

# City of Houston/Harris County

## Homeless Encampment Response Strategy

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*A housing-focused approach to persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness and residing in public spaces*

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### **Purpose**

This strategy guide establishes a framework for the City of Houston/Harris County response to homeless encampments. It provides a system-wide and coordinated response to unsheltered homelessness that focuses on decommissioning large encampments by facilitating access to a full array of permanent housing choices and services options. By pairing targeted and intensive outreach with housing surge events, the Houston community will end homelessness for people living in large encampments and other unsheltered locations and create a response strategy that facilitates a housing response for people who experience unsheltered homelessness in the future.

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The Way Home Continuum of Care

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# Introduction

Homelessness is a complex social problem requiring a strategic response of crisis services, housing stabilization options, and coordination across multiple public systems and service provider agencies. Unsheltered homelessness can be even more challenging to address because unsheltered persons are often difficult to contact and engage, experience debilitating trauma and co-occurring disabilities at greater rates than their sheltered peers, and too often the necessary services and housing designed for persons experiencing homelessness are not accessible to those who are unsheltered.

Under the strategic leadership of City of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and Harris County Commissioners, the City of Houston, Harris County, development districts and neighborhood groups, and the Coalition for the Homeless, the greater Houston community has adopted a strategy of engagement and housing rather than merely moving the issue out of public view. Elected leaders, public officials, service providers and advocates are addressing unsheltered homelessness through policies and interventions that are driven by data, backed by evidence, centered on people, and aimed at effective and sustainable outcomes.

This **Encampment Response Strategy Report** documents the existing practices that have led to successful encampment decommissioning and permanent housing placements for unsheltered persons and provides a road map for ongoing work in this area.

## Encampment Response Strategy Design Team

In May of 2021, the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County (the Coalition or CFTH) empowered a Design Team to study Houston’s response to unsheltered homelessness and encampments over the preceding year and recommend a set of design standards for Houston’s ongoing response. Figure 1 lists Design Team members and their affiliated organizations. The Design Team was comprised of local experts who have relevant experience with street outreach and encampment response work. The group met over the course of several months to document effective practices from recent encampment decommissioning, define roles and responsibilities among community partners engaged in the work, and establish standards and protocols for ongoing outreach and encampment response strategies. The Design Team’s work has culminated with this **Encampment Response Strategy Report**.

**Figure 1.** *Encampment Response Strategy Design Team Membership*

Organization	Staff
Coalition for the Homeless	James Gonzalez Ana Rausch Carrie Rai Jessalyn DiManno
Avenue 360	Rhonny Leopold
City of Houston	Marc Eichenbaum
City of Houston Attorney’s Office	M. Lucille Anderson
City of Houston Police Department	Sgt. Roger Espinoza
Houston Police Department Differential Response Team (DRT)	Bryan Bennet
Covenant House	Scurry Miller
Harris County Attorney’s Office	Scott Lamond

Organization	Staff
	Tumati Neeharika
Harris County Community Services Department	Daphne Lemelle
Harris Center (local mental health authority) PATH	Omar Sesay
Harris Health	Bobby Hansford
Healthcare for the Homeless – Houston	Kristina Arscott
Harris County Sheriff’s Department	John Whitley
Houston Downtown Management District	James Kennedy
Houston Recovery Center	Leonard Kincaid
SEARCH	Jonathan Danforth Alexis Loving
Star of Hope	Erika Wise
Veterans Affairs	Monique Thibodeaux-Jackson Danielle Washington

In addition to the Design Team, this report is informed by the feedback and guidance of persons with lived experience of encampment living. Matt White facilitated four focus groups and conducted three individual interviews with persons who either reside currently in homeless encampments or have recently moved from an unsheltered encampment to permanent housing. The insights of persons who themselves have navigated the daily complexities of unsheltered homelessness greatly inform the current **Encampment Response Strategy Report** and recommended design standards for ongoing encampment work included in this report.

**Encampment Strategy Design**

The greater Houston metropolitan area and The Way Home Continuum of Care (CoC) have largely coalesced around a strategy defined by HUD as *clearance and closure with supports*. This approach is described in HUD’s report, Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Cost, February 2020. Houston pairs this approach with *intensive outreach and engagement* and a *housing surge* event coinciding with the encampment closure that identifies a specific housing strategy for everyone in the encampment.

The component parts of the Houston strategy include the following:

- ✓ **Intensive Outreach and Engagement** ⇒ housing-focused case management by skilled outreach teams to connect encampment residents with services and to ensure every encampment resident has a permanent housing strategy.
- ✓ **Housing Surge** ⇒ resource-intensive housing fair to match all encampment residents with either an interim housing placement and a pathway to permanent housing, or immediate permanent housing placement.
- ✓ **Clearance** ⇒ removing structures and belongings from encampments.
- ✓ **Closure** ⇒ requiring that people leave encampments.

This encampment response strategy evolved over multiple years of each component part functioning relatively well as a standalone element, but not consistently resulting in sustained success in

decommissioning encampments or sustained permanent housing placements for inhabitants of those encampments. Key factors changed in 2020 that enabled Houston to align all these component parts and overlay a strategic, system-wide approach to encampment decommissioning with a focused plan of clearance and closure with supports. The keys to this success are described later in this report but flow largely from two significant factors: substantial new housing resources resulting from the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act of March 2020 that appropriated \$2 trillion in stimulus funds designed to blunt the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic) and a centralized encampment decommissioning process with strategic leadership support among government and non-government partners. As this strategy has been refined and implemented over the first half of 2021, five large encampments have been decommissioned, resulting in more than one hundred formerly homeless encampment residents now residing in permanent housing. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the dramatic visual impact of this approach. Figure 2 captures the area known as Allen Parkway prior to a housing surge event associated with clearance and closure. Figure 3 is a photograph of the same region one week later, after all 53 encampment residents have been housed.

**Figure 2.** *Allen Parkway Prior to Housing Surge*



**Figure 3.** *Allen Parkway After Housing Surge*



This report will describe the process steps linking these encampment response components into a cohesive and strategic response, define roles and responsibilities of community partners responsible for implementing this strategy, and identify practice standards for ongoing encampment decommissioning work.

## Guiding Principles

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The Design Team established a set of guiding principles to inform the encampment response practice standards outlined in this report. Guiding principles include the following core elements:

1. Houston/Harris County does not endorse sanctioned encampments as a response to unsheltered homelessness. Forcibly relocating individuals to designated camps is not an effective strategy.
2. All people can be housed, with the right housing model and service supports.
3. To the greatest extent practicable, individual choices about where and how to live should be honored.
4. Addressing encampments requires collaboration from multiple sectors and systems; no single entity can or should have exclusive responsibility.
5. Non-punitive, engagement-focused approaches are more preferable than enforcement, clearance, and criminalization. Houston should strategically combine enforcement approaches with housing offers to address broader community health and safety interests.
6. Intensive and persistent outreach and engagement is the key to building trust among persons living in encampments.
7. Persons in encampments do best with clear, low-barrier pathways to permanent housing.
8. Permanent housing placements must be followed by support services to ensure individuals are successful in maintaining their housing.

## Encampment Site Assessment

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### Defining Encampments

The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Houston, defined in this report as living in a place not meant for human habitation, was 1,510 during the Point-in-Time count conducted by the Coalition and community partners in January of 2021. The unsheltered count represents about half of all people who experienced homelessness during the count. While not all individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness reside in encampments, encampments are very visible indication of the vexing problem of homelessness arising from a complex set of factors around poverty and a lack of safe, accessible affordable housing.

To help Houston public officials, homelessness assistance providers, and communities impacted by homeless encampments understand the nature of encampments, strategies for responding to encampments, and the ongoing scalability of those approaches, this report organizes unsheltered homelessness into three distinct typologies: large, small, and hot spots. This report primarily focuses on large encampments but the strategies, service approaches, housing interventions and community response are largely consistent across all three typologies.

### Large Encampments

- concentration of **10 or more persons** in a definable location,
- use of structures for sustained habitation (cardboard boxes, tents, non-permanent structures),
- evidence of sustained presence – trash piles, cooking fires, shopping carts.

### Small Encampments

- Concentration of **3 – 9 persons** in a definable location,
- use of structures for sustained habitation (cardboard boxes, tents, non-permanent structures),

- evidence of sustained presence, although degree/visibility may be less than large encampments.

### Hot Spots

- **1 – 3 people** in a definable location,
- Evidence of bedding down but not sustained presence in the same location for sustained periods of time greater than one week.

### Site Assessment Protocol

In the initial stages of defining a system-wide strategy for encampment decommissioning, Coalition and system partners first identify and assess all large encampments throughout the region. This identification and assessment process is key to planning for the eventual housing surge process associated with the **clearance, closure and support** strategy. The site assessment also aides in sequencing the timing of decommissioning, although multiple factors play into the exact timing of when a specific site is scheduled for decommissioning.

Domains included in the site assessment protocol include location characteristics, assessing the vulnerability of the encampment residents, considering environmental health issues, documenting community safety issues, and planning for solid waste removal. Each domain and its associated characteristics are listed below:

#### 1. Location Characteristics

- Number of Persons
- Location – development district jurisdiction, unincorporated county
- Neighborhood/community complaints
- Visibility to general public
- Degree of criminal activity in nearby vicinity

#### 2. Vulnerability of Population (Safety)

- Perceived elderly (65+ years old)
- Perceived infants/children ( $\leq 17$  years old)
- Perceived physical and behavioral health issues
  - physical disabilities impacting activities of daily living
  - intellectual and developmental disabilities
  - mental health and/or brain injuries
  - active or visible alcohol and/or illegal substance use
  - open wounds/sores that require medical care
- Prostitution or human trafficking on site
- EMS/Police critical incident calls at site
- Physical violence among members of encampment
- Drugs purchased/sold on site
- Punitive or controlling rules in the encampment
- Neglected animals
- Culture of tension or animosity among members of encampment
- Lack of sufficient natural light

### 3. Environmental Health

- Presence of vermin – rats, mice, fleas
- Presence of hazardous materials – car batteries, kerosene
- Biowaste – blood, used condoms, feces, urine, vomit
- Food waste – spoiled food
- Loose sharps – used needles, broken glass, barbed wire
- Standing water
- Loud, amplified, and sustained noise from traffic and sirens

### 4. Community Safety

- Camping in public parks
- Camping on sidewalks
- Evidence of open fires
- Sites within 50 feet of bridge/highway ramp/guardrail
- Sites within 50 feet of heavy traffic
- Sites within 50 feet of lake, bayou, and areas prone to flash floods
- Sites within a block of homes/apartments
- Abandoned building
- Near industrial zone
- Near facilities for children – school, daycare
- Evidence of uncontrolled pets, and other animals creating safety issues
- Site access is hazardous, requires climbing fence, wall, or another dangerous barrier

### 5. Solid Waste

- Excessive disorganized garbage and trash throughout site
- Bagged garbage
- Bulky items (abandoned or in use) – sofa, chairs, furniture, shopping carts

Each domain in the site assessment is reviewed by outreach and/or Coalition staff. A rating system (one (1) to five (5)) is used to note the presence of the domain characteristic and the characteristic's relative intensity, scale, or degree of concern. The rating system is subjective, so the results are reviewed as a team and discussed with Coalition staff and public officials to develop relative consensus around the major concerns and issues associated with the specific encampment site.

## Encampment Decommissioning Core Practice Standards

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The practice of coordinating and delivering outreach services to unsheltered persons is a critical aspect of Houston's encampment strategy. Some unsheltered persons use encampment living as a strategy for maintaining anonymity by avoiding contact with emergency shelter and other crisis services. Or, unsheltered persons may be unable to access needed emergency services due to barriers to access at those facilities. Outreach teams are specifically designed to address these barriers, often a result of criminal backgrounds and/or behavioral health issues that may be inhibiting an unsheltered person's ability to seek and receive services.

Outreach, as a system-wide strategy for identifying unsheltered persons, engaging persons in services, and facilitating successful housing placements, functions most successfully when all outreach teams and staff adhere to a set of core practice standards. These practice standards describe the most effective engagement strategies and service delivery modalities. The core practice standards outlined in this section, while not requirements, are generally understood by outreach staff and service delivery agencies as effective and necessary components of outreach to unsheltered persons.

Outreach practice standards are organized according to the following eight key attributes, described below.

### Systemic

1. Outreach is part of a **system-wide strategy** rather than a stand-alone program of a single agency
2. Outreach is connected to **Coordinated Access (CA) [commonly referred to as Coordinated Entry in other communities]**
  - Outreach staff use standardized assessment protocols to document client needs and prioritize housing and service response

### Comprehensive

3. **Geography.** Entire Houston/Harris County geographic area is included. Alignment with outreach in Ft. Bend and Montgomery
  - Include all hot spots, coordinate assignments and service assignments
4. **Outreach activity.** All Outreach contacts, engagements, CA vulnerability scores, housing referrals, and placements are documented in HMIS
5. **Data.** Full data history of client used to support housing strategy. Use of data sharing agreements to build comprehensive data sets of client history and needs
  - Leverage technology/apps to coordinate mapping and tracking, and service delivery/outreach

### Coordinated

6. **Direct service partners.** Services are coordinated across all service partners regardless of funding, catchment area, target population
7. **Public and private systems.** Coordination occurs across the broader network of systems and supports – law enforcement, first responders, healthcare centers, behavioral health providers, child welfare, business development districts, faith-based organizations, community service organizations

### Housing-Focused

8. Outreach is paired with/coordinated with **housing surge events**, when available
9. Goal is **permanent housing**. 'Interim housing' is available but not required on pathway to permanent housing
  - Options include Diversion, RRH, PSH, other safe housing options
10. **No preconditions** for housing. Referrals are made to available housing regardless of sobriety, income, criminal records, treatment engagement, service engagement

### Person-Centered

11. Clients have **option to refuse** housing and service offers
12. Outreach providers employ staff with **lived experience**
13. Outreach staff offer **warm hand offs** to other service providers and resource connections
14. Outreach staff employ **strengths-based problem-solving techniques** to identify housing solutions most aligned with client goals

### Trauma-Informed

15. Assumes persons residing in encampments are more likely than not to have a **history of trauma**
16. Street outreach staff receive **regular training** in evidence-based practices

### Culturally Responsible

17. Street outreach efforts are **respectful and responsive** to the beliefs and practices, sexual orientations, disability statuses, age, gender identities and expression, cultural preferences, and linguistic needs of all individuals.
18. Use data to **analyze inequities and disparities** among persons of color and historically disenfranchised backgrounds

### Safety-Focused

19. **Safety of clients and staff** is prioritized throughout all planning, direct service, housing surge events
20. Protocols must be in place to **assess for safety risks of staff and clients**
21. Use **harm reduction principles** and non-coercive service provision
22. In limited and very prescribed instances, **non-voluntary commitment** may be required when individuals are a threat to themselves or others
  - Pursue guardianship as a tool; probate court judge orders an individual who meets the definition of "mentally ill person subject to court order" to participate in a treatment plan that is developed for that individual and which takes place in the community

## Encampment Decommissioning & Housing Surge Roles and Responsibilities

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The following section outlines the necessary staffing and support functions associated with Houston's encampment response strategy and identifies the lead entity(ies) responsible for performing each function.

### Project Lead

#### *Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County*

- ❖ Implement system policies on unsheltered homelessness, encampment response, and public space management for persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness
  - Act as intermediary among public officials, development districts, community and neighborhood groups, homelessness assistance providers and persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- ❖ Define and implement **Encampment Response Plan**
  - Coordinate communication and tasks among all project partners
  - Maintain cross-system collaboration protocols, including MOUs, partnership agreements, outreach standards, and protocols for housing surge events
  - Define encampment decommissioning schedule
  - Lead housing surge events and outreach efforts leading up to encampment decommissioning
  - Conduct debriefing meetings with all **Encampment Response Team** partners to identify successes and challenges and implement continuous improvement strategies
  - Identify ongoing funding opportunities to fill identified housing and services gaps

### Encampment Response Outreach

#### *CFTH*

- ❖ Conduct intensive, housing-focused outreach to persons residing in encampments
- ❖ Facilitate crisis resolution by facilitating access to emergency services, navigation center placement, and permanent housing placements via Diversion, RRH and PSH housing interventions
- ❖ Participate in housing surge events associated with encampment decommissioning process

### General Outreach

#### *Avenue 360, Covenant House, Harris Center, SEARCH, Star of Hope, Veterans' Affairs*

- ❖ Conduct intensive outreach to all persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness, inclusive of persons residing individually in outdoor locations without other persons in the immediate vicinity, and persons residing in encampment settings where 3 or more persons are living together.
  - Staff members from service organizations or government agencies locate, identify, and build relationships with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness who are not otherwise accessing crisis services or housing resources

- Provide connections to housing-related assistance and other types of assistance such as healthcare, legal assistance, employment assistance and connection to other community resources and benefits
- ❖ Coordinate the timing, location, and provision of outreach assistance with the Encampment Response Project Lead according to system plans and strategies

## Public Safety/Law Enforcement

### *Houston Police Department (HPD) Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)*

- ❖ Assist with outreach to persons residing in encampments and other unsheltered locations
  - Coordinate provision of services with other first responders and service providers – EMT, physical health care, behavioral health, outreach teams
- ❖ Facilitate housing placement process by issuing special identification cards, facilitating transportation assistance, offering referrals to other essential services
- ❖ Distribute **Encampment Violation Warnings** and enforce City of Houston land use ordinances that make it illegal to encamp in public spaces without prior permission. Use written notification of **Encampment Violation Warnings** to incentivize transitions to low-barrier, permanent housing as an alternative to maintaining camps in public spaces.

### *Houston Police Department (HPD) Differential Response Team Unit*

- ❖ Coordinate with development districts and special community groups and neighborhood associations to ensure public safety and community well-being throughout Houston’s central business district.
- ❖ Employ non-traditional and innovative forms of problem solving to engage persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness and facilitate their transition to appropriate housing placements in lieu of ticketing practices that disproportionately impact persons experiencing homelessness.
- ❖ Enforce **Encampment Violation** and **Shopping Cart/Litter Violation** warnings.

## Verification of Disability

### *Healthcare for the Homeless - Houston, Harris Center*

- ❖ Assist persons residing in encampments to secure verification of disability for purposes of eligibility for PSH

## Housing Navigation

### *Baker Ripley, The Salvation Army*

- ❖ Assist persons residing in encampments with housing search, application and move-in transition support
- ❖ Assist outreach staff prior to and during housing surge events to ensure persons residing in encampments have necessary identification, certification of disability (if applicable), housing application support, transportation, and other system navigation supports as necessary.
- ❖ Assist housing case management staff at lease signing and throughout the client move-in process to ensure the client’s transition from encampment to housing is as smooth and supportive as possible

## Housing Case Management

### *Baker Ripley, The Salvation Army*

- ❖ Assist persons residing in encampments upon enrollment in a housing project (Diversion, RRH and/or PSH)
- ❖ Provide in-person transition assistance upon client lease signing
- ❖ Provide ongoing, in-person case management assistance based on need to persons in housing, including housing stabilization planning, budgeting, assistance accessing public benefits, assistance accessing community resources, employment assistance, support with maintaining proficient tenancy skills, and conflict mediation among housing client and property owner/manager.

## Landlord Engagement

### *CFTH*

- ❖ Conduct ongoing outreach to area rental property owners and managers to secure units for housing surge events
- ❖ Process Landlord Incentive Fees to secure rental properties for use in housing surge events
- ❖ Maintain detailed status of each property – location, tenant selection criteria, unit inspection status
- ❖ Participate in housing surge events by assisting with housing applications, unit trades and transitions among housing surge participants
- ❖ Act as primary point of contact with all property owners/managers to facilitate clear, timely and supportive communication

## Material Assistance

### *Emergency Aid Coalition, Star of Hope*

- ❖ Provide ‘move-in kits’ of household items necessary to initiate tenancy – including basic furniture, linens, cleaning supplies, pillow, food basket

## Transportation

### *Houston METRO, CFTH, Outreach Teams, HPD HOT Team, Management Districts*

- ❖ Provide transportation assistance to persons transitioning from encampments to permanent housing.
- ❖ Provide transportation assistance for the personal belongings of persons transitioning from encampments to permanent housing. Transport belongings and materials items to housing locations and/or storage facilities

## Storage

### *CFTH*

- ❖ Coordinate with **Encampment Response Outreach Team** members to identify and tag material belongs of encampment residents.
- ❖ Coordinate with **Transportation Team** to ensure tagged items are transported to storage and inventoried for future reclaiming by encampment clients

## Clean Up

### *CFTH, Development District, City of Houston Solid Waste Management Department*

- ❖ Immediately after all belongings have been tagged and encampment residents have vacated, remove items identified as refuse/garbage and dispose of according to City waste management protocols

## Community Liaison

### *Development District staff, CFTH, Special Assistant to the Mayor for Homeless Initiatives*

- ❖ Coordinate public updates and information sharing to ensure public officials, elected officials, community members, media and Encampment Response Team members are updated on status of ongoing encampment response efforts

## Timeline for Encampment Response and Housing Surge Events

The following section describes the process steps associated with clearing and closing and encampment and supporting encampment residents to activate successful housing placements.

Activity	Outcome
<b>Site Reconnaissance – 4-6 Weeks Out</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Complete visual inventory of site</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Review reports of police activity from HOT and DRT</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Identify (but do not initiate direct outreach to) any neighborhood groups – development district, community groups, neighborhood associations</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Identify elected official(s) in affected area</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine initial geographic boundaries. Some boundaries are subject to change as the site assessment is completed and refined.</li> <li>• Identify number of structures and likely number of inhabitants</li> <li>• Identify major complexities or challenges associated with the site               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Traffic congestion</li> <li>○ Safety issues – illegal activity, gang activity</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Site Assessment – 4 Weeks Out</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Complete site assessment using <i>Encampment Site Assessment</i> tool/protocol</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Brief staff for elected officials on ongoing planning</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Brief outreach teams engaged in area</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document site characteristics               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Location characteristics</li> <li>○ Vulnerability of population (safety needs)</li> <li>○ Environmental health issues</li> <li>○ Community safety issues (immediate vicinity)</li> <li>○ Solid waste needs (number and size of large objects and structures to be removed)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Confirm schedule/timing for proposed response pre-work and Housing Surge Week.</li> </ul>
<b>Comprehensive Engagement – 3 Weeks Out</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Outreach teams initiate engagement work with clients</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Briefing #1 with Housing Surge partners</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Houston Police Department</b></li> <li>○ <b>Harris County Sherrif</b></li> <li>○ <b>Metro</b></li> <li>○ <b>City of Houston – Solid Waste</b></li> <li>○ <b>City of Houston – materials storage</b></li> <li>○ <b>Rehousing support providers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Avenue 360</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Covenant House</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine site geography, characteristics, attributes and major challenges and issues</li> <li>• Confirm dates for Housing Surge</li> <li>• Identify preliminary number of clients to be housed and number of program component types necessary to clear the encampment – Diversion, Navigation Center, 6160 (specialty temporary housing for behavioral health, physical health, and justice-involved individuals), RRH, PSH</li> <li>• Document individual housing and supportive service needs of clients</li> <li>• Estimate of housing needs (configuration and location of unit size) communicated to landlord engagement team</li> <li>• Review partner roles and commitments during Housing Surge Briefing</li> </ul>

Activity	Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Healthcare for the Homeless - Houston</li> <li>▪ Houston Recovery Center</li> <li>▪ SEARCH</li> <li>▪ Star of Hope</li> <li>▪ Veterans Affairs</li> </ul> <p>✓ Brief staff for elected officials on ongoing planning</p>	
<b>Encampment Response Intensive Planning – 2 Weeks Out</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Outreach teams continue intensive engagement work. Initiate client housing planning.</li> <li>✓ Ongoing planning with targeted Housing Surge partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Law enforcement</li> <li>○ METRO</li> <li>○ CoH Solid Waste</li> <li>○ Rehousing support providers</li> </ul> </li> <li>✓ Brief staff for elected officials on ongoing planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial client assessment and service planning results in confirming or refining the number and type of housing and service types needed to decommission the encampment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify extent of client documentation needs – personal identification, verification of disability, verification of length of time homeless, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Landlord Engagement Team presents preliminary report on availability and location of housing resources</li> <li>• Coordinated Access Lead identifies likely availability of CoC resources – Diversion, RRH and PSH</li> <li>• Verification of Disability (VoD) providers informed of expected number of clients who might need VODs so that appointments and staffing can be set up for the week before the surge.</li> </ul>
<b>Encampment Response Intensive Planning – 1 Week Out</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Outreach teams continue intensive engagement work</li> <li>✓ Briefing #2 with Housing Surge partners</li> <li>✓ Brief staff for elected officials on ongoing planning</li> <li>✓ HPD or other law enforcement staff communicate encampment clearance and closure schedule with encampment inhabitants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm site geography, characteristics, attributes and major challenges and issues</li> <li>• Confirm number of clients to be rehoused and structures to be cleared during Housing Surge Week</li> <li>• Confirm partner roles and commitments during Housing Surge</li> <li>• Landlord Engagement Team Lead reports on availability, location, and accessibility of private market housing</li> <li>• Process Landlord Incentive Fees</li> <li>• Coordinated Access Lead reports on availability of CoC RRH and PSH slots</li> <li>• Develop <b>Client By-Name List</b> of all encampment inhabitants and proposed housing strategy for each</li> <li>• Confirm with inhabitants that encampment will be decommissioned, and all persons must find alternative housing</li> <li>• Confirm number of staff involved from each partner and their role during Housing Surge Week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Outreach specialists</li> <li>○ Landlord Engagement Team</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Activity	Outcome
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transportation Team</li> <li>○ Housing Navigators</li> <li>○ Housing Case Managers</li> <li>○ HPD</li> <li>○ CoH – waste removal, public works</li> <li>● Secure commitment from METRO for transportation for all clients during Housing Surge Week</li> </ul>
<b>Encampment Response – Housing Surge Week</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Outreach teams continue intensive engagement work</li> <li>✓ Encampment Decommissioned with Housing Surge</li> <li>✓ Brief staff for elected officials on status</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Encampment Response Project Managers</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coordinate all response work and rehousing teams</li> <li>● Primary communication contact with response teams, CoH, HPD, neighborhood groups, METRO, providers</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Outreach Teams</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide outreach, engagement, and housing navigation support</li> <li>● Prepare homeless verification, support document collection, tag personal items</li> <li>● Support housing move-ins</li> <li>● Identify encampment items as either trash, storage, or accompanying client with move-in</li> <li>● Coordinate with CoH Public Works to clean site</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Landlord Engagement Team</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Point of contact with landlords</li> <li>● Secure additional units as necessary</li> <li>● Manage unit switches and trades</li> <li>● Process landlord incentive fees</li> <li>● Manage unit application issues, approvals, and denials in real time during surge</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Transportation Team</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide transportation for clients at encampment for move-ins and any disability appointments (METRO, HC Transit, ride share, outreach van/vehicles)</li> <li>● Traffic calming support, if necessary</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Housing Case Managers (Diversion, RRH, PSH)</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete HMIS enrollments, upload all documents and unit applications into HMIS</li> <li>● On site at move-in (i.e., client’s new housing), if available</li> </ul>

Activity	Outcome
	<p><b>Law Enforcement – HPD, HC Sheriff’s Office</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support engagement</li> <li>• Provide HOT IDs as necessary</li> </ul> <p><b>Garbage Removal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Houston Department of Solid Waste (management district resources when available)</li> <li>• Remove all belongings and items marked as trash</li> <li>• Deliver all storage items to storage facility</li> </ul> <p><b>Health Needs (Harris Health, Harris Center, HCH-Houston)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide onsite health services and connections as necessary</li> <li>• Provide agency-based appointments to assist with VODs, health needs</li> </ul>
<b>Post Surge Follow-up</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Outreach teams continue intensive engagement work</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Brief staff for elected officials on status</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the last day of the surge, an official notice of closure is posted at the location to ensure new people do not take up residence. This also helps with enforcement.</li> <li>• All housed clients met by case managers upon move-in and offered daily site visits throughout first week of PH placement</li> <li>• Site monitored daily by HPD and outreach to maintain clearance.</li> </ul>

## Keys to Success

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While this report identifies the component parts of Houston’s encampment strategy, the presence of each component does not automatically guarantee success. Other, intangible elements are necessary to ensure the encampment strategy is fully functional and results in the intended outcomes. The Encampment Strategy Design Team identified the following keys to success for Houston’s encampment strategy.

### Effective Balance of Engagement with Enforcement

- Strategy of clearance and closure with housing supports is endorsed by all partners
- Strategy is well-managed and coordinated

### Address Clients’ Barriers to Housing

- Secure identification documentation
- Support housing application process
- Verify disability status
- Coordinate with criminal justice system to clear criminal records

### Secure a Variety of Housing Resource Types for Immediate Housing Placements

- Housing placement strategy for every encampment resident
- Interim housing, Family reunification, Diversion, RRH, PSH

### Effective Coordination among Participating Partners

- Coordination among multiple outreach teams and efforts
- Public sector coordination with Coalition and homeless assistance providers
- Centralized management of housing surge events

### Total Encampment Response

- Individual housing placements will do little to relieve population pressures at encampments
- Each targeted encampment is addressed in totality with all residents housed and the location closed and cleared

### Housing Surge Management

- Housing Surge events integrated with clearance and closure strategy
- Clear project manager with identified roles and responsibilities of all partners
- By-Name List is essential to coordinating engagement and housing response for everyone
- HMIS data is essential to understand homeless histories and develop individual housing strategies
- Timely and frequent communication among all Encampment strategy partners

### Landlord Engagement and Retention

- Ready supply of available units that are accessible to persons living in encampments
- Landlord engagement team actively engaged in ongoing recruitment and relationship management
- Landlord incentive fees to continually recruit new landlords
- Plan for landlords to connect tenants to services and supports when lease violations are identified

## Scaling the Current Encampment Strategy for Sustained Future Impact

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Houston has demonstrated significant progress in addressing encampments throughout the first half of 2021. This success is not guaranteed into the future, however. While Houston partners have tested, refined, and improved encampment resolution strategies, ongoing success is dependent on a crisis response and homelessness system that is scaled to the needs and demands placed on it. The Houston community cannot continue to conduct encampment clearance and closure without significant system investments in specialized services, treatment beds, outreach staff expansion, and, most importantly, the supply of a variety of safe, accessible, and supportive housing options that people residing in encampments will need in the future.

The following resources are currently planned or in development and are vital to the Houston/Harris County's ongoing response to unsheltered homelessness and ability to clear and close encampments while ensuring all unsheltered Houstonians have a safe, accessible and affordable place to call home.

Harris Center's Respite, Rehabilitation, and Reentry Center ("6160"): 80+ beds of specialized interim housing

- Hospital to Home
- Jail Diversion
- Outpatient Competency Restoration
- Jail Re-Entry

Navigation Center: 50-75 bed interim housing facility with low barriers to access

- Higher level of care for persons unable to access traditional emergency shelter or other interim housing facilities

Dedicated Encampment Response Outreach Teams

- New encampment team dedicated to addressing large encampments
- New encampment team dedicated to addressing small encampments

Expanded Supply of Housing Options

- Secure additional private market, affordable housing with targeted strategies to reduce barriers to entry
- PSH with higher level of care
- Ensure existing CoC housing resources are accessible, targeted, and paired with sufficient service supports