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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE:**     **Peel's Homeless Encampment Policy and Protocols Update**

**FROM:**                 Steve Jacques, MScPI, MCIP, RPP, Commissioner of Human Services

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide an update on Peel's Homeless Encampment Policy and Protocols Project.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- This report provides Council with an update on Peel's Homeless Encampment Policy and Protocols Project. The report includes a brief update on the Citizens' Table, as well as an update on the draft policy, protocols and tools that have been successfully used to manage the encampment beside the Dundas Street shelter.
  - Citizens Table: The first meeting of the Citizens' Table was in December 2024. The Table was formed in response to Council direction for citizens of Peel who are impacted by homeless encampments to have an opportunity to provide feedback on the tools and outputs of the Peel Encampments project. A report on the findings of the Citizens' Table will be presented to Council in March 2025.
  - Dundas Street Shelter Encampment: At its largest size, in the fall of 2024, the Dundas Street encampment consisted of 42 people and 42 tents. By using the encampment response team's new tools and coordinated approach, just 2 people and 3 tents remain in the Dundas encampment as of February 3, 2025.
  - Legislative Environment: In Ontario, there is evolving case law and proposed legislation impacting encampments on public lands. The working group will continue to assess new legislative or legal updates as they arise, while continuing to support a human rights-based approach that balances the needs of encampment residents with Peel residents.
  - Next steps: Staff will return to Council with two more reports in 2025. Results from the Citizens' Table will be presented to Council in March. The final encampment policy and protocols, full implementation plan, and the 2026 budget implications will be reported to Council in June 2025.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The "Homelessness Policy and Programs" report to Regional Council dated October 26, 2023 noted the need for a Council-endorsed encampment policy and protocols. Subsequently, in April 2024, the Homeless Encampment Policy and Protocols project was launched to create a coordinated, and human rights-based approach to responding to encampments in Peel. A key goal of the project is achieving balance between the needs of people residing in encampments,

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and the needs of community members using the same public spaces, while aligning with all applicable legal requirements.

Since project launch, Council has received two updates on the work completed by the Peel Encampment Working Group and Steering Committee (see Appendix I for a list of members). These reports included "Homeless Encampment Policy and Joint Protocols" on May 23, 2024, and "Update on the Encampment Policy Framework and Joint Protocols for Peel Region" on July 11, 2024.

This report provides Council with a third project update. The report includes a brief update on the Citizens' Table which was created at Council's direction, an update on the draft policy, protocols and tools and how they've been used to manage the encampment beside the Dundas Street shelter.

### 2. Project Update

The Peel Encampments Working Group and Steering Committee continue to meet regularly to achieve project deliverables and meet the timelines as described in Table 1 below. Regional staff continue to attend weekly municipal encampment meetings held by the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga to support the interim response while the final deliverables are being developed and piloted.

**Table 1 – Project Deliverables and Timelines**

Deliverables	Timelines	Status
Project kick-off	April 2024	Complete
Draft policy framework and interim measures to support Etobicoke Creek encampments	July 2024	Complete
<b>Stakeholder consultation</b> People experiencing homelessness/ encampment residents Resident townhall Sector associations Business survey Resident survey Citizens' table	May 2024 – ongoing  May 2024 June 2024 Sept – Oct 2024 Sept – Oct 2024 Nov 2024 – March 2025	In progress
Mitigating risks of encampments throughout Peel by creating and piloting assessment tools and templates, and improved information-sharing and education	July 2024 – present	In progress
Final policy framework	June 2025	In progress
Joint protocols, tools (e.g., assessment templates, process map), municipal and regional operating procedures complete	June 2025	In progress

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Implementation plan	Summer 2025	Not started
Municipal by-law updates	Summer-Fall 2025	Not started
Policy and protocols operationalized	January-February 2026	Not started
Project close-out and transition to operations	February 2026	Not started
Reports to Regional Council	October 2023 May 2024 July 2024 February 2025 March 2025 June 2025	In progress
Reports to local municipal councils	Brampton – Fall 2024 Mississauga – Fall 2024 TBC – 2025	In progress

### a) Citizens' Table

The first meeting of the Citizens' Table was in December 2024. The Table was formed in response to Council direction for citizens of Peel who are impacted by homeless encampments to have an opportunity to provide feedback on the tools and outputs of the Peel Encampments project. To ensure an objective and transparent process, staff retained an independent consultant to recruit up to 20 citizens from across Peel and facilitate several meetings with them to introduce and explain the deliverables of the Peel Encampments working group and record their feedback. A report on the findings of the Citizens' Table will be presented to Council in March 2025 in advance of the final report in June.

### b) Application of draft protocols and tools at the Dundas Street Encampment

Draft tools recently developed by the Peel Encampment Working Group that helped support a successful clean-up at the encampment located next to the Dundas Medical Shelter include templates for site assessments and needs assessments, and protocols for roles and responsibilities and site clean-up. These tools ensure a coordinated and consistent encampment response as well as timely information sharing between the encampment response team members.

An encampment was first established at the Dundas Street location in 2023 when shelters were extremely over capacity due to the needs of people experiencing homelessness and asylum seekers. At its largest size, in the fall of 2024, encampment assessments counted 42 people and 42 tents.

Before the first clean-up in November, the team worked collaboratively to appropriately assess and mitigate risks, communicate regularly with encampment residents, and determine the roles, key actions, and responsibilities for each organization attending the

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clean-up. The clean-up was a success and the number of tents decreased to 25 from 42. Ten individuals voluntarily left the encampment to relocate to other shelter.

Several other clean-ups have since occurred. As of February 3, 2025, only 2 people and 3 tents remain in the Dundas encampment. The ongoing collaboration of the encampment response team, alongside new assessment tools and best practices, has resulted in successfully reducing the size of Peel's largest encampment, transitioning people safely and voluntarily to indoor shelter, and improved use of public space – all without the use of enforcement.

### **3. Legal and Legislative Environment**

There is an evolving body of case law concerning the issue of encampments in Ontario. The relevant principles from these cases will help to inform the development of the encampments protocol. In addition, the Ontario government recently introduced Bill 242 - *Safer Municipalities Act, 2024*, which may impact how encampments are dealt with, particularly in circumstances where illegal substances are being used in public spaces. A detailed overview of this proposed legislation was provided to Council in an information report from the Regional Solicitor and Commissioner of Legislative Services entitled, "Bill 242 – Safer Municipalities Act, 2024" on the January 9, 2025 Regional Council meeting agenda. The calling of a provincial election may interfere with the legislative process required for the passing of the *Safer Municipalities Act, 2024*, which may have to be re-introduced as a new bill once a new legislative session begins following the election.

Legislative changes and decisions being made by judges with respect to encampments continue to be tracked by the Working Group and are informing the development of final protocols and operating procedures.

### **4. Next Steps**

Staff will return to Council with two more reports in 2025. Results from the Citizens' Table will be presented to Council in March. The final encampment policy and protocols, full implementation plan, and the 2026 budget implications will be reported to Council in June 2025.

## **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

There is evolving case law and proposed new legislation impacting encampments on public lands, particularly in cases where illegal substances are being used. The working group will continue to assess new legislative or legal updates as they arise, while continuing to support a human rights-based approach that balances the needs of encampment residents with Peel residents.

The collaborative and consistent use of the protocols, assessments, and other templates will enable Peel's encampment response teams to continue to respond proactively and promptly to encampment issues and the needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. To reduce or end chronic homelessness in Peel, it will be critical to continue to invest in homelessness prevention programs and to create new affordable and supportive housing.

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### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This report has no financial implications. However, staff anticipate that the full implementation of the new policy and protocols will have net operating budget implications for 2026.

### **CONCLUSION**

This report provides Council with an update about Peel's Homeless Encampment Policy and Protocols Project. The report focuses on the results of piloting the draft protocols, tools and templates at the encampment outside of the Dundas Medical Shelter.

The legal environment with respect to homeless encampments is complex and evolving, particularly within a strained housing system with a limited supply of affordable and supportive housing and balanced between the needs of encampment residents and others. The working group continues to monitor these changes as the final policy and protocols are developed.

The work of the Peel Encampment Working Group and Steering Committee is progressing well. The final encampment policy and protocols will be tabled at Regional Council in June 2025.

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I – Members of the Peel Encampments Steering Committee and Working Group

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