



Committee of the Whole Report

Report Number: HS2025-003
Meeting Date: April 8, 2025
Title: Encampment Response Update and Council Policy
Description: Encampment Response Update From 2024 and Proposed Encampment Response Council Policy
Author and Title: Michelle Corley, Human Services Manager, Housing

Recommendation(s):

That Report HS2025-003, **Encampment Response Update and Proposed Council Policy**, be received;

That the policy entitled Encampment Response Policy, attached as Appendix A to Report HS2025-003 be adopted and numbered for inclusion in the City's Policy Manual; and

That this recommendation be brought forward to Council for consideration at the next Regular Council Meeting.

Department Head: _____

Financial/Legal/HR/Other: _____

Chief Administrative Officer: _____

Background:

At the City of Kawartha Lakes Committee of the Whole Meeting of September 10, 2024, staff introduced concepts aimed at supporting the creation of an encampment response protocol. In response, Council passed the following resolution:

CW2024-158

Moved By Councillor Richardson

Seconded By Councillor Joyce

That the presentation by Michelle Corley, Manager of Human Services, and Aaron Sloan, Manager of Municipal Law Enforcement and Licensing, **regarding an Overview of the Encampment Response Protocol**, be received; and

That this recommendation be brought forward to Council for consideration at the next Regular Council Meeting.

Carried

This report provides an update to the City's encampment response work in 2024. A recommended Council Policy (Appendix A) to provide guiding framework to the City's future response to encampments is provided.

Rationale:

Municipalities in Ontario face a delicate balance when it comes to managing encampments on public land. On one hand, they must ensure the human rights and dignity of individuals experiencing homelessness, providing them with access to basic needs such as shelter, food, and safety. On the other hand, municipalities are tasked with maintaining safe, clean, and welcoming public spaces for all residents, which may be challenged by the presence of encampments.

Municipalities must navigate complex legal and ethical considerations, ensuring that their actions comply with human rights obligations while addressing concerns from the broader community about public health, safety, and aesthetics. This balancing act requires careful integration and coordination of resources, policies, and services that prioritize both the well-being of individuals in encampments and the needs of the general public. Approaching this issue with empathy, effective communication, and a commitment to long-term housing solutions over time is key to finding an equitable and sustainable resolution.

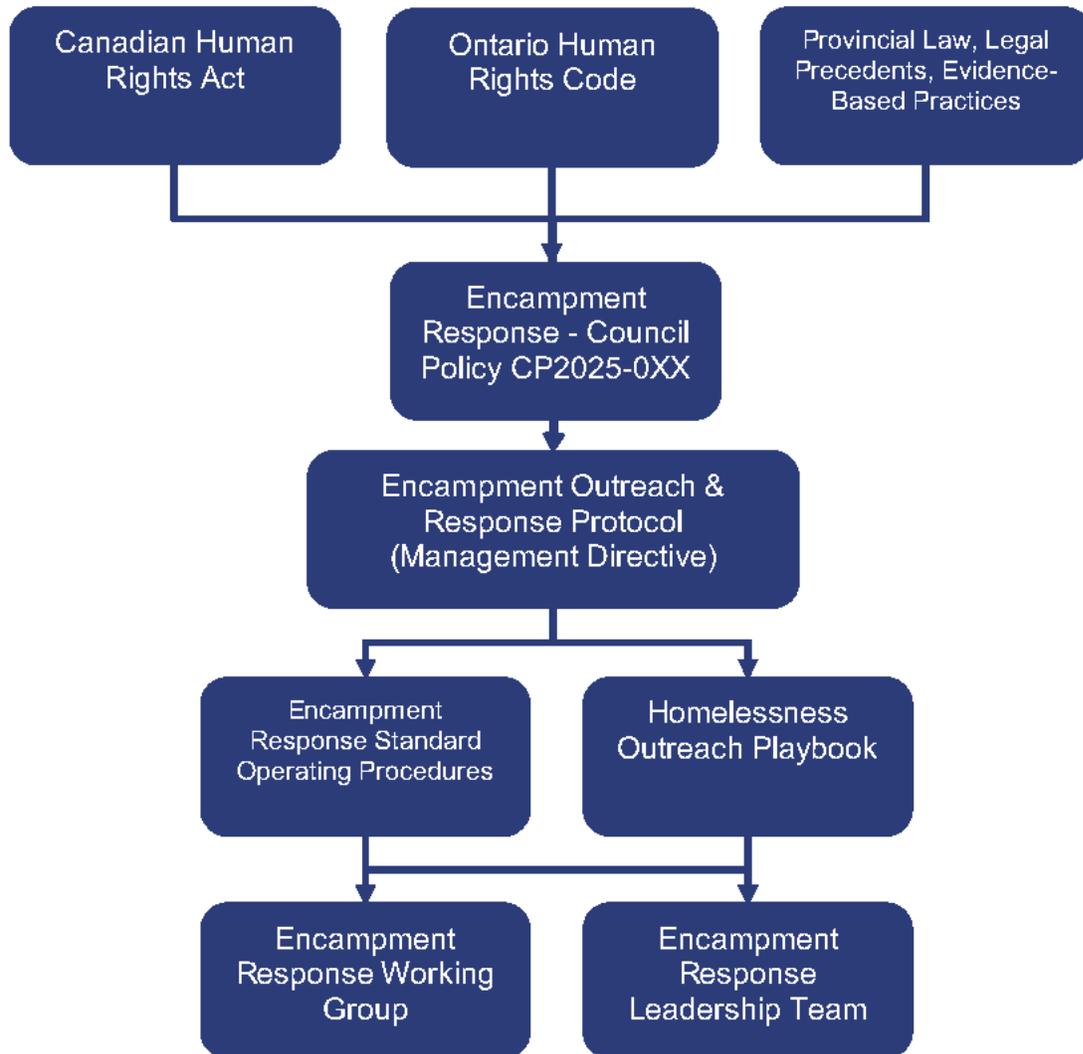
Further to the September 10th Committee of the Whole meeting, which included a review of the current legal context, as well as the content included within the proposed protocol, we are now seeking Council's approval of the proposed guiding policy.

City staff and community partners continue to be guided by the draft Encampment Outreach and Response Protocol (Appendix B). Necessary escalation resulting in the enforcement of any applicable City By-law or regulation that restricts use of City-owned land would follow. This aligns with the City's duty to accommodate under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Numerous external community stakeholders have demonstrated their support with the human-rights approach taken by Kawartha Lakes to address encampments; these letters of support are appended to this report in Appendix C to H.

Subject to final feedback and input, the draft Encampment Outreach and Response Protocol (Management Directive) shall be approved by the Encampment Response Leadership Team by the end of April, 2025.

The Encampment Outreach and Response Protocol is informed and guided by the proposed Encampment Response Council Policy. The Encampment Response Council Policy is informed by the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Ontario Human Rights Code, along with applicable provincial laws, legal precedents and evidence-based practices, as illustrated in image 1 below.

Image 1: Encampment Framework Image



Since the Committee of the Whole meeting on September 10, 2024, staff implemented many of the guiding principles outlined in the draft Council Policy to manage encampments. Over the past few months, this process has provided opportunities to foster collaborative relationships among City staff across various departments, gain valuable insights, and build trust with individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, staff have gained a better understanding of the impacts that encampments have on those staying in them, as well as on staff, municipal services, and nearby residents. Through this experience, staff have also updated operational processes.

Encampment Response is based upon a step-up framework. That is, can the individuals step up to the shelter, connect with natural resources (friends, family) or find other

forms of short-term or long-term shelter. The support offered is also balanced with securing basic needs such as food, water, hygiene as well as referrals to Community Outreach Services where unhoused can get basic needs, medical care, mental health support and crisis counselling. The City’s homelessness Outreach workers visit or connect with all known encampments at minimum twice per week. All household types are seen including couples, families and single adults with a range from young adult to senior. Pets are common.

Year after year, we continue to see a steady increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness, including those without shelter. The growing homelessness crisis has become more visible, driven by long-standing policies at all levels of government and other complex systemic challenges. This has led to a significant rise in encampments on municipally-owned properties, including parks.

Homelessness and Encampment Data

In 2024, 450 people experienced homelessness across the Service Manager region. As of February 4, 2025, 89 people are known to be experiencing homelessness in Kawartha Lakes, and 38 in the County of Haliburton, with 14 single individuals estimated to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness, with their experiences of unsheltered homelessness being more temporary or transient during the winter.

In October 2024, we were aware of 69 individuals staying in 52 encampments in Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton. Table 1 below ranks the months with the highest level of encampments since March 2024.

Table 1: Number of encampments ranked by month with the highest occurrence from March 2024 to March 2025

Month and Year	Total Number of Active Encampments	Total Number of People In Encampments
October 2024	52	69
August 2024	42	60
September 2024	39	49
July 2024	30	38
November 2024	19	25

Month and Year	Total Number of Active Encampments	Total Number of People In Encampments
June 2024	17	24
May 2024	15	22
December 2024	14	20
January 2025	12	18
February 2025	12	18
April 2024	9	13
March 2025	4	8
March 2024	4	6

2024 Encampment Response Outcomes

Below are some of the outcomes from the Outreach work completed by City staff:

- 16 households secured permanent, secure and safe rental units or Rent Geared to Income (RGI) units.
- One (1) household who had been chronically outdoors for several years secured a place in a transitional housing program and has been stable and successful for three months.
- Several households gained access to emergency shelter and remain connected to many resources.

Other related outcomes include:

- All households were referred to various resources and programs.
- All households were provided empathy, supportive counselling and active listening.
- All households were supported in creating a safety and housing (readiness) plan.
- All engaged in community outreach services.

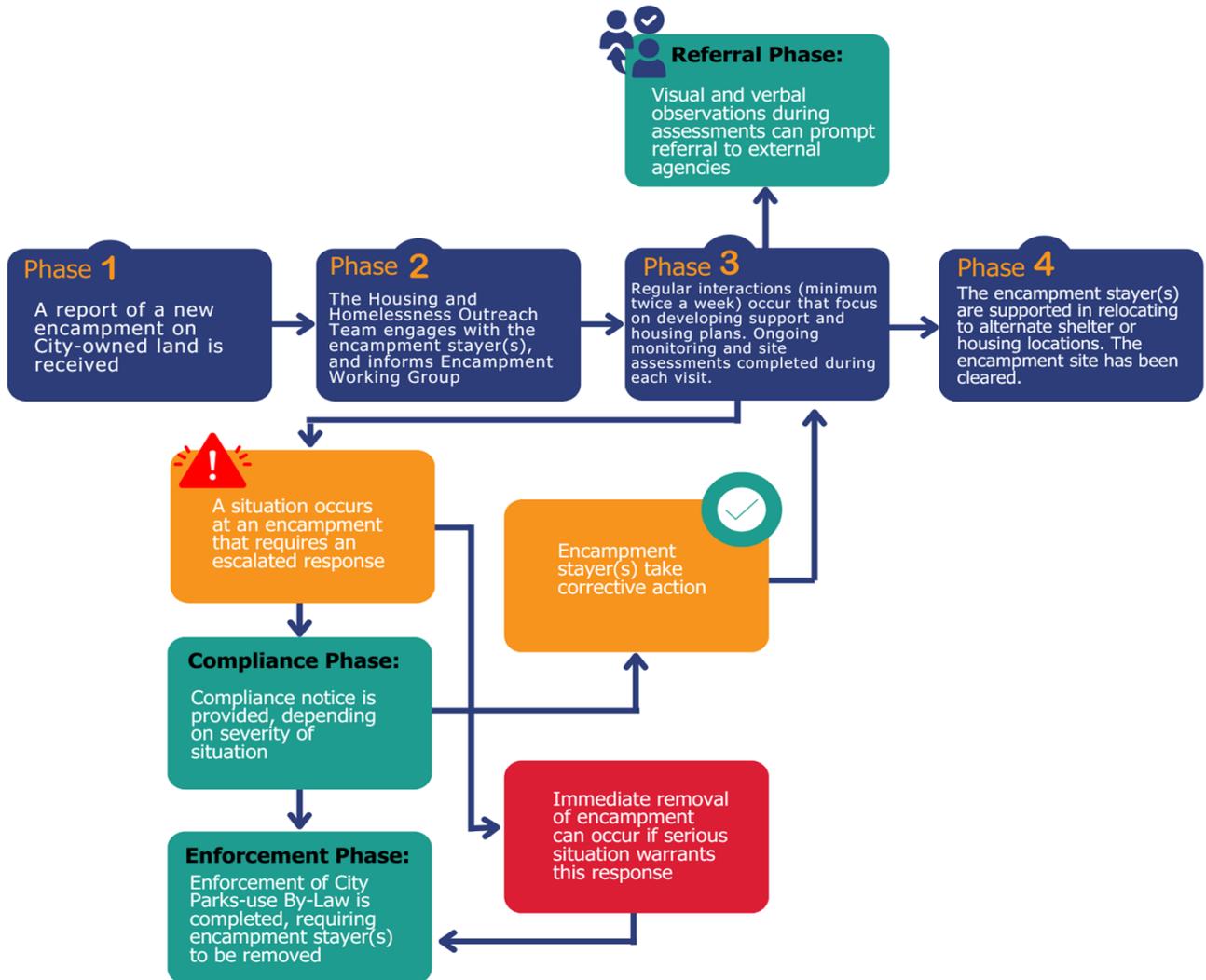
The time spent engaging each person to achieve these outcomes can drastically vary from person to person.

Even with active engagement, enforcement activities were also conducted when necessary. As an example, a progressive enforcement action took place as a result of

excessive debris, which involved a violation notice giving the individual 72 hours notice to clean up the site. On the day of the enforcement, the coordinated response team involving staff from various City departments engaged the individual at the site, resulting in a peaceful clean-up. Another enforcement action involved a notice to vacate the site at a local park, this was due to a lack of engagement and concerns over a dog who was frequently unleashed. A 72 hour notice was provided resulting in the individual peacefully leaving the area, with City staff coordinating the removal of remaining debris.

The encampment protocol process begins by the City becoming aware of a new encampment, engaging in supports while actively assessing and monitoring encampments. The goal of the encampment response is to clear the encampment by ideally finding the individual appropriate shelter or housing option that meets their unique needs. The process can include phases involving compliance and in serious circumstances enforcement and eviction of the encampment stayer(s), as outlined in Image 2 below.

Image 2: Encampment Protocol Process



Both staff and Councillors received many complaints from residents living near encampment sites. The complaints ranged from reports of people committing illegal acts, noise, public urination and defecation. Council members and City staff received complaints, actively listened to the concerns of the resident, and attempted to provide education on the approach the City is taking. Councillors and staff reminded residents to call Police should there be an active crime or safety concern. Staff carefully reviewed documented evidence of reported concerns to distinguish between safety issues arising from behavior and discomfort or fear related to homelessness.

Some living in encampments were also victims of serious crimes. These malicious acts included a knife attack, community-organized disruptive acts involving vehicles shining

their lights on tents for extended periods of time, spitting, throwing trash, tent slashing and three cases of arson.

Homelessness continues to be a very polarizing topic in our community. The City has and will continue to provide public information and education to help support community unification. This is done by dispelling myths and bias, in an effort to raise awareness and compassion.

Encampment Safety Feedback by Kawartha Lakes Police Service

Through consultation with Kawartha Lakes Police Service (KLPS), the following text is taken directly from their review of encampment safety from 2024.

Balanced View of Safety Concerns

- Neighbour Concerns: The Community Response Unit acknowledges that neighbours report fear, discomfort, frustration, stigma, and gossip, which the unit observes during outreach services. The Community Response Unit provides education and information to mitigate these issues and dispel misinformation, often amplified or perpetuated by social media users and groups.
- Encampment Resident Concerns: Encampment residents commonly express safety concerns, often facing hate, harassment, discrimination, aggression, and assaults from the public. Most of these incidents go unreported.

Statistics on Calls and Charges

- Calls for Service: The Community Response Unit finds it difficult to provide data on the number and types of calls related to encampments. The unit focuses on outreach services in the areas of mental health and addictions, and does not always categorize calls by "encampment" or associate them with a particular residence or individual. For example, a call for service for an overdose in Old Mill Park may not directly relate to someone living in a tent there.
- Charges Laid: Similarly, charge sub-categories do not directly relate to any particular encampment.

Police Discretion in Minor Offences

- **Public Urination:** The Community Response Unit has not received any complaints from the public regarding this issue. In fact, the unit observes that people experiencing homelessness tend to settle near public washrooms (such as Old Mill Park, Rivera Park, and Memorial Park).
- **Substance Use:** The Community Response Unit focuses primarily on connecting individuals with support services rather than enforcement. Many people in these communities choose to use substances inside their tents to avoid public exposure, which the outreach teams have consistently observed.

Community Impact and Education

- **Aggressive Neighbours:** The Community Response Unit reports that aggressive behaviour from neighbouring community members is the primary safety concern for those living in encampments.
- **Community Education:** The Community Response Unit believes that reducing stigma and promoting understanding through community education would significantly benefit the City's overall response strategy.

Encampment Stayer Survey Results

In February 2025, Outreach staff conducted surveys with seven individuals who had lived in an encampment last year. The goal of the survey was to gain insight into their experiences, understand their perspectives, and gather their recommendations to inform our future planning.

Of those surveyed 100% agreed that people without housing should be allowed to stay in parks, as they have no other option. 86% agree that recent work by the City of Kawartha Lakes to support people living in encampments and parks has been a positive step. Most also indicated that they felt that the safest parks are those closest to the downtown core, as well as those that provide some privacy from the public. They also shared their own concerns and suggestions around improving safety which included a desire for police to do regular patrols to protect them from public harassment, or have resources nearby to get help and support.

People who have lived in encampments in local parks agree that encampments should not be:

- Near a playground 86%

- Near a school 57%

If an encampment stayer disturbs the peace or causes problems at a site, individuals who have previously stayed in encampments believe that action should be taken. They emphasized the importance of guidelines and shared that those with lived experience in encampments would take decisive steps to maintain peace.

- Police should be called 57%
- Stayers would ask to leave/banned from the area 71%
- Fined 14%

To improve sites the following are needed:

- Washrooms 24/7
- Garbage cans/recycling/increased removal
- Resources of water, hydro
- Sharps disposal box
- Increased room/space to spread

Overwhelmingly people who have lived in encampments stated that encampments should be safe, and police should lead this aspect by providing regular patrols, police walk-throughs and presence. Safety should also be led by professional outreach workers and staff.

Emergency Shelter Update

Effective December 1, 2024, City staff amended the Service Agreement with A Place Called Home to permanently increase emergency shelter space from 19 beds to 30 (a 36% increase). In addition to this, staff also contracted with A Place Called Home to support a further temporary increase in shelter capacity through the Out of the Cold – Winter Response Program. Between combinations of these two initiatives, along with the cold weather forcing others to find indoor shelter, there has been a dramatic decrease in unsheltered homelessness in the Service Manager region this winter (2024/25).

Through December 1st 2024, until March 15th, 2025, a total of 49 unique individuals were supported over the winter through the Out of the Cold – Winter Response Program. Table 2 below outlines the unique individuals served through this time period, as well as if they were residents of Kawartha Lakes or the County of Haliburton.

Table 2: Out of the Cold – Winter Response Program

Month	Unique Individuals Served – Kawartha Lakes	Unique Individuals Served – County of Haliburton
December 2024	14	8
January 2025	15	5
February 2025	6	
March 2025 (up to March 15 th)		1
Total	35	14

Unfortunately, increasing emergency shelter capacity only provides temporary (crisis) relief from experiencing unsheltered homelessness. As the weather changes, temporary increased shelter space winds-down, and others simply conclude their stay in shelter, the presence of encampments in our communities once again will be seen. New supportive housing units have not been created in a few years, which creates one of the biggest barriers in addressing chronic homelessness.

Planning Ahead

It is anticipated that encampments will appear once the weather changes. Staff will continue through this encampment season to apply the Encampment Outreach and Response Protocol, maintaining a strong framework, fair guidelines and experience to continue to improve our encampment response. With the increase in shelter capacity, along with the trusting relationships that have been formed with our most vulnerable residents, staff will strive to ensure that those living in encampments are supported to find alternate shelter or housing options as quickly as possible.

To look upstream, be proactive and plan to meet the future growth within Kawartha Lakes and the County, the City’s 10-Year Housing and Homelessness plan is currently being refreshed. The new plan will not only project what is needed related to housing stock across the continuum of housing types, and will also estimate the capital and operating investment required to decrease the number of individuals living without housing in Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton. This extensive project also includes the completion of an updated Housing and Homelessness Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment will include an incredible amount of data collection (both

qualitative and quantitative) from consultations with individual stakeholders, those with lived or living experience of homelessness or housing insecurity, community service partners across various sectors, and a general public survey. It will include the review of census data and local statistics to understand current community needs, which ultimately, inform policy development and future investments. These findings will be compiled into a report that offers actionable insights and strategic recommendations to Council later this year, informing the long-term financial plan, expansionary capital development, as well as future operating budget.

Other Alternatives Considered:

There are many perspectives about the feasibility and practicality of sanctioned encampments as a solution to the current housing crisis for the unhoused population. While these initiatives have provided some relief, the sanctioned encampment model can introduce additional challenges, while diverting financial and staffing resources away from long-term planning solutions. Given that CKL does not currently have long-standing encampments, the focus should continue towards finding alternative in-door options for individuals as quickly as possible, making their stay in an encampment as brief as possible, while staff strategically plan and implement long-term housing options (approved and supported by Council).

Based on research, including input from the City's insurer, the most serious concerns about sanctioned encampments include:

- Increased opportunities of victimization and other violence
- Greater stigmatization and segregation
- Community resistance, or "Not In My Back Yard" opposition from neighbours (NIMBYism)
- Additional staffing, security and resources to support a site with a concentrated number of encampment stayers
- The potential that the sanctioned encampment is located away from essential services and supports

The main intent is to not normalize the presence of encampments in the community, and by setting up a designated space suggests that encampments become a type of housing the City provides as part of our housing continuum.

If a sanctioned encampment ends up with a number of residents whose presence poses a risk to the residents of the encampment or staff, they may have to be removed from the site — at which point they set up camp somewhere else, resulting in the situation that we were initially trying to avoid.

Alignment to Strategic Priorities:

The Encampment Response Update and Council Policy Report HS2025-003 aligns with the following strategic priorities within the 2024-2027 Kawartha Lakes Strategic Plan

1. An Exceptional Quality of Life

Working towards a supports-first approach to improve the health and well-being of our most vulnerable residents.

2. Good Government

A collaborative encampment response that is supportive, inclusive and aims to address individual needs through an equitable approach.

Financial/Operation Impacts:

This report, as well as the appended Encampment Outreach and Response Protocol, does not require any specific financial commitments, beyond what is already included within the 2025 operating budget.

A Council report anticipated for the summer of 2025 will provide an overview of the refreshed 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan outlining financial impacts and options related to implementing long-term solutions aimed at stabilizing, and ideally improving, the rate of residents experiencing homelessness.

Consultations:

Human Services Staff, including:

Data Analyst Coordinator

Homelessness System Coordinator

Program Supervisor, Homelessness

Program Supervisor, Community and Affordable Housing

People Partner, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility

Deputy Clerk

Executive Assistant to the Mayor

City Solicitor
Director, Human Services
Director, Community Services
Chief, Paramedic Services
Chief, Fire Services
Insurance & Risk Management Officer
Manager, Municipal Law Enforcement
CAO
AON Insurance
Kawartha Lakes Police Service

Attachments:

Appendix A – Council Policy CP2025-00X Encampment Response Policy



Proposed
Encampment Respon

Appendix B – Draft Encampment Outreach and Response Protocol



Draft Encampment
Outreach and Respc

Appendix C – Letter of Support – Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness



Letter of Support -
CAEH

Appendix D – Letter of Support – Kawartha Lakes Police Service



Letter of Support -
Kawartha Lakes Poli

Appendix E – Letter of Support – John Howard Society



Letter of Support -
John Howard Society

Appendix F – Letter of Support – United Way



Letter of Support -
United Way

Appendix G – Letter of Support – Access to Permanent Housing



Letter of Support -
Access to Perm Hous

Appendix H – Letter of Support – A Place Called Home



Letter of Support - A
Place Called Home

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Department Head: Cheryl Faber, Director, Human Services