March 26, 2025

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Sheryl M. M. Long, City Manager   202500578

Subject: Encampment Update and Resources

Reference Document #202402557

The City Council at its session on December 10, 2024, referred the following item for review and report:

> **MOTION,** submitted by Councilmembers Cramerding, Jeffreys, and Owens, **WE MOVE** that the administration provide a report on homeless encampments in Cincinnati. The report should include the following:
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> 1) Gaps in the current shelter or housing systems that would provide viable alternatives to encampments and identification of city or county resources that would help eliminate the obstacles to fill these gaps
>
> 2) Data regarding the rate of homeless encampments in the city and other relevant information that the administration has gathered
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> 3) Proposals to further discourage encampments in parks, recreation sites, and other public spaces to ensure that these spaces can be utilized by all City residents
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> 4) Identification of any additional resources necessary to curtail homeless encampments, including additional resources to ARC (Alternative Response to Crises) teams or the Cincinnati Police Department, potentially reinstating the Cincinnati Parks Police Department (reorganized into the Cincinnati Police Department in the late eighties), or instating a Parks Ranger program.

Introduction

A homeless encampment can take a variety of forms, such as a "tent city" or a group of individuals living together in a public area, such as a public park. Homeless

encampments can vary widely in size and can be constituted of a single person or hundreds of individuals. In general, an encampment will include some type of shelter i.e., a tent, a lean-to made of cardboard, etc., although some encampments may rely on pre-existing structures, such as a highway overpass, to provide shelter with the encampment itself consisting primarily of personal property i.e. Clothing, sleeping bags, cookware, etc., and some encampments may include no shelter.

The City's lawsuit settlement with the Homeless Coalition provides guidance for police officers and the city manager's designee to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of individuals experiencing homelessness. The City Manager's designee will investigate the encampment and engage with its resident(s) to offer services and shelter. Only after the City Manager's designee confirms that housing or shelter is available for each resident of an encampment, will the residents be advised that they have a 72-hour, three-day period to collect their personal belongings and depart the area. Signage shall be posted in the vicinity of the encampment. This workflow applies to all city managed properties including city parks.

Identified Gaps in Shelter and Housing Systems

There are several gaps in the shelter and housing system that contribute to homelessness. The largest gap is that shelter options are limited. Many shelters enforce strict entry requirements, such as sobriety, curfews, and identification, which exclude many individuals in need. Specific populations face additional barriers. Youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, families, and people with disabilities often struggle to access appropriate shelter and housing resources. There is an insufficient supply of transitional and permanent supportive housing. The shortage of these housing options leaves many individuals without a pathway to long-term stability.

A lack of affordable housing units exacerbates the problem. Rising rental costs and a shortage of affordable units make it difficult for people to secure stable housing. Outreach and case management services are insufficient. Many individuals struggle to navigate available housing programs due to limited case management support. Emergency shelters often lack capacity. Seasonal and emergency shelters fill up quickly, forcing many individuals to remain outside with no alternative. Overall, the resources available do not match the number of homeless individuals, leaving significant gaps in the shelter and housing system.

Data regarding the rate of homeless encampments in the city and other relevant information that the administration has gathered.

Service Requests (SR) regarding homeless encampments are entered into the 311 Customer Service Response (CSR) system by city residents and staff members. These requests are managed by the Place-Based Initiatives team in the City Manager's Office. Since January of 2025 there have been a total of 96 reports of homeless

encampments that have been submitted through the 311 system. However, not all SRs represent true encampments. 49 of the 96 reports have been validated as real encampments with active campers. Of those 49 sites, 12 encampments have been cleaned. Currently, there are 37 open and active encampments.

The Office of Performance and Data Analytics (OPDA) provides a public-facing [dashboard of CSR data](#) on the CincyInsights portal. This dashboard may be filtered to the Homeless Encampment request type and used to view the number of currently open requests, requests created over time, and their distribution by neighborhood.

Proposals to Discourage Encampments in Parks, Recreation Sites, etc.

To discourage encampments in parks, recreation sites, and other public spaces, there are four strategies that can be implemented. First, community engagement and education efforts can help increase public awareness about available resources and city policies. By informing the public, individuals experiencing homelessness may be more likely to seek appropriate support, and proper use of public spaces can be encouraged. Secondly, we can use environmental design strategies that can be used to deter unauthorized camping. Improvements such as better lighting, clear signage, strategic landscaping, and increased park activation through programming can make public spaces less conducive to encampments. Next, increasing directed patrols by the Cincinnati Police Department can help enforce local regulations. Expanding police presence in parks and recreation sites can deter encampments and ensure public spaces remain accessible to all community members. Finally, providing education and training for parks' and recreation staff on handling homeless encampments is essential. By continuing to develop and implement training programs, staff can learn best practices for reporting and interacting with individuals experiencing homelessness in a compassionate and effective manner.

Additional Resources

The 311 Community Responder team will assist the Place-Based Initiatives Manager by quickly validating initial reports of homeless encampments to ensure the proper service providers are engaged. In addition to the CMO Place-Based Initiatives Team, there are many other organizations and agencies that are utilized for outreach and service provision, including the City's Alternative Response to Crisis (ARC) team, the Cincinnati Health Department, PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness), GeneroCity 513, and the Hamilton County Quick Response Team.

cc: John Brazina, Interim Assistant City Manager
     Brooke Lipscomb, Place-Based Initiatives Manager
     Bill Vedra, Director of Emergency Communication Center