

County Statement

County and partners remain committed to meeting the needs of unsheltered residents

Cobourg, ON – September 8, 2023 – Northumberland County continues to work closely with community partners including NHH Community Mental Health Services, Transition House Shelter, and Cobourg Police Homeless Addiction Resource Project (HARP), to ensure a coordinated response to unauthorized encampment on public and private property.

The health and wellbeing of individuals residing in encampments in our community is at the heart of this collaborative encampment response, which has included:

- Coordination through Northumberland’s Homeless Coordinated Access System, including updates to the By-Name List – a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in Northumberland who consent to having their information shared by caseworkers and supportive agencies.
- Crisis intervention.
- Supporting individuals to transition from encampment to community services, such as emergency shelter.
- Arranging transportation for individuals to access shelter and services from encampments.
- Assisting individuals with completing documents needed to obtain housing, such as the completion of applications for identification and subsidized housing.

“The aim of collaborative encampment response between local service providers is not to displace people experiencing homelessness to other locations, but to support people to resolve their homelessness through engagement with services,” states County Director of Community and Social Services Lisa Horne. “Accessing services is voluntary. Enforcement of public property violations occurs only after multiple offers of support have been made without success, and individuals have been notified that they are required to vacate the property. Occasionally, though rarely, enforcement of removal from public property is required. However the goal has always been, and remains, voluntary resolution of encampment through offers of service.”

All residents of Northumberland should have access to public space, and no person, business or entity can or should claim public space as private space. Furthermore, municipal facilities are not a sustainable location for shelter given the active municipal services being delivered at these locations that must continue unimpeded for the broader community. Unauthorized tenting on private property of any kind is trespass.

The County, in collaboration with front-line service providers, is committed to meeting the needs of unsheltered residents through supports and services aimed at helping individuals find safe and sustainable housing solutions. Recent examples of partnerships and investments to provide additional service options and increased capacity to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Northumberland have included:

- Increase in shelter system capacity with the addition of overflow motel spaces.
- Investment in County Housing Stability and Rent Supplement Programs - monthly housing subsidies to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

- Increase in outreach services through Northumberland Hills Hospital Community Mental Health Services to expand street-level supports.
- Purchase of a 22-unit apartment complex in Colborne and partnership with Northumberland County Housing Corporation to preserve local stock of affordable housing.
- Purchase of five-bedroom property in Campbellford and partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association—Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (CMHA HKPR) to operate supportive housing.
- A review of the shelter system completed in 2022, with recommendations for enhancements coming forward to County Council in the coming weeks.

“The impacts of homelessness are increasing in Northumberland, as with communities across Ontario. We have neighbours in need in our community, and we are continuing to work with our front-line partners to ensure responsive supports are in place,” states Warden Mandy Martin. “The County is using all resources at its disposal to address the level of need locally, from increased shelter spaces, to investments in outreach services, rent supplement programs, to increasing food resources at local food banks, and – one of the most significant solutions – building affordable housing.

“Today, between the efforts of the County, non-profit, and community housing providers, and federal and provincial funding partners, there are nearly 170 units of affordable housing either in development or under construction in Northumberland, with plans for further development. However, this is a longer-term solution. When it comes to immediate need for shelter, the main resource our community has is the emergency shelter system.

“We understand that some may not find the shelter system suitable, and recommendations coming forward to Council from the recent shelter system review will seek to address this. Nevertheless, it is currently how system partners are equipped to support people in need. And there is capacity within this shelter system today. We encourage everyone who needs support resolving their homelessness to engage with available services today.”