

To: David Creery, Chief Administrative Officer
From: Brian Connors, Director of Parks & Recreation-
Re: Funding for Encampment Clean-Up

AIM

To obtain direction from Council on how to proceed with the on-going cost of encampment cleaning for the remainder of 2024.

BACKGROUND

In the 2024 operating budget, Council approved \$100,000 for the cleaning of encampments which has been a growing and ongoing problem within the City for several years. A tender was issued and five qualified bids were received. The contract was awarded to *First Response Environmental*, who was the lowest qualified bidder.

COMMENTS

Six abandoned sites have been cleaned up by contractors this year; two sites in Richardson Park, one site at the corner of Dundas and Springbank, one site at Bexley, one site off James Street, as well as a major clean-up involving the Canadian National Railway (CN) rail at Clarke Street.

The clean-up efforts thus far represent a small fraction of the encampments in the City. As of the time of writing this report, there are 44 known encampments in Woodstock, either active or abandoned as outlined below:

- 23 active sites on City/UTRCA/County property – 12 of these locations are a tent or structure occupied by 1 person or couple. The remaining 11 locations have more than one tent or structure and are considered large with significant debris requiring more than a day for clean-up if needed.
- 8 abandoned sites on City/UTRCA/County property requiring clean-up
- 13 active or abandoned sites on private property (clean-up would be the responsibility of the landowner)

The Clarke Street encampment site was located in a portion of Brick Pond Wetlands and could only be accessed by crossing the CN tracks. There were a number of Health and Safety concerns that contributed to the need for the residents to relocate and the priority for clean-up. Being located within the wetlands created a wet and unsanitary environment for the residents. The location being in close proximity to the train tracks posed a hazard not only for the residents but also for the rail line. CN formally brought their concerns with this site location forward to staff in April of this year. There were numerous fires in this location that became difficult for the Woodstock Fire Department to extinguish due to the location. The quantity of debris and wood spread throughout the site posed a hazard for evacuation and created an environment where a fire could easily spread and cause significant damage to the encampment, rail line, and an environmentally sensitive area.

The clean-up at Clarke Street presented several unique challenges that contributed to a high expense of operations. Crossing the CN tracks to access the site and removing debris required coordination with the rail authority, who gratuitously installed track mats and provided CN flag workers for the duration of the project. Various equipment including an excavator and skid steer were utilized to remove debris. A crane was also needed to remove debris from deeper in the wetland where ground conditions did not allow equipment to be utilized. Over 20 large waste bins of debris were removed from the site over the course of a week and a half. There were a number of hazardous materials found on site, including asbestos piping, human feces, and sharps that required additional health and safety control measures.

The total cost for this one encampment clean-up came to \$101,412.02 (inc. 1.76% HST). This expenditure puts the overall Parks Clean-up – Purchased Services budget in deficit by \$15,392.86 (incl. 1.76%HST). Staff predict that this budget will be in a much greater deficit by the year end if clean-ups continue without additional funding. Looking at the current number of abandoned sites requiring clean-up and the larger areas that may require servicing before the end of 2024, staff predict an additional \$100,000 will be required to operate without a significant Parks Clean-up budget deficit.

Two options are presented for encampment clean-up on city property. Council can provide direction to pause encampment clean for the remainder of 2024 or Council can direct continuation of encampment clean-up and provide additional funding.

Recommended financing for any additional funds is the Hydro Reserve Fund. Please note that this is a different reserve fund from the Hydro Legacy Fund which includes the proceeds of Woodstock Hydro Services.

RECOMMENDATION

That Woodstock City Council provides no further funding and directs staff to pause encampment clean-up until 2025 budget consideration.

OR

That Woodstock City Council provide an additional \$100,000 to be financed from the Hydro Reserve Fund for Parks Cleanup – Purchased Services Account 0701-83125-0393.

Authored by: Reta Horan, Supervisor of Parks

Authored by: Brian Connors, Director of Parks and Recreation

Approved by: David Creery, M.B.A., P.Eng., Chief Administrative Officer