

The cover image is split into two horizontal panels. The top panel shows a landscape of rolling hills under a bright, hazy sky with a sunburst effect on the right. The bottom panel shows a dirt path winding through tall grass, tinted with a blue color.

Encampment Strategy

As amended April 2024

Overview

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, 2023¹. 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

The Encampment Strategy will ensure:

- Parks and public 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.

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

Homeless Encampment: refers to temporary outdoor accommodations consisting of tents, vehicles, or makeshift shelters for individuals and groups of unsheltered individuals that have been established, without permission, on public property.

Encampment Response Process

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.

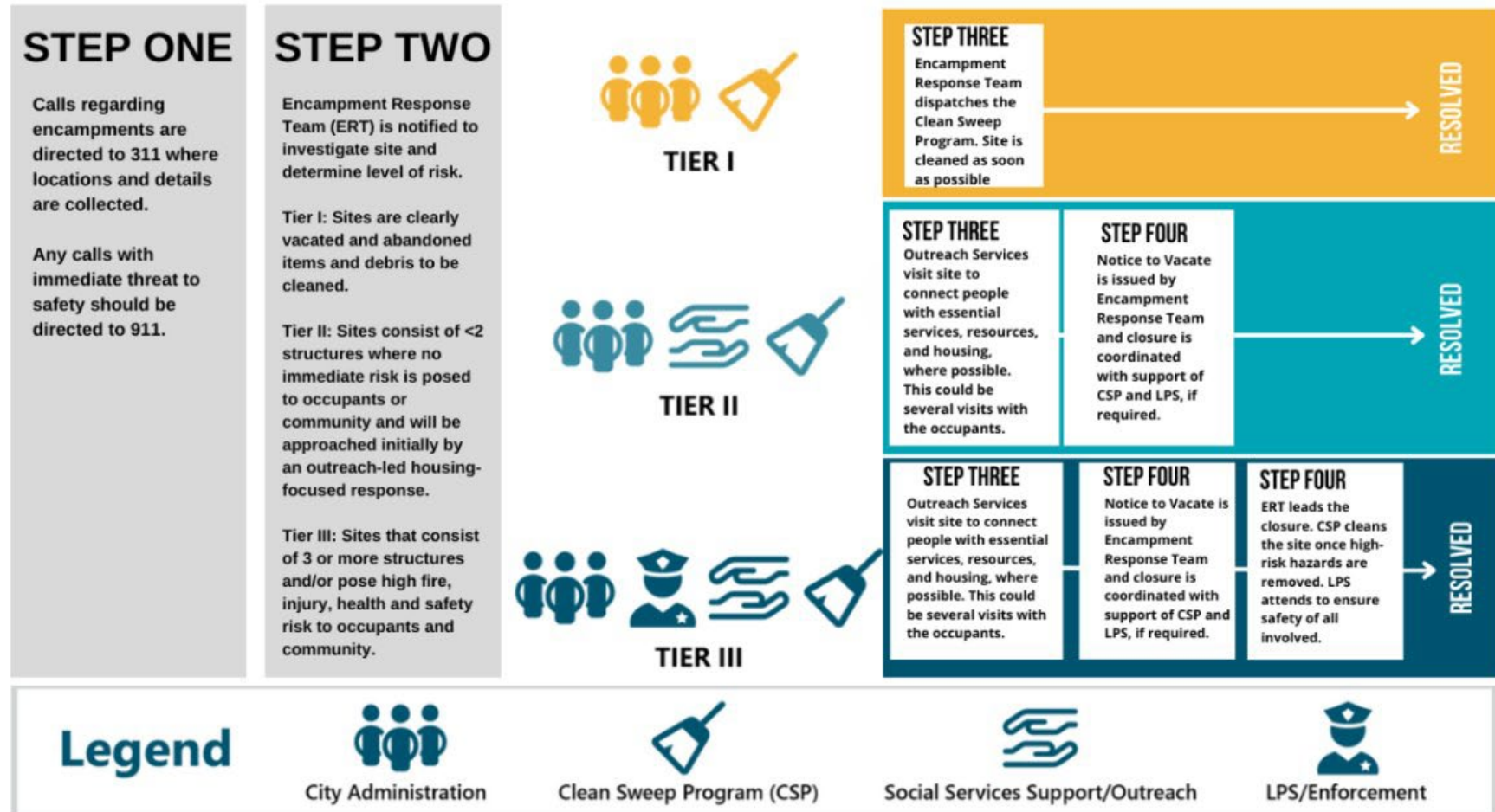
Keys to the Response:

- An adequately resourced, year-round encampment response that is coordinated 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 public 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 the 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, proximity to locations or events where the safety of public and encampment occupants could be jeopardized, 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 as soon as possible.
 - **Tier 2:** Active sites that consist of one or two structures where no immediate health or safety risk is posed to occupants or community. Tier 2 encampments will be approached initially by an outreach-led housing-focused response followed by encampment closure.
 - **Tier 3:** Active sites that consist of three or more structures and/or pose high fire, injury, health or safety risk to occupants and community are prioritized for an expedited outreach-led housing-focused response followed by 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 continuously improve the response.
- 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 Solutions Coordinator 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
 - 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

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 Solutions Coordinator 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.

Additional funding sources may be leveraged as appropriate including but not limited to 2023-2026 Operating Budget C-11.2 Outreach Services.

The Level of Service (LOS) for 2023 is:

- Tier 1: Within 2 Days
- Tier 2: Within 7 Days
- Tier 3: Within 5 Days

**Level of Service may be limited to external factors including but not limited to weather conditions, available resources of City and partner agencies, etc.*

Partnership with Lethbridge Police Service (LPS)

The Encampment Strategy is delivered by a partnership of City of Lethbridge and LPS resources including but not limited to the Downtown Policing Unit (DPU) and The Watch Program 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.

Interagency Encampment Response Team (IERT)

The Interagency Encampment Response Team (IERT) is the core group who have an active role in the operational side of the strategy and responses to encampments. The IERT 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 IERT, 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

Stakeholder	Roles & Responsibilities
City of Lethbridge – Community Social Development	<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>Bi-monthly reporting to City Council and community.</p>
311/Safe Community Call Centre (SCCC)	<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>
Lethbridge Police Services	<p>Key partner in coordinated Encampment Response Strategy oversight</p> <p>Critical role in coordinated encampment closure operational response as needed</p> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data</p>
City of Lethbridge – Fire/EMS	<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>
Downtown BRZ/Clean Sweep Program	<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>
Outreach Services	<p>Participation in coordinated encampment operational response</p> <p>Lead integrated outreach services - receive/conduct ‘warm hand-off’ referrals, information provision, meeting encampment occupants where they are at</p> <p>Collection, monitoring, and analysis of encampment related data</p>
Community Partners	<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>

Encampment Response Team Reporting Structure



Communication and Reporting

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. These meetings will transition to bi-weekly as call volume dictates, generally November-April.
- Monthly meetings with a City of Lethbridge internal committee that will focus on resource coordination and information sharing from all departments who have involvement or are impacted by homeless encampments or the encampment response. Representatives will include but are not limited to: Communications & Engagement, Community Social Development, Facilities, Finance, Fire and EMS, LPS, Parks, Planning and Development, and Legal.
- Bi-monthly standing verbal update to City Council in regularly scheduled Council meetings.
- Bi-monthly media availabilities following City Council updates.