

Homelessness and People Living in Poverty Policy

Division:	Parks and Recreation	Approved by:	Parks and Recreation Directors
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Policy Statement

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is committed to providing accessible, inclusive and high quality programs to all members of the community. People who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness face particular barriers to accessing services. Through the co-ordinated efforts of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Streets to Homes staff, assistance will be offered in identifying opportunities for shelter, improving access to community services and in promoting safe environments to people who are homeless. Additionally, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will provide assistance to those at risk of homelessness, or who are living in poverty.

From time to time Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will be required to remove patrons from city parks and facilities due to unacceptable behaviour in order to maintain service to all members of the community. However, staff should be aware that an individual who is homeless is equally welcome to access and use our parks, facilities, and programs as any other person. As a rule, a patron should only be removed from a city park or facility if their behaviour is in conflict with the guidelines contained within this policy document.

This policy also provides guidelines to staff in removing encampments in City parks and other public areas. It is the direction of Council, through the Inter-divisional protocol, that Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff and Streets to Homes staff assist homeless persons in accessing shelter, rather than living outdoors in City parks and open spaces. This policy is based on Council's decision of February 1, 2, and 3, 2005, Policy and Finance Committee Report No. 2, Clause No. 1 "From the Street into Homes: A Strategy to Assist Homeless Persons Find Permanent Housing".

Council-Directed Interdivisional Protocol

The goal of the City's outreach initiative is to assist and encourage people currently camping in public spaces to access safer and healthier alternatives to living outside, including housing, support services and shelter. The initiative also seeks to balance the need to provide appropriate supports to vulnerable individuals camping in public spaces, with the civic responsibility of maintaining the use of public spaces for the purposes intended.

The outreach initiative to homeless persons provides a more intensive, proactive and co-ordinated effort among City divisions. It promotes the co-ordination and delivery of human services prior to any enforcement activities, such as removal of unauthorized structures, personal goods and debris from public spaces. It is

anticipated that given the appropriate outreach and supports over time, homeless individuals will be able to secure better shelter alternatives to sleeping outside and will voluntarily vacate public spaces, thereby making enforcement unnecessary.

To respond to the needs of homeless individuals, the outreach initiative is delivered on a case-by-case basis and focused on a site-specific approach. Staff efforts will focus on larger sites where more people are in need of assistance, where there are encampments and where there are public safety concerns.

Streets to Homes staff efforts will also endeavour to address the needs of single individuals camped in parks, public transit shelters and city streets.

City divisions involved in human service programming such as: Shelter, Support and Housing, Social Services, Public Health and Parks, Forestry and Recreation will participate in the outreach initiative with Shelter Housing and Support staff having the lead role.

City divisions with enforcement responsibilities include Transportation; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; and Facilities and Real Estate. Enforcement activities will depend upon the success of outreach activities, the need for such services, the location of the site, and the division responsible.

Notification and Enforcement of Public Space:

1. Shelter, Support and Housing will co-ordinate efforts to provide services for homeless people provided by community agencies and other City divisions, including Public Health and Social Services and will work closely with Transportation, Parks Forestry and Recreation, Facilities and Real Estate and other divisions to ensure that the timing of enforcement activities does not conflict with the outreach efforts.
2. Transportation, Parks Forestry and Recreation, Facilities and Real Estate and other City divisions and agencies are responsible for providing notice to individuals that camping is to be discontinued and that personal goods, debris and structures are to be cleared from a public space or right of way.
3. Notices will be given to individuals in advance. The timing of issuing notices will be determined in consultation with Shelter, Support and Housing staff. Formal enforcement notices will provide relevant and clear communication to the individual. In addition, site specific information notices for each location will be attached to provide a list of resources to provide individuals with information regarding access to housing, support services and shelter in the area.
4. When public space enforcement activities are initiated by a City division, Shelter, Support and Housing outreach staff will, **at all times**, accompany enforcement officers to continue providing supports to individuals who have refused to accept outreach services.
5. Where deemed necessary, by-law enforcement officers will co-ordinate activities with the Toronto Police Service to maintain the safety of staff and individuals still at the site."

Definitions

Homelessness and People Living in Poverty:

For the purposes of this policy, the terms "homelessness" and "people living in poverty" are defined as characteristics of people who:

- live outside (on the street or in ravines and parks);

- stay in emergency shelters;
- spend most of their income on rent; or,
- live in overcrowded, substandard conditions and are therefore at serious risk of becoming homeless

(Source: The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness, 2001)

Streets to Homes:

An outreach-based unit, directed by City Council and under the jurisdiction of the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division, which endeavours to secure long-term housing for people who are homeless and living in encampments on City property.

(Decision Tree)

Procedures for Handling Various Situations Involving Homeless Persons

Situation #1

Emergency / Incident

(Medical Emergency, Violence, Unacceptable Behaviour – verbal, physical assaults, etc.)

- In a medical emergency, call Emergency Medical Services – **911** and provide first aid, if possible.

In all other emergencies/incidents:

- Staff **must** monitor the situation and avoid a conflict / confrontation, at all times.
- Should an incident escalate into a threat to staff or others, contact Police immediately through **911**.
- Supervisor/Foresperson must be the first person notified at all times.
- Supervisor/Foresperson will, in turn, notify Manager, who will, in turn notify the Director and final notification will be given to the General Manager.
- Supervisor/Manager will be responsible for contacting the Media Hotline at **416-560-8726**.
- Staff must follow the Emergency Response Plan which gives clear instructions on steps to be taken. Facilities have been supplied with an Emergency Response Plan Binder and it is recommended that staff familiarize themselves with the contents. Both the Plan and related materials can also be located on the Policies, and Forms Database located at <http://wi.toronto.ca/intra/edct/policies.nsf/PoliciesbyCategory>
- Supervisor/Foreperson should provide to Police, in advance or on site, a copy of the **Trespass to Property Act Police Letter**, when it is necessary to remove an individual from a Parks, Forestry and Recreation property.
- Supervisor/Foreperson must complete the **Emergency / Incident Report Form**.
- The Manager/Director will inform the office of the affected Ward Councillor.

Situation #2

Homeless Person Requesting Immediate Shelter Service

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will make every effort to provide assistance, call 211, or refer homeless people to the Street Helpline at **416-392-3777** (Payphone Free **0-416-392-3777**).

Situation #3

Illegal Activity (Use of Drugs/Alcohol; Vandalism; Building of Bonfires)

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation will not tolerate any illegal activity, which may include vandalism, the building of bonfires, the use of drugs and alcohol, etc.

Employee will:

- Immediately inform Supervisor and/or Foreperson of any illegal activity on Parks, Forestry and Recreation property.

Supervisor / Foreperson will:

- call Police, if necessary.
- inform Manager of situation.

Situation #4

Homeless Demonstration within a Park

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to contact Supervisor / Foreperson.
- Supervisor / Foreperson to advise Manager and Director.
- Manager/Director to assess situation and call police, if necessary (i.e. incidents, threats, etc.)
- In the case of a demonstration or evacuation, the Manager or Director to contact Media Hotline (416-560-8726), Mayor's office and Ward Councillor's office.

Situation #5

Erecting Structures (Encampments)

Occasionally homeless people occupy public parks or other open spaced areas (e.g. ravines) as a place of residence and erect structures, such as tents, lean-to's or other forms of shelter. They may also store other belongings in their encampments. This is contrary to the intended use of these public areas and is contrary to the City of Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 608.

When staff become aware that a person (or persons) have taken up residence in a park or ravine, the following steps should be taken:

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff must immediately report such encampments to their Supervisor / Foreperson, who will, in turn, notify the Manager and Director.

- The Manager or Director will contact the Streets to Homes unit for assistance.
- Streets to Homes staff will visit a reported encampment and will work with Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to resolve the situation on a priority basis.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will co-operate with Streets to Homes staff assigned to assist in resolving the encampment situation.
- Streets to Homes staff will conduct the following assessment of the encampment situation.

Compliance – Individual Accepts Housing Offer

- If homeless individual accepts an offer of housing, Streets to Homes staff will inform Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff that encampment can be dismantled, in a timely fashion.

Non-Compliance – Individual Does not Accept Housing Offer

If homeless individual does not accept housing offer:

- Streets to Homes staff will work with individual until services are exhausted.
- Only then will Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff:
 1. Issue or post a **Notice of Advice**, in consultation with Streets to Homes staff, providing a minimum of 72-hours' notice to the homeless individual requesting that they vacate the area with their belongings.
 2. Retain a copy of the **Notice of Advice**.
 3. Streets to Homes will post their notice concurrently.
 4. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will organize resources to dismantle encampments on the date of enforcement. All debris will be removed on the date of enforcement.
 5. On date of enforcement, the Supervisor, together with Police assistance, will ask the individual(s) to vacate. Once vacated, Streets to Homes staff will go through encampment to sort and collect relevant personal belongings. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will take saved personal belongings to the nearest community centre where they will be stored for up to 30 days, after which time they will be disposed of.
 6. A Briefing Note to the Mayor and affected Ward Councillor(s) will be prepared by Streets to Homes staff for their General Manager's approval and submitted, for information, to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

Situation #6

Homeless Individual (or Group of Homeless Individuals) Taking Up Residence within a Park without Encampment

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will monitor situation.
- If the situation continues for a period of more than two or three days, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff must report it to their Supervisor / Foreperson, who will, in turn, notify the Manager and Director.
- The Manager or Director will contact the Streets to Homes unit for

assistance.

- Streets to Homes staff and Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will work together in providing assistance/services to the individual(s).
- The Supervisor will advise the Manager and the Director in the event the individual (or individuals) fails to leave the site.
- In cases where the individual(s) has belongings, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to post a **Notice of Advice** providing a minimum of 72-hours' notice requesting that they vacate the area with their belongings.
- The Supervisor must complete an **Emergency / Incident Report** which will be submitted to the Manager.
- After a 2-week period, and at the discretion of the Manager, he/she will provide Police the **Trespass to Property Act Police Letter**, which gives the Police authority to remove both the individual(s) and their belongings from the park.

Additional Information Weekend or Night Duty Staff

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to inform the on-call Supervisor if any of the afore-noted situations occur during evening shifts or weekends.

Health and Safety

At least two staff must be present when approaching an encampment, whenever possible.

Appropriate personal protective equipment must be worn at all times including:

- Safety footwear
- Coveralls or other City issued work clothing
- Leather work gloves or impervious gloves
- Dust mask and/or protective eyewear is optional and available upon request

For more information please refer to:

- **Needles, Sharps and Biohazardous Disposal Policy**

As part of the regular training on homelessness issues, staff involved in the removal of temporary dwellings and related material in parks will be made aware of the potential hazards and appropriate safe work practices.

Community Centre Programs

For more information on recreation policies / assistance relating to people living in poverty please refer to the:

- **Welcome Policy**
- **User Fee Policy**
- **Priority Centres for People Living in Poverty**

Training

Training focused on developing sensitivity to issues relating to homelessness and people living in poverty will be developed for Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff

and volunteers. Staff will be notified of these training programs, when available.

All Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will be encouraged to take part in the training with a particular emphasis on front line staff.

Social Service and Hostel Information

For more information on social services and hostels, please check the Blue Book online at www.findhelpToronto.com.

More Information

For more information, contact the Community Engagement Manager at **416-392-0460**.

Related Information

Emergency Response Plan

Needles, Sharps and Biohazardous Disposal Policy

Priority Centres for People Living in Poverty

Recreation Programs User Fee Policy

Welcome Policy

Forms

Decision Tree – Response to Homelessness

Emergency / Incident Report

Notice of Advice

Trespass to Property Act Police Letter