

Encampment Advisory Committee Report to the Council of the

Municipality of Chatham-Kent

*Subject to change following public input and deputations
at the September 8, 2026 EAC meeting.*

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Background to Formation of the Encampment Advisory Committee

The downtown Chatham homeless encampment was moved to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) property on Grand Avenue East on **July 14, 2025**.

Key Details of the Move

- **Reason for Relocation:** Campers had to leave the former site at Rotary Park along Thames Street so the municipality could start a necessary slope stabilization and construction project on the Thames River embankment.
- **Deadline:** Residents were told they needed to vacate the downtown site by Monday, July 14, 2025.

Lack of Prior Communication

The establishment of the encampment at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) property (325 Grand Avenue West) occurred without prior notification or consultation with either the surrounding community or Municipal Council. The sudden arrival of this unsheltered population immediately raised significant public safety and security concerns among area residents.

Strain on Emergency and Municipal Services

The localized impact escalated rapidly. In July 2025 alone, the Chatham-Kent Police Service fielded more than 140 calls regarding the Grand Avenue property. This high volume prompted police administration to publicly request that residents cease using 9-1-1 for non-emergency complaints. Instead, citizens seeking information or reporting violations of the Municipal Encampment Protocol were redirected to the 3-1-1 municipal intake line or the police non-emergency line.

Inadequacy of Municipal Response Tracking

Residents who log complaints through the 3-1-1 system receive the following automated email response:

"Thank you for contacting the Municipality of Chatham-Kent. We have received your concern regarding the encampment on Grand Ave. I have passed this concern over to our Encampment team. You may receive an email stating your case has been resolved, however that is just because it has been moved over to the proper system."

For the affected neighbors, an internal file transfer does not constitute a meaningful response or resolution. Closing service requests automatically when conditions on the ground remain unchanged offers no assurance that corrective action has been taken

Public Deputations and Subsequent Action

In response to the volume of formal complaints submitted to Council, a Special Council Meeting was convened on July 28th. Numerous neighborhood delegations shared firsthand accounts and observations regarding the encampment's direct impact on their safety and quality of life.

Because the structured deputation process restricts extended public dialogue, citizens requested a formal mechanism for ongoing community consultation. To address this need, Councilor Michael Bondy brought forward a notice of motion to establish a dedicated advisory committee.

The motion; as brought forward by Councilor Michael Bondy, read as follows:

*"That staff return to Council with Draft Terms of Reference for Council to approve a pilot Encampment Advisory Committee to be established to **facilitate transparent communication between the municipality and the community at large** with regards to any proposed projects for the encampment prior to the submission of reports to council and with due consideration for the impact of the programs to the residential community in balance with the needs of the unhoused.*

The Encampment Advisory Committee would include equal representation from the following:

- a. Council*
- b. Residents from neighborhood around the PUC drawn from the Northside Neighbors Association and residents who have previously lived near a shelter or large encampment*
- c. Business owners and/or operators, drawn from the Northside Neighbors Association*
- d. Administrative personnel from the municipality of Chatham-Kent*
- e. Community groups and Persons with living experience*

The committee will address the existing encampment at the PUC and/or any future encampments which house 10 or more tents in Chatham-Kent. The Council Members, nearby residents and business owners/operators can be interchanged depending on location of the encampment.

It is worth revisiting some of the comments made by Municipal staff and Councilors at the Council Meeting on September 22, 2025 in response to the motion:

CAO Michael Duben – "There is a need for the committee as deputations do not allow for question and answer, just statements from the public. The committee would allow for conversation."

Councilor Harrigan - "It is important to have this as an important vehicle for customer service.

Councilor Ceccacci - "I can see a real great need for a committee like this; I would be surprised that there would be anybody who would not support this... we need to do this as soon as possible."

Councilor McDonald - "I look forward to seeing this great step forward towards collaboration."

Councillor Finn: "I would just like to thank everybody who sent in emails, made phone calls, took the time when we went around and spoke to us. You guys were very understanding with us, very understanding of the entire situation, so thank you."

Councilor Storey – "This committee is an opportunity to rebuild some of those bridges, some of the trust and do some of the engagement that should have been done in the first place."

Mayor Canniff - "I think this is a big step forward for us as a community. This is going to be a community effort. As we talk to various people, it is going to take all of us to come together. With all of us together we can come up with some solutions. I very much look forward to supporting this and this will be our next step moving forward."

In summary; Council unanimously supported the creation of the EAC **as a vehicle for community dialogue and input centered on the encampment at the PUC and any future encampments throughout CK.**

The Terms of Reference for the EAC were brought to Council on November 3, 2025. The final application deadline for community member positions was November 25, 2025. Council formally appointed citizen members of and council representatives to the roster. The EAC held its inaugural meeting on March 10, 2026.

MEETING SCHEDULE AND FOCUS

Dates with “*” were added subsequent to the initial meeting at the request of the Chair.

March 10	-	Committee training
April 21	-	Deputations & presentation by Housing Services
May 4*	-	Deputations & discussion about a single motion
June 16*	-	CKPS and CKFS (no deputations permitted)
July 15*	-	ROCK (no deputations permitted)
August 5*	-	EMS and CMHA (no deputations permitted)
August 25	-	Discussion of recommendations and draft report input
September 8	-	Deputations and additional discussion of the report
October 20	-	Meeting cancelled due to proximity of the election

INPUT TO THE COMMITTEE VIA DEPUTATIONS

The quotations below are taken from depositions submitted to the EAC, and show the categories of concern and requests for action by the EAC in response to public input.

BYLAW COMPLIANCE & ISSUANCE OF ORDERS

“Consistently enforce by-laws relating to safety, sanitation, public drug use, discarded needles, property damage, noise and obstruction, while connecting people with appropriate support.”

“Providing support to help with bylaw compliance at the PUC is a step towards increasing the likelihood of successful exits to housing later. Every resident is subject to bylaw compliance. In fact, on September 9th, Council stated that they want to get tougher on repeat bylaw offenders due to concerns raised by the public and issues arising in the community around garbage disposal and property standards such as long grass and unsightly weeds. Surely the municipality is equally concerned about the encampment as they are about long grass.

Included with this deposition is some data to validate that bylaw compliance is an issue at the PUC. In 2025 community members were told to report concerns and observations from the encampment to either 311 or by email at ckinfo. However, there is no feedback to either of these, and there was no visible change at the encampment to support that anyone was listening. Starting last September, I collected data on the number of tents in the encampment, and the number that were in compliance with the bylaws. Data was collected 16 times. I want to thank you for taking a few moments to review the data collection chart included with this deputation. It also includes the items that are of particular concern, such as the illegal bike businesses that bring questionable activity into the neighborhood. The average percent of compliance with bylaws was 17%. Certainly not an indicator of a successful level of support and compliance.

Our 311 calls and emails do not get returned, but our data supports that things at the PUC leave a lot of room for improvement. We respectfully request that the EAC arrange a public meeting where the community can ask questions. We don't need another PowerPoint presentation, we need you to listen. We are equally deserving of consideration for the state of our neighborhood. As such, we are equally deserving of an opportunity to be heard.”

“Bylaws are meant to contain and ensure there is some level of support and engagement- to mitigate the very real impacts on everyone from this crisis and are

meant to be a temporary necessity until we get it together as a country to address the root failures. But that's not what's happening...and I refuse to be quiet about it. It's a farce. I see it. No number of reports or statements about how the bylaws are being enforced can argue with my own eyes. And the real shame is that hiding our failures here ensures we let down everyone."

"Restore Consistent Community Standards. Consistently enforce by-laws relating to safety, sanitation, public drug use, discarded needles, property damage, noise and obstruction, while connecting people with appropriate supports."

"I was very discouraged by comments made by administrative staff about bylaw compliance and the process of issuing orders. The lack of bylaw compliance has been the main complaint of neighbors since the encampment arrived. Neighbors and businesses have repeatedly asked that bylaws be followed as Council intended, not by administration's interpretation.

*Like other cities, notice orders should have a set time limit for compliance. In London there is a 72-hour maximum. RPS should issue the notice orders and state the time allowed for compliance. After the order is written the Outreach provider should bring necessary support to help with compliance. R.O.C.K. said in Council that they don't want to be a part of enforcement, but the way the **procedure** is written right now – they are in the middle of every order written. There is no time limit, and problems go on for months in some cases. When asked about compliance on June 16th, the responses let us know there was no intention at all to listen to our concerns or consider a change in procedure. I have heard this same message from her many times, and I cannot accept this."*

"Recommendations for Structured Enforcement: While alternative site selections are being finalized for October, immediate accountability is required on the ground. I strongly urge this committee to formally recommend that Council standardize the Chatham-Kent Encampment Protocol into a rigorous, predictable 4-step enforcement protocol bound by a strict 72-hour compliance deadline:

- 1. Prompt Notice: Royal Protective Services (RPS) issues an official Notice Order within 72 hours of a 311 report or protocol violation.*
- 2. Immediate Coordination: Notice Orders are immediately carbon-copied to Housing, Outreach, and remediation contractors.*
- 3. Targeted Support: Outreach services actively assist individuals in meeting compliance requirements before the deadline hits.*
- 4. Final Remediation: On the deadline date, authorized contractors clear and remove non-compliant structures."*

"Addressing the Enforcement Gap: Nights and Weekends - Rules are only effective if they are actively enforced. Encampment violations, fire hazards, and neighborhood disruptions do not stop at 5:00 PM on Friday afternoon. I request that this committee question administration directly: Why can't RPS work on weekends and evenings? Restricting bylaw operations strictly to weekday business hours leaves residential neighborhoods completely vulnerable during peak disruption hours. If RPS serves as our municipal enforcement mechanism, their scheduling must adapt to match the 24/7 reality of the situations they manage."

Restricting bylaw operations strictly to weekday business hours leaves residential neighborhoods completely vulnerable during peak disruption hours. If RPS serves as our municipal enforcement mechanism, their scheduling must adapt to match the 24/7 reality of the situation they manage.

Conclusion: I request that the Encampment Advisory Committee include these concrete enforcement steps, the push for non-residential site transparency ahead of October, and expanded RPS operational hours as formal suggestions within your final Report to Council."

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

"We need to see the data from Royal Protective Services (RPS), specifically regarding tickets issued and recidivism rates. Because RPS began in late August (after the situation had already escalated), this data is essential to determine if our current response is working or if we need a new strategy for the upcoming season."

"Last August, (eight months ago), Council committed to identifying additional encampment sites. Those maps remain hidden. This delay is unacceptable and undermines public trust. Research proves that smaller, managed, and segregated sites are safer than one overcrowded location. The March 23rd Housing Report confirms that demand exceeds supply, therefore, the PUC cannot and should not be the only site. We must identify secondary locations now to prevent the overcrowding and conflict that defined last summer."

"As a concerned resident of the Northside neighbourhood, my primary focus is on finding a clear, long-term solution: moving encampments entirely out of residential areas. It has now been 11 months since August 2025, and our community is still waiting for a definitive list of alternatives, municipally approved zones. During the May 2026 EAC meeting, administration claimed they could not share which municipal properties were available due to "privacy issues." This reasoning is highly problematic. General asset lists of public municipal lands do not constitute personal, private data. While the municipality has now stated it will release the property options on October 1, this extended delay continues to prolong the disruption to local neighborhoods. I want to see our local park safely restored so residents can get back to simple, everyday community enjoyments like walking, playing frisbee, bocce ball, or volleyball."

"Ensure meaningful participation by neighbors, businesses, health, housing, safety and lived-experience representatives. Require transparency, evidence and measurable outcomes."

SAFETY AND SECURITY: ENCAMPMENTS DO NOT BELONG IN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

"It is our steadfast position that tent encampments do not belong in residential neighborhoods. On a recent Thursday night, at 2:00 am, a man in a complete stupor was wandering our street ringing doorbells and knocking on doors. I personally viewed a video recorded by a neighbor who tried to converse with this person through his doorbell camera but the individual was completely incoherent and my neighbor was unable to determine what he wanted. Most of us would understandably feel intimidated and scared at the prospect of someone knocking at your door in the middle of the night in this questionable mental state. Add to this, multiple instances of dangerous fires, open drug use, bicycle chop shops, unsightly litter, and people screaming at each other during arguments. The citizens living in the adjacent Skyline apartment have many stories about scary behavior and the folks on Taylor Ave have been dangerously close to the toxic smoke from fires. The inappropriateness of the PUC location should not even be in question!"

"I am a senior citizen living near the PUC encampment. Since its arrival, our peaceful neighborhood has become a source of constant anxiety. My sister and I no longer feel safe walking to our mailboxes, and we are forced to lock our doors at all times.

The safety risks we face are real and escalating. Recently, on June 26 at 2:30 AM, a homeless individual came to our home and knocked on our door. This was a frightening, unacceptable violation of our security. It is unfair to expect senior residents to navigate these unpredictable, late-night encounters.

An unmanaged encampment does not belong in a residential area. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their home. Because your committee is responsible for advising municipal leadership, I formally request that you recommend that Council immediately address these critical gaps by implementing the following measures:

Increased Evening Patrols: Recommend that Council coordinate an active, visible police presence in our neighborhood, particularly during late evening and overnight hours to deter individuals from entering private yards.

Accountability for Nighttime By-Law Enforcement: Ask Council to review evening enforcement gaps. Why are by-law officers not actively working and patrolling during evening hours when residents are most vulnerable? We need the Council to put overnight enforcement on the ground to protect neighborhood residents.

A Permanent Relocation Strategy: Formally recommend to Council an expedited plan to transition individuals out of this residential green space and into structured, managed indoor shelters."

LOOKING BEYOND THE ENCAMPMENT

"Make Treatment and Recovery a Greater Priority. Rebalance the Four Pillar approach by strengthening prevention, treatment and recovery while maintaining appropriate harm reduction and community safety. Examine the Alberta Model: Ask Council to review relevant approaches to housing, addiction, treatment, recovery and accountability, and identify elements suitable for Chatham-Kent."

"Fund Results, Not Just Programs. Review Community Service Delivery Models. Tie funding increasingly to measurable outcomes, including treatment access, recovery, housing stability, reduced crisis interventions and improved neighborhood conditions. Compare traditional staffing with partnerships, contracted specialists, peer support and outcome-based agreements. Ensure lived experience informs policy and program evaluation, while qualified organizations and professionals retain operational responsibility and accountability."

"Pilot Before Expanding. Require time-limited pilots, independent data, community feedback and public reporting before major programs or housing models are expanded."

OPEN RECOMMENDATIONS YET TO BE ADDRESSED

Due to time constraints, the following items were not addressed at the August 25th meeting. While it was suggested that these points be summarized into a single generalized statement, doing so would compromise the integrity of the individual recommendations.

At that same meeting, Councilor Bondy confirmed Council's original intent: **the Encampment Advisory Committee (EAC) was established specifically to facilitate community dialogue and gather local input regarding the PUC site.** Each item listed below carries distinct significance and responds directly to the public feedback detailed in the above section of this report.

Because the completed motions do not capture the specific details raised by citizens, the outstanding items have been organized below. They correspond directly to the community's primary concerns and follow the same categories as the public deputations.

BYLAW COMPLIANCE AND ISSUANCE OF ORDERS

Encampment Protocol 5.0 Enforcement and Penalties:

• 5.3.2 ORDERS:

Current wording: An Officer who finds that a person has contravened or caused a contravention of a provision of this by-law may issue an order to that person: specifying the time period within which compliance must be achieved

Revision: The timeline for compliance with the order to range between 24 to 72 hours. The exception; if a site poses an immediate safety risk—such as blocking roadways or sidewalks—removal may occur right away. RPS (the contractor) to notify the Program Manager of the issuance of Orders.

That the contractor be authorized to have an “open order” for a site with continuous non-compliance.

• 5.33 CLEAN UP:

Current wording: advising that if the person fails to comply with the order within the specified time, the Municipality may carry out the required work at the person's expense;

Revision: The Program Manager notifies Outreach to provide necessary support to remediate the issue by the deadline stated in the order.

• 5.6 REMEDY AND DISPOSITION:

Current wording: Where a person defaults in complying with an order issued under this by-law, the Municipality may authorize its employees, contractors, or agents to take any action, or combination of actions, necessary to bring the site into compliance with the requirements of this by-law.

Revision: where a person defaults in compliance with the order, the contractor is authorized to take any action, or combination of actions, necessary to bring the site into compliance with the by-law on the date listed on the order.

Expectation: full compliance with the Bylaws: Issuance of Orders as per the bylaws.

Specifically, (taken directly from the Encampment Response Protocol): The current encampment protocols include a provision that there is to be no more than one tent per person, and that all personal items be stored within a tent (with exception of a bicycle and small structures for pets); and items in contravention to this will be removed following notice.

Encampment By-law # 111-2025

Current wording: In addition, to improve the safety and well-being of encampment occupants and general public, the following safety protocols are to be followed in encampments: (followed by a bulleted list)

Revision: addition of the following bullets

- A tent is a single enclosed living space used for sleeping and shelter, tarps are not enclosed living spaces.
- Strict enforcement of no storage in additional tents (or under tarps)

Current wording: Tents/structures must be a minimum of 2 metres away from other structures while meeting all other rules to ensure fire separation and emergency service access

Revision: Tents set up in a row and a minimum of 3 metres apart, as per the recommendation made by CKFS to the EAC. There should be no clustering of tents.

Current wording: All personal items be stored within a tent (with exception of a bicycle and small structures for pets).

Revision: (with exception of a bicycle per person, one chair per person and small structures for pets). No accumulation of additional bicycles or bicycle parts is permitted.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Expectations (bylaws) to be posted on signs in encampments with over 10 tents.

That 311 concerns be sent directly to Bylaw Officers for investigation and action if warranted. That 311 concerns and actions are documented in the data dashboard. Currently citizens are directed to submit concerns to 311, the email reply from 311 states that “you may receive an email stating that your case has been resolved” however that is just because it has been moved to the proper system -”. Combining direct submission of 311 concerns to the Bylaw Officers, along with documentation in the data dashboard provides transparency, accountability and assurance to the public that concerns are addressed.

SAFETY AND SECURITY: ENCAMPMENTS DO NOT BELONG IN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Municipality to release maps showing all municipal properties, as requested in August 2025. Maps to be used to identify potential encampment sites **outside of residential neighborhoods and proximity to schools**, prioritizing industrial or peripheral zones, in support of Ontario Safer Municipalities Act (Bill 6). Identify locations for specific groups: seniors, sober living. That public consultation is a cornerstone of the process.

Repurposing Vacant Municipal Assets. Council direct administration to immediately audit all municipally owned buildings, vacant schools, and surplus lands within Chatham-Kent, and present a report to Council identifying at least three locations viable for immediate conversion into temporary transitional housing or emergency winter shelters **outside of residential neighborhoods and proximity to schools**. That public consultation is a cornerstone of the process.

Scheduling of Bylaw Officers. That the contracted organization (RPS) liaise with CKPS to utilize their data to identify critical periods for a presence in the area; those schedules be flexible to ensure a correlation between peak needs as per the data

LOOKING BEYOND THE ENCAMPMENT

Planned use of Municipal Properties. That Council direct the appropriate departments to prepare a report to the public on the planned use, type of housing and projected completion date for development on the following properties:

1. Former St Ursula's School
2. 24 & 28 Redwood Crescent
3. Jaycette Park surplus lands
4. Park Street/Park Avenue East Public Works lands

5. 398, 406 & 410 Park Street

Additional Staff for Supportive Housing: That the Municipality hire at least two more staff members to the Housing Department to provide direct support to those living in Municipal housing. Between 2022 & 2025 Housing reported a cost of over \$2 000 000 under the category of Deliberate Damage and Tenant Neglect, separate from routine maintenance, major repairs and emergency repairs. Potentially, an opportunity to provide greater support in the acquisition of life skills needed to remain housed.

Open Fire Strategy for Public Spaces. That administration coordinates bylaw, social services, and fire rescue under a synchronized open-air fire strategy. Fire safety hazards inside parks trigger immediate removal protocols, to support this, maintain a vacant space as a source of alternative housing.

EAC COMMITTEE MOTIONS AS OF AUGUST 25, 2026

The following motions were moved and carried by the EAC and are presented for public input prior the finalizing of the Report and Recommendations to the Municipality of Chatham-Kent Council.

1. **Direct Administration to develop a Chatham-Kent 2030 Homelessness and Encampment Reduction Strategy:** designed to substantially reduce unsheltered homelessness and eliminate the need for permanent encampments.
2. **Direct Administration to establish a coordinated Housing Resolution Team** responsible for connecting people experiencing homelessness to permanent, transitional or supportive housing.
3. **Direct Administration to prepare individualized housing pathways** for identified people experiencing chronic homelessness or residing in encampments, subject to consent and privacy requirements.
4. **Direct Administration to identify the number of permanent supportive, transitional and affordable housing units required** to substantially reduce current homelessness numbers.
5. **Direct Administration to identify existing properties that could be rapidly acquired or converted into housing** and provide Council with a prioritized list of opportunities.
6. **Direct Administration to develop a Private Landlord Housing Partnership Program** incorporating appropriate incentives, rent-security mechanisms and tenant-support services, subject to available funding and legal authority.
7. **Direct Administration to strengthen homelessness-prevention measures**, particularly eviction prevention and rapid intervention for people at imminent risk of losing housing.
8. **Direct Administration to establish a standardized encampment-resolution process** based on engagement, housing assessment, appropriate housing offers, support, relocation and site restoration.
9. **Direct Administration to establish a public homelessness and housing dashboard** and report results regularly to Council.
10. **Direct the Mayor and appropriate senior municipal officials to advocate jointly with provincial and federal governments** for capital and operating funding for identified Chatham-Kent housing projects.

11. Direct Administration to establish a Chatham-Kent Housing Partnership Table involving government, private-sector, non-profit, health, community and lived-experience representatives.

12. Direct Administration to return to Council with a fully costed implementation plan, including municipal, provincial, federal and potential private/community funding sources.

13. That the level of P2C (Pathways to Care) service be increased to provide approximately double the current level of service to individuals experiencing homelessness.

14. That the Municipality work with private-sector partners, community organizations, businesses and other stakeholders to coordinate private initiatives and identify funding opportunities for homelessness initiatives.

15. That the Municipality fund and establish an emergency shelter, away from residential neighborhoods where possible, to provide a safe, appropriate place for individuals experiencing homelessness while they work toward more permanent housing solutions.

16. That the Municipality invest in supportive housing initiatives across Chatham-Kent and actively support partnerships with private, non-profit and community organizations to develop sustainable supportive-housing models.

17. That Administration create a comprehensive support plan and strategy to support the safety, business continuity, and economic wellbeing of Chatham-Kent businesses and neighborhoods in regard to the encampment and homelessness strategy.

18. Recognizing the growing need for homelessness services and the increasing visibility of homelessness in communities throughout Chatham-Kent, the Encampment Advisory Committee (EAC) be renamed the Homelessness Prevention and Response Committee.

That the Terms of Reference for the committee be reviewed and revised to reflect its expanded mandate, including homelessness prevention, emergency response, housing, supportive services and homelessness issues throughout the entirety of Chatham-Kent.

That the Homelessness Prevention and Response Committee include representatives from each ward, including 3-4 Councilors with 1-2 representing rural wards, to ensure that the experiences, needs and concerns of communities throughout Chatham-Kent are considered.

19. That Administration publicly provide, at specific periodic intervals, relevant collected data, by municipal channels and community partners, regarding housing, homelessness and encampments within Chatham-Kent. This data will be provided via established municipal websites.

20. Council prioritize investments to support housing and homelessness using existing reserves and additionally consider tax funding starting in 2027.

21. That appropriate emergency housing be prioritized for families with children.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This report summarizes the considerable work effort completed to date by the Encampment Advisory Committee in the relatively short period of time as meetings were limited allowing for deputations and presentations between April and August 2026.

Committee members acknowledge that the needs connected to homelessness continue to grow and as such acknowledges the need for a plan that includes **actionable timelines** to be completed immediately.

The report summarizes motions, those completed and those remaining open, as of September 1, 2026.

The report is to be posted and available to the public on September 3rd, allowing time for the submission of deputations by the deadline of noon on September 8th when the EAC convenes for its final meeting and finalization prior to the submission of the report for the consideration of the next Council subsequent to the election. It will also be shared with VINK Consulting in their assessment of the housing and homeless supports in Chatham-Kent.