

Policy: Addressing Homeless Encampments in Public Parks
Adopted by Board of Park Commissioners: May 2022

Purpose

Homelessness, which was already steadily increasing prior to 2020, has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue to remain a complex community challenge in the years to come. The professional staff of the BPRYCS play a vital role in supporting and advancing the health and well-being of all individuals in the City of Bristol, including people who are experiencing homelessness. Department staff provide community resources, programs and services which include (but not limited to) counseling, short term case management, EBT/Snaps program at the Bristol Farmer's Market, dynamic drug free communities program and coalition, as well as on-going initiatives and collaborations with our community partners and non-profits.

The BPRYCS Department also has the responsibility to create public parks that are safe, attractive and well-maintained aligned with our mission to enhance the quality of life for Bristol residents. In order to balance these responsibilities with a person-centered approach to our residents experiencing homelessness, a formal policy was developed. The policy outlines a clear process for removing homeless encampments in public parks while connecting individuals to essential services.

Process

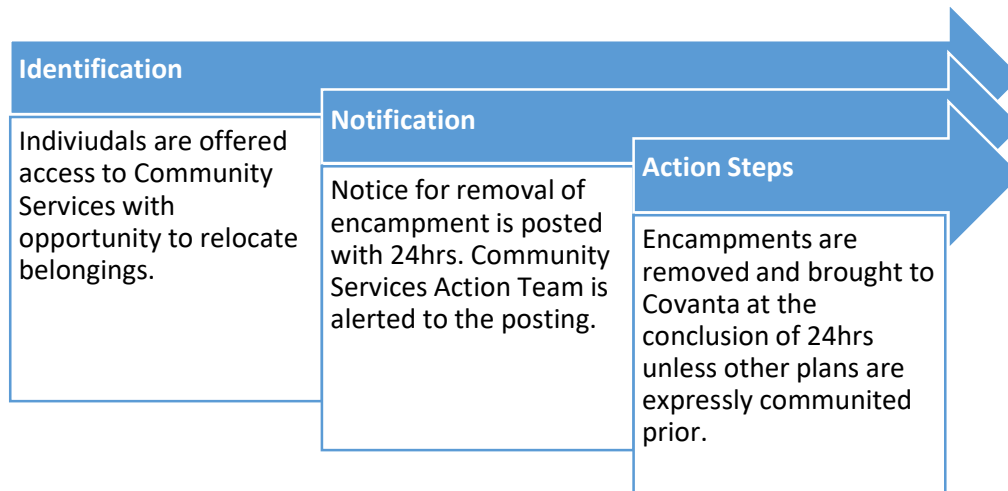
Understanding that every individual experiencing homeless has a unique set of circumstances and there is not a "one size fits all" approach to managing a situation, it should be understood by all parties, that situations are fluid and subject to change when public safety is at risk. The following process was developed as a framework to help guide the staff in this work.

Step 1: Identification- When an individual who is experiencing homelessness is discovered in a park, the staff member should assess the situation and upon determining it is safe to do so, introduce themselves and ask if they need any assistance? Staff are encouraged to ask if they are interested in speaking to the Community Services Coordinator to review available resources and supports. If the situation does not appear safe or the staff member is not comfortable they should contact the Community Services Coordinator and alert them of the individual's presence in the park. Police should be contacted if the individual appears violent or threatening to themselves or others. If they are interested the staff member should assist them in contacting the Community Services Office. If they refuse, the staff member should provide the individual with the business card of the Community Services Coordinator in the event they change their mind. If a homeless encampment is discovered without an individual on site, the staff member shall contact Community Services Coordinator to inform them of the encampment.

Step 2: Notification- After consultation with the Community Services Coordinator the staff member will post the notice of removal form in a secure location on the encampment. The notice informs the individual that they have 24 hours to remove their belongings from the site. At the time of the posting the Community Services Coordinator will send a notification to the Community Services Action Team members informing the collective group of the notice being posted. At that time a community support agency may opt to intervene and make arrangements to remove the encampment as well as other services as required.

Step 3: Action Steps- At the conclusion of the 24 hour notice, unless otherwise instructed by the Community Services Coordinator, the Parks, Grounds and Facilities crew will remove the encampment and bring to Covanta.

Figure 1. Homelessness Encampment Notification and Action Process



Community Services Action Team

The Community Services Action Team will be comprised of the following contacts in order to alert all relevant providers of the homeless encampment. Community Services Coordinator will initiate the alert and it is expected that a provider will take ownership of the situation, clearly communicate an action plan, and then follow through on the plan. The alert system is not meant to be an on-going dialogue but rather an assignment of responsibilities. Confidentiality of clients must be maintained.

- Superintendent of Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services
- Youth & Community Services Supervisor
- Community Services Coordinator
- Parks, Grounds and Facilities Supervisor
- Agape House Director
- St. Vincent DePaul Director
- Brian’s Angels Director
- Salvation Army Director