



# Encampment Strategy

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May 2023

## Overview

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The City of Lethbridge has provided resources towards encampment response on public lands since 2019, and the approach and allocation of resources dedicated to responding to encampments has continued to evolve since. However, it has not kept pace with the rapid growth in the number of people living in encampments throughout the community.

In 2022, the City of Lethbridge saw that without a properly resourced encampment response there was increased risk of larger-scale, entrenched encampments on public lands. This created numerous challenges to individual and public health and safety with increased incidents of overdoses, illegal activity, aggressive behaviors, territoriality, waste, debris, and biohazards.

The **Encampment Strategy** has been developed as a partnership between City of Lethbridge Administration and Lethbridge Police Service (LPS) building off of a significant allocation of resources from City Council on April 18, 2023<sup>1</sup>. The strategy considers research and approaches from other municipalities while also recognizing the unique context and needs in Lethbridge.

The strategy recognizes that homelessness is a complex social issue and the City of Lethbridge remains committed to addressing the underlying social issues under the premise of the [Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy](#) and related strategies.

The strategy intends to balance the needs and protection of the dignity of the most vulnerable in the community while maintaining public safety, health, order, and safe and enjoyable parks and green spaces for all residents.

## Strategic Goals

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### The Encampment Strategy will ensure:

- Parks and open spaces within the community are enjoyable for everyone.
- Vulnerable people are connected to wellness, housing and social supports.
- Encampments do not become entrenched.
- Residents are informed on how to report encampments identified within the community.
- Community and City Council remain informed.

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<sup>1</sup> City Council Encampment Resolution – <https://agendas.lethbridge.ca/AgendaOnline/Meetings/ViewMeeting?id=3902&doctype=2>

**Encampment:** *refers to one or more temporary accommodations consisting of tents, vehicles, makeshift shelters, bus shelters and/or vacant buildings on public or privately owned land in which the habitation, occupation and/or use is not permitted by landowner consent or contract, bylaw, or land use and development rules and regulations.*

## Encampment Response Process

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The encampment response process is managed by the City of Lethbridge cross corporately in partnership with LPS. Further, it is coordinated with key community partners including but not limited to Lethbridge Housing Authority, Blood Tribe Department of Health, and the Downtown Business Revitalization Zone/Clean Sweep Program.

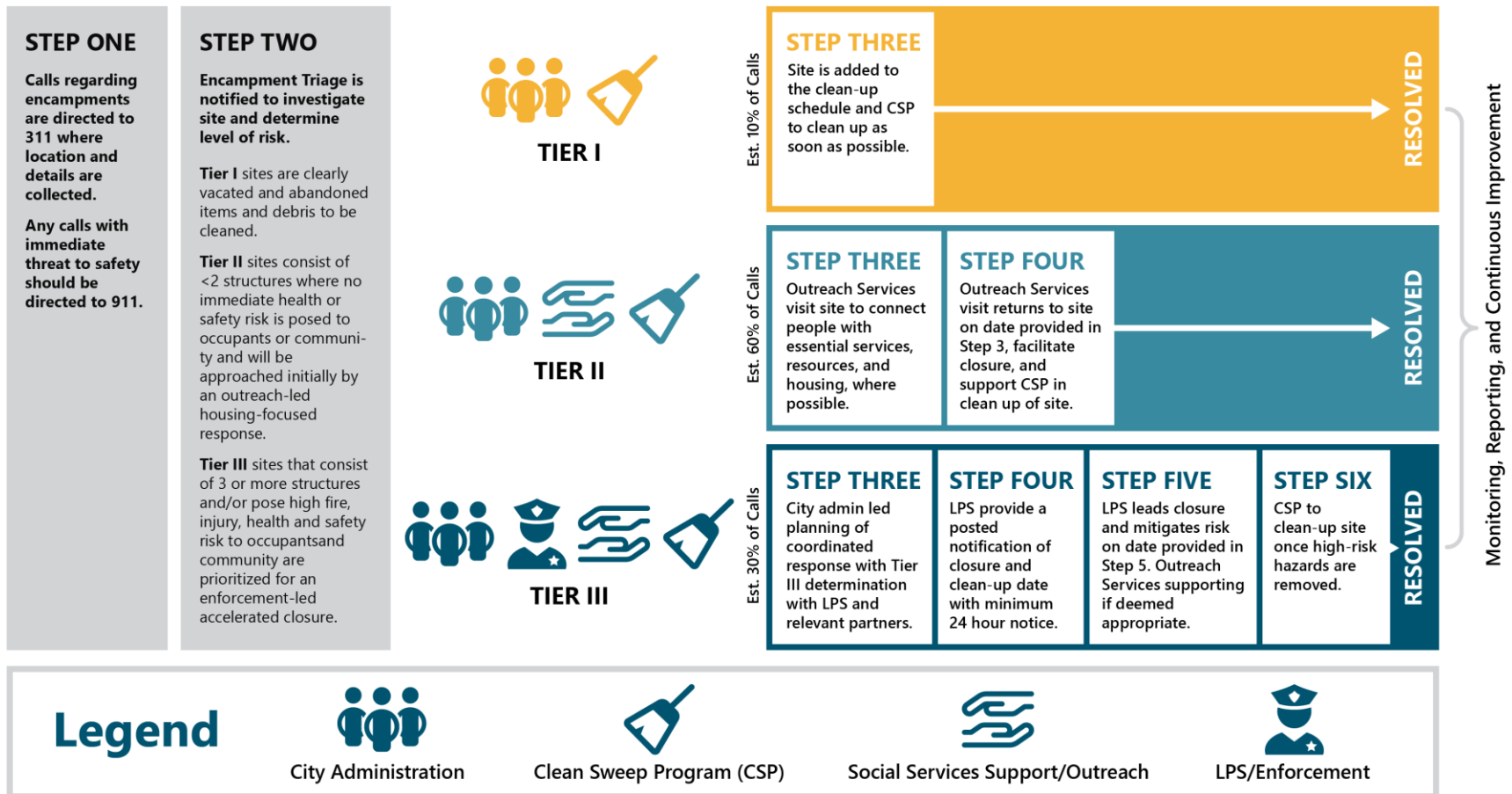
### Keys to the Response:

- An adequately resourced, year-round encampment response that is integrated with LPS.
- An approach that can respond quickly and consistently to balance the needs and dignity of the most vulnerable in the community while maintaining public safety, health, order, and safe and enjoyable parks and green spaces for all residents.
- A dedicated outreach services team that will engage with and prioritize the needs of those living in encampments with a focus on wellness and appropriate shelter/housing, prior to any clearing of encampments
- A risk assessment tool used to help triage the closure and cleanup of encampments. Risk factors consider length of time structure(s) have been in place, occupant injury or death due to fire, disease, extreme weather, drug use, violence, observed or investigated presence of weapons or criminal activity.
- A risk level is assigned to a site through inspection and one of three response streams determines lead responder, support needs and closure timelines.
  - **Tier 1:** Inactive sites that are clearly vacated and abandoned items and debris to be removed and cleaned.
  - **Tier 2:** Active sites that consist of one or two structures where no immediate health or safety risk is posed to occupants or community will be approached initially by an outreach-led housing-focused response.
  - **Tier 3:** Active sites that consist of three or more structures and/or pose high fire, injury, health and safety risk to occupants and community are prioritized for an enforcement-led accelerated closure.

- A detailed operational plan shared by those involved in the operational response that details, in a clear and consistent manner aspects of the response including but not limited to: appropriate notification, approach to outreach services, how property is seized and if deemed necessary disposed of, hazardous materials, data management, etc.
- An approach that uses consistent data points to identify trends, make informed decisions on resource deployment and evaluate and make continuous improvement.
- A clear and consistent communications and reporting structure will be established for managing operational response, coordinating inter-departmental understanding, and responding to questions, concerns, and feedback of Council and community.
- A dedicated Housing Specialist position tasked with working on implementing initiatives connected to the Municipal Development Plan and the Municipal Housing Strategy that work towards creating systemic improvements that will benefit shelter and housing capacities across the Housing Continuum in the short and long-term. Actions including but are not limited to working towards:
  - reducing red tape
  - partnering with agencies and other levels of government
  - support diversion of individuals out of encampments and into appropriate shelter options
  - supporting efforts that prevent individuals from falling into homelessness

# Encampment Response Flow Chart

The following chart represents the flow from reporting, to triage, response, monitoring, reporting, and continuous improvement. The process will remain the same despite the number of resources. What will be impacted or vary is the Level of Service (LOS) of the response.



## Resourcing and Level of Service

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Lethbridge City Council provided dedicated resources for the implementation of the Encampment Strategy to deliver on a defined Level of Service (LOS)

The dedicated resourcing will include \$750,000 in annual funding in 2023 and \$500,00 annually on an ongoing basis for:

- 2 Full-Time Encampment Response positions and 1 Full-Time Housing Specialist within Community Social Development (CSD) department;
- Funding for Lethbridge Police Service resources
- Additional resource funding including, but not limited to: vehicle and fuel, biohazard cleanup resources, training, PPE, etc.

The Level of Service (LOS) for 2023 is:

- Tier 1: Within 2 Days
- Tier 2: Within 4 Days
- Tier 3: Within 7 Days

## Integration with Lethbridge Police Service (LPS)

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The Encampment Strategy is integrated with City of Lethbridge and LPS to provide a unified response with a focus on coordination, collaboration, and consistency. It is important to note that all decision-making on police matters remain entirely with the Lethbridge Police Commission and LPS and no direction will be provided by the City of Lethbridge.

## Encampment Response Team (ERT)

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The Encampment Response Team is the core group who have an active role in the operational side of the strategy and responses to encampments. The ERT will meet weekly during the months of April-November to identify encampment hot spots, collaborate on coordinated clean ups, coordinate on-site supports, and discuss outcomes.



**City Council is not a part of the ERT, however has an important role in the encampment response by approving the Encampment Strategy, resources, and Level of Service (LOS).**

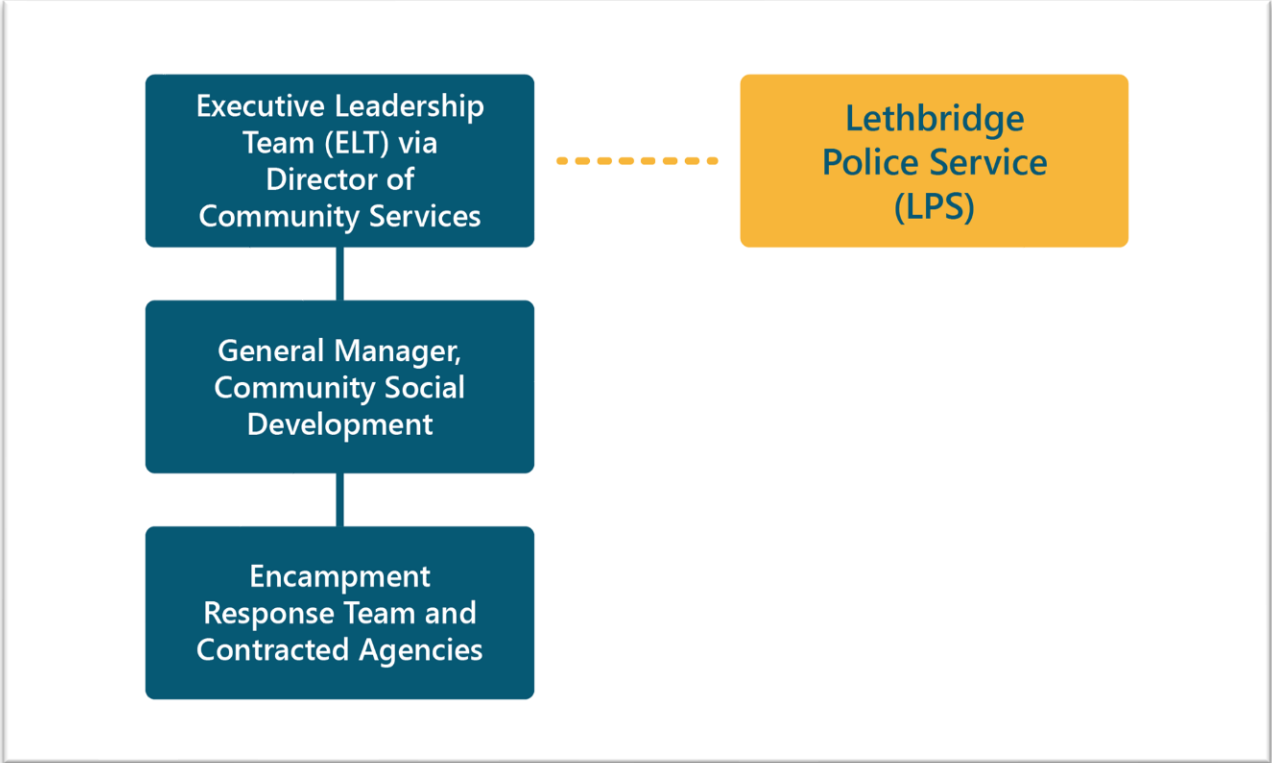
**Table 1 – Encampment Response Team Roles and Responsibilities**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</b>
<b>City of Lethbridge – Community Social Development</b>	<p>Lead Role in Encampment Strategy oversight</p> <p>Lead role in facilitation and coordination of strategy implementation with all relevant stakeholders</p> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data to inform strategy outcomes and KPIs</p> <p>Contract management and financial management of procured and/or contracted services.</p> <p>Monthly reporting to City Council and community.</p>
<b>311/Safe Community Call Centre (SCCC)</b>	<p>Central point of contact for encampment related complaints/calls.</p> <p>Central point of contact for encampment strategy complaints/calls and general information.</p>
<b>Lethbridge Police Services</b>	<p>Key partner in coordinated Encampment Response Strategy oversight</p> <p>Critical role in Tier 3 coordinated encampment operational response</p> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data</p>
<b>City of Lethbridge – Fire/EMS</b>	<p>Participation in coordinated response</p> <p>Reporting of encampment-related fire and health risks</p> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data</p>
<b>Downtown BRZ/Clean Sweep Program</b>	<p>Participation in coordinated encampment operational response; specifically, as lead agency in disposing of encampment related debris and waste</p> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data</p>
<b>Contracted Outreach Services</b>	<p>Participation in coordinated encampment operational response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead integrated outreach services - receive/conduct ‘warm hand-off’ referrals, information provision, meeting encampment occupants where they are at</li> </ul> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data</p>
<b>Community Partners</b>	<p>Non-contracted community partners who have an important role in the coordination of the response including but not limited to Lethbridge Housing Authority, Blood Tribe Department of Health, Canadian Mental Health Association/DOT, Etc.</p>

*\*Detailed roles and responsibilities for this group are still in discussion and will be disseminated once confirmed. At this point, those groups denoted with an asterisk are critical stakeholders informing the process but are not playing a front-line role in encampment processes.*

# Encampment Response Team Reporting Structure

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## Communication and Reporting

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A clear and consistent structure will be established for managing operational response, coordinating inter-departmental understanding, and responding to questions, concerns, and feedback of Council and community.

- Weekly tactical meetings between the City of Lethbridge , Lethbridge Police Service, contracted outreach services, Clean Sweep Program, and other relevant community partners will focus on the operational response.
- Bi-weekly meetings with a City of Lethbridge internal committee that will focus on financial and resource tracking from all departments who have involvement in encampment response. Representatives will include but are not be limited to: Communications & Engagement, Community Social Development, Facilities, Finance, Fire and EMS, LPS, Parks, Planning and Development, and Legal.
- Regular written briefing notes provided to City Council with a focus on data, spending, and any significant highlights.
- Monthly standing verbal update to City Council in regularly scheduled Council meetings.
- Monthly media availabilities following City Council updates.