



Homelessness Emergency Action Plan (HEAP)

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Approved by: 

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PURPOSE

This Homelessness Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) provides a framework to guide the City of Vancouver response to the Homelessness Emergency Declaration and to facilitate shared awareness and timely coordination among responding and supporting agencies and organizations.

SCOPE

1. Provides a framework to effectively integrate city and community resources in a joint, multi-disciplinary response to the homelessness emergency
2. Establishes city objectives and priorities, describes response actions
3. Designates Program and Policy Development Manager as Incident Commander
4. This Plan is intended to augment – not replace – existing homelessness response programs and/or activities

GOAL

Reduce incidents of homelessness and mitigate the adverse impacts of unsheltered homelessness within the city.

OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance law enforcement collaboration with HART as an engagement force multiplier with the unhoused community.
2. Expand mechanisms to encourage participation with available social services through Clark County District Court's Community Court program.
3. Amend City Code to
 - a. Provide greater balance in access to public spaces intended for public use, particularly greenways/open spaces, and
 - b. Establish clearer guidelines for outdoor habitation and camping, ensuring greater clarity for both those experiencing homelessness and law enforcement.
4. Reduce the significant negative impacts related to unsheltered homelessness in the Fourth Plain and downtown corridors through the operation of corridor-specific community response teams that provide both behavioral health response and community engagement.
5. Increase shelter capacity and serve a greater number of individuals experiencing homelessness by establishing a congregate bridge shelter to accommodate ~150 individuals, provide Medication Assisted Treatment and peer-support services on-site, as well as medical respite beds in partnership with hospital(s).

PRIORITIES

1. Protect life and property of both unhoused and housed Vancouver residents
2. Protect individual civil rights
3. Protect critical infrastructure and community assets
4. Protect the environment

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SITUATION

1. A 10-week study conducted by the City's Homeless Assistance and Resources Team (HART) during the summer of 2023, and follow-up contact completed after the 2023 study found 451 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Of those 451 individuals, many were new to Vancouver and, therefore, less familiar with the City's resources, opportunities, laws and regulations.
2. The overall behavior exhibited by individuals residing in larger encampments has materially changed over recent months. Outreach workers report that many individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Vancouver have reduced interest in voluntarily engaging in community services such as behavioral health treatment and housing/shelter services.
3. Over recent months, members of the HART have observed an increase in the prevalence of the following within and around homeless encampments in the City of Vancouver: untreated mental and behavioral health issues; weapons, firearms and violence; improperly discarded solid waste and biohazards; careless storage of drugs (e.g., Fentanyl pills on the ground); overdoses; substance use related deaths; and threats towards, and attempts to intimidate, outreach workers.
4. In addition, some homeless encampments have begun serving as cover for criminal activity, including drug dealing, by individuals not experiencing homelessness.
5. Individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness utilize essential fire, police, and emergency medical services in significantly greater frequency than other residents of the City of Vancouver creating corresponding system demands and impacts (e.g. response time delays) felt by the surrounding community-at-large.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Police, Fire and AMR will use assigned CRESA 9-1-1 Dispatch protocol.
2. Departments will use existing contract and mutual aid resources to the maximum extent possible.
3. The city will continue to provide essential services, as long as practical, under any emergency condition.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

The Incident Commander is responsible for responding to the Homelessness Emergency and has access to all city resources needed to implement this Action Plan.

The City's Homeless Response Manager coordinates the city's Safe Stay and Safe Park shelter programs and manages development and initial operation of the Bridge Shelter.

The Homeless Assistance and Resources Team (HART) Manager supervises ongoing HART outreach programs and coordinates Community Response Teams activities in the 4th Plain Corridor and downtown area. They also continue to collaborate with Non-Profit Organizations to improve access to Community Court services for individuals experiencing homelessness.

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The HART Team, in collaboration with VPD and City Attorney's Office, recommends homelessness related policy and procedure changes that will clarify outdoor habitation and camping guidelines. VPD continues to enforce camping and habitation codes as well as additional codes enacted in Emergency Orders.

Fire, Finance, City Attorney's Office, Communications, and General Services perform key support roles. (Homelessness Emergency Action Team organization chart is on page 8.)

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Tasked departments and agencies are expected to develop internal procedures and train designated personnel to implement assigned tasking.

1. Program and Policy Development Manager (Incident Commander)

- a. Develop and implement a Homelessness Emergency Action Plan
- b. Provide monthly Homelessness Emergency update to City Council
- c. Advise the City Manager on public property to close and reopen under Emergency Order 2023-03
- d. Establish a Bridge Shelter capability and services
- e. Ensure timely updates on the City website and social media platforms
- f. Coordinate cost and funding issues with Finance Department

2. Emergency Manager (Planning Section Chief)

- a. Establish and maintain a Common Operating Picture
- b. Participate in Bridge Shelter development and implementation
- c. Identify baseline and performance benchmarks
- d. Develop and implement reporting procedures
- e. Maintain, monitor and assess the Homelessness Emergency Action Plan progress

3. Homeless Response Manager (Shelter Operations Chief)

- a. Manage Safe Stay and Safe Park shelter programs
- b. Coordinate public outreach and response activities with Communications
- c. Manage development and initial operation of the Bridge Shelter

4. HART Program Manager (Outreach Operations Chief)

- a. Manage ongoing HART outreach activities and programs
- b. Coordinate with Community Response Team on outreach/response activities
- c. Recommend City policy and procedure changes to establish clearer guidelines for outdoor habitation and camping

5. Police (VPD HQ and Operations)

- a. Advise Incident Commander on law enforcement issues.
- b. Enforce city code including provisions established in Emergency Orders
- c. Assist HART and NPO's in referring homeless issues to Community Court services

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6. City Attorney's Office (Legal Officer)

- a. Prepare, coordinate and issue Emergency Orders
- b. Monitor and assist in refining and/or scaling Community Court activities to meet community needs
- c. Advise City Manager and Incident Commander on property closures/reopening under Emergency Order 2023-03 and homelessness-related legal issues

7. General Services (GS)

- a. Advise Incident Commander on Property and Facility Management, Records Management and related actions
- b. Advise Emergency Manager on state and county official notifications and on coordination with external stakeholders (i.e., CRESA, Council for the Homeless).

8. Communications (PIO)

- a. Post/update no-camping map on city website
- b. Update Homeless web page, FAQs, and city social media network
- c. Coordinate public outreach and response

9. Finance (Finance/Admin)

- a. Track costs and coordinate funding
- b. Provide logistics and finance support
- c. Coordinate documentation requirements with Records
- d. Manage donations

PLAN ACTIVATION

This plan is activated on the date signed by the Incident Commander

PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Emergency Management is responsible for developing and updating this Plan.

DISTRIBUTION/RECORD OF CHANGES

Emergency Management will maintain the master copy of this plan. Requests for a copy should be sent to: vancouverEM@cityofvancouver.us

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