement attempts maintained.

5. **Site Clearance and Remediation**
   - Clear the encampment after the notice period, ensuring the proper authorities are present to enforce the relevant laws.
   - Consider support of residents through safe rides and property storage.
   - City crews conduct cleanup, waste removal, and site restoration.
   - Site to be temporarily monitored if re-encampment risk is high (MOS, WFPS).
   - Consider permanent signage to dissuade re-occupation.

6. **Post-Action Review**
   - Interdepartmental debrief completed within 30 business days.
   - Data recorded for tracking (location, response time, outcomes).

Level Two:

1. **Identification**
   - Encampment identified through 311, inspection, or City staff observation.
   - ECT assesses for risk (size, safety hazards, service complaints, environmental impact) and prioritization.

2. **Internal Coordination**
   - ECT develops a response plan.

3. **Mitigation**
   - MOS establishes contact with residents, offering supports, referrals, and voluntary relocation options.
   - City staff qualified to enforce relevant laws to provide notice of mandatory site clearance between one hour after sunrise to one hour before sunset.
   - Engagement documented and reviewed weekly (ECT).

4. **Notification**
   - ECT determines an appropriate notice period required before enforcement, taking into account:

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        - Any appeal period that may apply (if a by-law is relied upon), and/or any amount of time necessary to allow the residents the opportunity to be heard by decision-makers
        - How entrenched the encampment is (more entrenched encampments may require more notice)
        - Any disabilities or particular needs of the residents that would slow their ability to pack and move
        - Whether voluntary movement can be obtained in a reasonable time (voluntariness to be preferred over forceful eviction)
    - Temporary barriers or signage installed if required.
    - Outreach continues during notice period to support voluntary departure.
    - Health and safety risks monitored for escalation (WFPS).

5. **Site Clearance and Remediation**
    - Joint operation scheduled following notice period.
    - City staff qualified to enforce relevant laws and WPS attend with outreach support present.
    - Removal of structures and waste; consideration of storage of personal belongings.
    - Area cleaned, hazards removed (PW).
    - Follow-up inspections conducted to deter re-establishment during the daytime (MOS, City staff qualified to enforce relevant laws).

7. **Post-Action Review**
    - Interdepartmental debrief completed.
    - Data recorded for tracking (location, response time, outcomes).

Level Three:

1. **Identification**
    - Encampment identified by City staff, outreach, or 311.
    - ECT to assess and categorize as Level 3 if low risk and no significant complaints or hazards.

2. **Mitigation**
    - Outreach to be dispatched for assessment and to provide verbal notice of mandatory site clearance between one hour after sunrise to one hour before sunset.
    - Regular site visits (weekly to biweekly) by Outreach.
    - Risks reassessed each visit to determine if escalation is required.
    - Occupants offered shelter or housing placement by Outreach as availability allows.
    - Transportation assistance considered for voluntary moves.
    - Enforcement resources prioritized to higher levels unless risk level increases or daytime presence continues.

3. **Site Clearance and Remediation**
    - If site vacated, clean-up need will be assessed (Outreach) and coordinated (PW).
    - Site deemed inactive after 30 days of no occupancy and will be removed from ECT list.

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Internal and External Responsibilities

Specific tasks of relevant City departments may include the following:

- **Community Development (CD)**:
  - Chair and provide administrative support to the Encampment Coordination Table.
  - Receives requests and complaints (through 311 and other sources) related to encampments.
  - Informs the Chief Administrative Officer of progress and new developments related to encampments.
  - Manages the City's 24-Hour Mobile Outreach Service (MOS) contract.

- **By-law Enforcement:**
  - City staff qualified to enforce relevant laws to lead data collection, communication of infractions, ensuring signage is posted when appropriate, and participating in enforcement.

- **Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service (WFPS)**:
  - The WFPS is often the first to identify encampment issues around the City due to fire and medical calls. WFPS will share this information with internal departments and the MOS, without disclosing residents' personal health information.
  - The WFPS Fire Prevention Officers work with MOS to educate encampment residents of fire hazards, providing life safety information to mitigate risks. In addition, the Assistant Chief – Community Risk Reduction holds the encampment portfolio on behalf of the WFPS, and handles complex encampment issues, including the decision to resort to enforcement and vacate encampments.
  - When enforcement action is required due to the existence of significant fire and life safety issues, WFPS will work with other departments including PW and the CAO's Office to ensure all appropriate policies and procedures are followed.
  - WFPS will only vacate an encampment for issues regarding fire and life safety, and this will occur after less disruptive measures have been attempted. This may include (but not be limited to) issues related to the placement of shelters, the materials used in shelter construction, the location and volume of combustible materials, compressed gases such as propane, fires, and behaviors that contribute to the occurrence of accidental fires

- **Public Works (PW)**:
  - PW staff investigates areas of concern for garbage removal or remediation as reported through 311, CD, ECT, and the MOS.
  - Where an encampment has been vacated, PW will coordinate clean up and removal of debris.

- **Winnipeg Police Service (WPS)**:
  - Attends calls for service.
  - Investigates criminal activity.
  - May identify and document circumstances of individuals who are in violation of any City Bylaws in the absence of Bylaw Officials.
  - May enforce the *Trespass Act*.

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- Supports eviction or cleanup of a bylaw violation by providing a presence to ensure the safety of all involved.

External

The City partners with different levels of government, service providers, and community-based organizations on issues related to housing and encampments. The City currently funds 24-Hour Mobile Outreach Support (MOS) services for individuals who are living in encampments.

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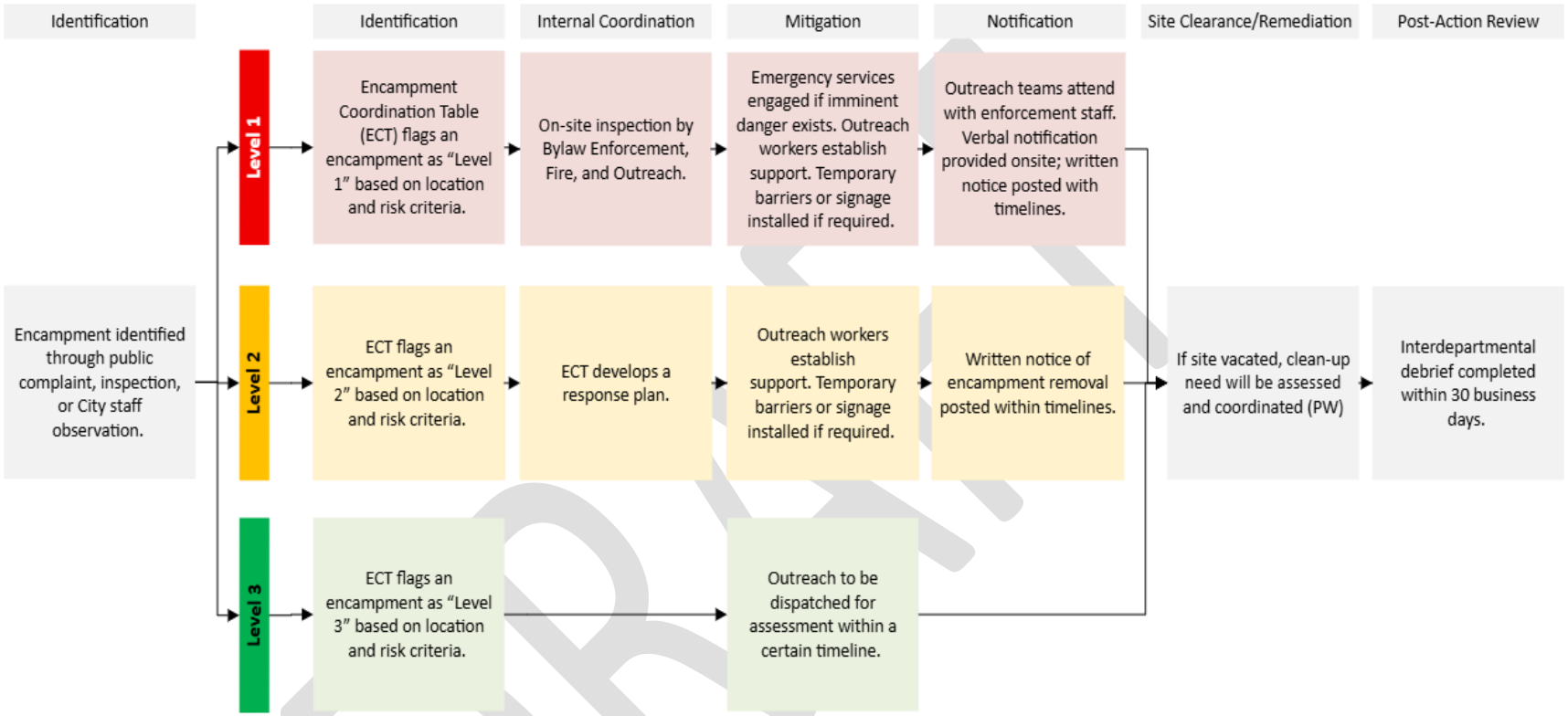
Figure 1. Priority Levels and Suggested Response Process



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