Encampment Task Force Recommendations

On January 7, 2016, the Metro Homelessness Commission established an Encampment Task Force and charged its members to collaborate and establish preliminary recommendations surrounding authorized[1] and unauthorized encampments in Metro Davidson County.

The Encampment Task Force recognizes the complexity of the issues and barriers for those without housing; a primary thread being the lack of affordable housing in our economically booming community. We recognize the continued work that must be done to ensure those with disabilities, low, fixed or no income, and housing barriers have the opportunity and a place to not only survive but to thrive. We also recognize that until there are enough affordable and accessible permanent housing options, there is a need for safe places where people can transition from the streets into housing where they are less likely to be cited or arrested for nonviolent acts of daily living.

The Encampment Task Force seeks to create recommendations for a system that identifies and addresses the needs of those experiencing literal homelessness in our community while creating a collaborative effort to move people from the streets and encampments into permanent housing.

We recognize that it will take time to build a system of care; therefore, we propose guidelines for interacting with unauthorized encampments and for the continued and expedited exploration of authorized encampments or an alternative safe place and the policies and procedures needed to promote an environment of safety and protection for all. In doing so, we, as a community, recognize the rights of all people to be treated with dignity and respect.

The task force recommends that Metro considers the development of policies and protocols in relevant departments to address unauthorized encampments with the goal of linking people living in camps with services and in partnership with nonprofit, for-profit, and faith-based organizations work with each individual on possible alternatives, with a special focus on housing options.

[1] The task force discussed defining authorized (during discussions also referred to as sanctioned) camps as legal encampments, which follow current laws including definitions as described by the State of Tennessee: http://share.tn.gov/sos/rules/1200/1200-01/1200-01-05.pdf. This document refers to all other encampments as unauthorized (or unsanctioned).

Objective	**Our community needs to have clear policies around how to deal with unauthorized camps**
Description	The task force recommends the following for Metro government recommendation: 1. Establish a Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) unit within Metro government under the Police or Social Services departments. The HOT should serve as a trained unit to deal with encampments and street homelessness and be supplemental to and in partnership with existing community outreach efforts. This unit will communicate closely with outreach workers, neighborhoods, Council persons and other relevant parties. Such a unit should serve as a liaison between all relevant stakeholders and where deemed necessary help train and educate Metro personnel on the interaction with people experiencing literal homelessness. A HOT should be modeled after similar units created in other cities. 2. Establish a clear protocol endorsed by all relevant Metro departments that outlines how Metro government responds to the community calls about a campsite (unauthorized). This protocol should take into consideration the following issues: ▪ Where is the campsite located (private/public land)? ▪ Who is the lead Metro agency dealing with unauthorized camps (or a specific camp in question)? ▪ Take a census of the camp (# of people, needs, barriers to housing & social services, sanitation situation). ▪ Communicate with property owner. ▪ Together with property owner determine how long people can stay. ▪ Provide a minimum notification period before eviction process begins. If the encampment is on private property, the property owner will determine the time period until people need to move. If the encampment is on public property, Metro government will set a minimum notification period. ▪ Eviction processes should consider safe storage of property for a certain period of time (in consideration with relevant laws) where people who were not present at the time of the dismantling of the camp (if people were arrested in the eviction process, their belongings should be stored safely until a person has a chance to collect belongings and in accordance with law). People should be notified where to pick up their belongings. ▪ If a property owner is willing to work with Metro & provider agencies on a timeline, we recommend that the lead agency considers in its protocol to: Hold a meeting with campsite residents. Identify resources and options to link people with services and if possible housing. Together with property owner and campsite residents establish a timeline until camp needs to be dismantled. Together with campsite residents establish internal rules including: o No theft o No violence o Keep campsite clean, regulate together with all partners involved trash pick-up and sanitation rules o Occupants agree to actively participate in bettering their lives &

	community o Repeat offenders against rules all parties agreed to will be removed (rather than the entire camp shut down) o All parties agree that no additional campers will move to this site (if they do, they will be asked to leave or evicted by Metro). o Sanitation issues should be addressed when possible in partnership with other agencies and departments. Together with all immediate stakeholders determine who enforces any internal rules and regulations that were established. Together with property owner and campsite residents address other issues that may arise. Furthermore, the task force recommends to the community of service responders including Metro government, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, advocates and others to consider the following actions in their approach to unauthorized encampments: 3. All outreach workers/frontline responders including HOT members, nonprofits, etc. utilize the community assessment tool established in the *How's Nashville* process to determine the acuity/vulnerability level of people sleeping outdoors and prioritize the most vulnerable people for available housing units (if they are eligible). Work with all people toward permanent housing solutions. 4. All stakeholders (nonprofit organizations, faith-based community, HOT, etc.) keep engaging people experiencing literal homelessness through outreach efforts and focus on trust-building to establish working relationships. 5. Avoid to actively seek out and dismantle encampments without having alternative options for people to go. 6. Consider exploring the creation of a centrally located storage space outside of current shelters for people to keep their I.D.s and other documents and belongings safe. Include measures that address the safe-keeping of belongings of people who were evicted or arrested. (Are there options at different Metro Parks community center sites across town?)
# to be served	650-1,000 people: At the 2016 PIT count in January, more than 650 people were counted staying outdoors during that one night. The task force estimates 650-1,000 living in streets and encampments across Davidson County.
Costs	More research has to be done to determine cost of unauthorized camps versus the cost of authorized camps. These costs could be compared/contrasted with service costs the city spends on people living outdoors (arrests for trespassing, public intoxication, etc.)
Duration of Project	The task force recommends to the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission to ask for a six-month progress report, with an annual community review process in place to determine further needs.

Anticipated Outcomes	▪ Communicate clear expectations to people in campsites. ▪ Include input from property owners and people living in campsites. ▪ Increase collaboration among Metro departments and outreach workers. ▪ Seek to provide services to everyone with a special concern for those with the most urgent needs. ▪ Ensure campsites are part of the system we need to create as a community to move people experiencing literal homelessness to housing solutions. ▪ Reduce criminalization of homelessness.
Potential Partners	Metro government/first responders and service providers: Police, Metro Social Services, Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Nonprofit organizations/service providers: Outreach teams including teams from the Mental Health Cooperative, Open Table Nashville, Park Center, VA, etc. Members of the homeless community and current encampments Others: Property owners Neighborhoods Council members
Risks and Challenges	▪ Drawing unnecessary attention to encampments, which could cause disturbances and potential harm to people before the community's social service responders have had a chance to work with individuals. ▪ How do we communicate that unauthorized camps are not authorized or legal – even if people living in an unauthorized camp are receiving temporary stay privileges and service support as long as they are actively working toward housing? ▪ By publicizing and drawing attention to this issue, we may have given false hope or stirred up expectations among people who camp outside due to a lack of a home and also among people who have quietly ignored camps on their properties.
Action Steps	Request the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission to outline clear next steps with timelines to move these recommendations forward with the goal of creating an implementation plan. The task force recommends the Homelessness Commission consider the following action steps: 1. Work on the creation of a strong Housing Crisis Resolution System[2] in Nashville that ameliorates a number of the challenges listed in this document and ought to be one of our community service goals. 2. Send the document for further consideration to the Executive Committee. 3. Send final recommendations to the Mayor's Office for feedback. 4. Establish a clear timeline around next steps.
Resources	Metro departments (see partner list) Outreach and social service providers (see nonprofit partner list)

[2] http://focusstrategies.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Focus_Strategies_Housing_Crisis_Resolution_System.pdf

Objective	**Create authorized camps as a temporary alternative site**
Description	The Encampment Task Force spent much time discussing authorized camps. However, more time is needed to satisfy a thorough discussion on the topic of authorized camps and establish more detailed recommendations that could lead to an authorized encampment proposal.

A majority of the current task force members would be willing to serve on this task force until the next Commission meeting on May 6 to provide recommendations on guidelines and protocols for the establishment of authorized encampments, alternative safe places, or interim housing until enough permanent housing is available.

Notes

On January 7, 2016, the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission officially established an encampment task force and changed its members to present recommendations to the Homelessness Commission by March 6, 2016, around:

1. Unauthorized camps
2. Authorized camps

These issues are not specifically focused on, but related to the Fort Negley situation. The recommendations should focus on long-term approaches.

The Commission charged the encampment task force to clearly connect recommendations to the goal of housing.

The following task force members met six times (Jan. 27, Feb. 3, Feb. 10, Feb. 24, and Mar. 2):

Wendell Segroves, co-chair (homeless representative, Homelessness Commissioner)
Phil Duke, co-chair (business representative, Homelessness Commissioner)
Sgt. John Bourque, (Metro Police, Homelessness Commission rep)
Tommy Lynch, (Metro Parks Executive Director)
Erik Cole, (Mayor's Office representative, chair of CoC, Homelessness Commission rep)
Renee Pratt, (Metro Social Services Executive Director, Homelessness Commission rep)
Traci Pekovitch, (Mental Heatlh Cooperative)
Lindsey Krinks, (Open Table Nashville)
Charles Strobel, (Room In The Inn, Homelessness Commission rep)
Alexander M. Jackson-Smith, (homeless representative)
Marvin Cox, (Metro Action Commission, Homelessness Commission rep).