

City of Charlottesville Homeless Encampment Response Protocol

1. Purpose

This protocol guides City staff in responding to homeless encampments on City property or public rights-of-way. It ensures that removals are:

- Lawful and coordinated across departments
- Compassionate and respectful
- Focused on connecting people to services

Staff may adjust procedures when needed for safety or other good reasons.

2. Background

Charlottesville, like many cities, has seen a rise in homelessness and unauthorized encampments. These sites can pose safety and health risks for both the people living there and the public. At the same time, many unhoused people need help accessing housing and services.

This protocol promotes a team approach, connecting City staff with nonprofit partners and ensuring a consistent, fair response.

3. Definitions

- **City** – Includes all City departments, staff, and volunteers.
- **Encampment** – A place where someone appears to be living outdoors (e.g., tents, bedding, belongings left in place).
 - Not included: abandoned sites, movable carts, day gatherings, legally permitted campsites, or private property encampments.
- **Immediate Hazard** – A site posing urgent danger to life or health (e.g., near roads, fire-prone, no sanitation).
- **Obstruction** – Anything from an encampment that blocks sidewalks, parks, or disrupts use of public property.
- **Designated City Personnel (DCP)** – Trained staff authorized to respond to encampments.
- **Outreach Provider** – Professionals who help people experiencing homelessness.
- **Personal Property** – Items with value or clear ownership (e.g., tents, ID, glasses, bikes, medications).
- **Hazardous Item** – Dangerous or contaminated items (e.g., sharp objects, flammable liquids, waste).
- **Solid Waste** – Trash, scrap, or debris not considered personal property.
- **Abandoned Property** – Items that appear to have been intentionally left behind.
- **Public Property** – Land owned or leased by the City, including public right-of-ways.
- **Public Health Crisis** – Unsafe living conditions that risk spreading disease or harming health.

4. Immediate Hazards and Obstructions

For encampments that are dangerous or block public use:

- No advance notice is required.
- Removal should happen within 24 hours.
- If people are present:
 - Notify law enforcement and outreach staff.
 - Post notice if possible.
 - Remove and store personal property; dispose of trash and hazards.
- Document the site and what was removed. Photos are encouraged.

5. Reporting and Inspecting Encampments

- Report any suspected encampment to the Deputy City Manager for Social Equity.
- The site will be logged and assigned to a DCP for inspection.
- Nonprofit partners may assist with outreach during inspection.
- If safety is a concern, law enforcement may attend.
- The DCP must verify whether the encampment is on City property.

6. Prioritizing Sites

Encampments are prioritized for action based on:

- Safety risks (traffic, slopes, fire)
- Criminal activity
- Trash and health issues
- Site conditions or complaints
- Interference with scheduled City work
- Size and environmental damage

Staff may change priorities as needed.

7. Notice Prior to Removal (Non-Hazardous Sites)

If the site is not an immediate hazard:

- Post a 10-business-day notice with:
 - Date of posting and scheduled removal
 - Warning that trash and hazards will be discarded
 - How to claim stored property
 - Notice that unclaimed property may be destroyed after 60 days
 - Contact info for service providers
- Post in multiple locations.
- Provide oral notice if possible.
- If the removal is delayed, repost the notice.

8. Outreach Before and During Removal

- Arrange at least one outreach visit between posting notice and cleanup.
- Outreach staff should be present during cleanup when possible.

9. Cleanup and Resolution

- Law enforcement may be present if needed.
- Give a final warning before removing people or items.
- Separate personal property from trash.
 - Weapons should be reported to police.
 - Contaminated personal property may be discarded.
- Store property as described in Section 11.
- Clean the site and consider deterrents to prevent return camping.
- Document the cleanup (notes and photos).

10. Post-Cleanup Notice

After cleanup, post a notice with:

- Cleanup date
- Info on stored property and how to claim it
- 60-day storage period
- Contact for service providers

Add the site to the City's public-facing website for property recovery info.

11. Storing Personal Property

- Store property unless it's hazardous or ruined.
- Keep records identifying where items were taken from.
- Dispose of unclaimed items after **60 days**.

12. Returning Property

- Meet individuals who claim stored property.
- No ID required unless ownership is disputed.
- Release property unless someone else also claims it—then contact the City Attorney.
- Storage is free.

13. Private Property

This policy does not apply to encampments on private land.