

Pre-Pandemic Policy regarding Tent Encampments on Public Property Restored

Summary: *Beginning on June 2, 2021 the City of Akron restored its pre-pandemic policy regarding the cleaning of tent encampments on City owned property. Beginning on June 21, 2021, the City will begin to disperse and clean up after known tent encampments on City property. City [policy](#) is to post a 48 hour notice for any encampment clean up. For this first clean up effort, the City will post at least a week in advance to give habitants of these encampments extra time to gather and move their belongings and get into transitional housing. The City is collaborating with the area's homeless resource providers to ensure that anyone moved during these clean-up efforts who had been previously documented as living in the area is offered a safe place to stay. These efforts include providing transitional housing vouchers and, later in the summer, establishing an additional emergency shelter in the City.*

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Akron has maintained a policy of refraining from dispersing tent encampments, per CDC guidance, in order to help prevent community spread of the virus within our homeless population and beyond. City service personnel have not dispersed any camps on City property for over 14 months. As of June 2, 2021, the State of Ohio has lifted all health orders and mandates in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic due to the decreasing number of cases and the widespread availability of the vaccine.

Over the course of the last 14 months, the City has been in consistent communication with the various homeless resource providers in the area as well as Summit County Public Health regarding the safety of homeless individuals and the resources available to them, including mental health or recovery care, transitional housing, and the COVID vaccine.

Akron's local network of providers have routinely visited known encampments over the last year to offer support services and to help get these individuals into temporary and permanent housing, if they were willing. When the temperature dropped drastically this winter, the City activated our community centers as warming centers, and members of the Summit County Continuum of Care, in connection with Community Support Services, Inc. (CSS), opened an emergency shelter to house people overnight who were unable or unwilling to go to the area's shelters. The funding for that shelter was provided through an emergency shelter grant secured by the City of Akron through the Federal CARES Act.

Currently, the City allocates almost \$2 million annually for affordable housing, homelessness prevention and emergency shelters. This is in addition to the approximately \$5 million this region receives from HUD to aid our homeless provider network.

Many experts and organizations in the homelessness field, including the Akron/Summit County Continuum of Care, have advocated a "Housing First" approach, recognizing that permanent housing solutions are the best way to create stability for individuals experiencing homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness has put forward research showing that a Housing First approach not only helps individuals exit homelessness, but also improves feelings of personal autonomy and agency and is a cost-effective method of addressing homelessness. It is the City's position that the Housing First approach is best to help those experiencing homelessness break that cycle and get into safer and more stable living situations.

With that in mind, the City will begin to disperse encampments from public City property as early as June 21. The City will be posting signage today (June 14) in encampments to give those living in these encampments a full week to collect their belongings and move into transitional housing. We are working in collaboration with CSX Transportation who has, when safe to do so, refrained from dispersing encampments on their private property for much of the last year. CSX has also indicated plans to disperse encampments on their private property on the same day, as their property is adjacent to City property. These clean-up efforts will occur in the Grace Park area and near Adams St. This collaborative approach is meant to ensure that anyone living outside in these areas has the same immediate access to safe, transitional housing. The City has no authority over CSX regarding how they address trespassers on their private property, however we are appreciative of the collaboration we have experienced as we resume pre-pandemic protocols and seek to address these concerns holistically.

Over the last several weeks, the City and Community Support Services (CSS) have been working with the individuals in these areas to educate them on their options and the resources available to them. CSS is providing transitional housing vouchers to those who have been documented as living in these encampments so there will be a place for every single one of these individuals to stay when they vacate the encampment. Last week, many of these individuals accepted emergency housing assistance in the form of hotel vouchers.

Additionally, CSS will be opening an emergency shelter by the end of July 2021 at 111 E Voris St. The emergency shelter will remain in operation through the winter months. These steps ensure that even those individuals who are unable or unwilling to utilize the area's shelters will still have somewhere to go where they will be treated with respect and dignity while our area's homeless resource providers work with them to secure more stable and permanent solutions for their housing needs. The emergency shelter will be funded by the City of Akron using federal CARES Act dollars. CSS will release more information about the emergency shelter in the coming weeks.

Another focus during this time has been to help any individual that wants it get access to the COVID-19 vaccine. CSS has been offering walk-in vaccinations every Friday over the last 3 weeks at their location at 150 Cross Street. To date, they've vaccinated 75 people. Also for those who wish to make an appointment for a vaccine, Akron METRO RTA is offering free rides to and from vaccine appointments if you show proof of appointment.

Those experiencing homelessness in our community are some of our most vulnerable citizens and it is the City's goal to help these individuals access permanent housing solutions while treating them with respect and dignity and ensuring the safety of all of our residents.

Community Partners:

Community Support Services, Inc. (CSS)

CSX Transportation

Akron Police Department

Summit County Continuum of Care

Downtown Akron Partnership

Klein's Pharmacy