



Overview

Street homelessness has increased significantly in Denver and across the country, from small towns to large cities, during the pandemic. The economic impact of public health-related business closures has left thousands with reduced income, leading to an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Even prior to the pandemic, homelessness was on the rise due to Denver's population growing much faster than our supply of housing. Housing prices have risen dramatically.

The City's approach for addressing homelessness continues to evolve and improve based on a variety of changing factors such as: The Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, litigation over camping ban legislation, new city programs, best practices etc. Enforcement of encampments falls under the Mayor and the departments that report to him (Dept. of Transportation & Infrastructure, Public Health & Environment, Human Services, etc.) The EIT (Early Intervention Team) and HOST (Dept. of Housing Stability), under the Mayor, are the primary agencies responsible for housing and homelessness.

City Council does not have authority or the ability to decide when and where encampment clean-ups take place.

- The City is limited by current court rulings on how camps can be cleaned up, and how those cleanups must be notified. Many of these requirements are mandated by the courts and were further complicated by COVID restrictions and CDC guidelines.
- Addressing camps of people experiencing homelessness is a complex process. There are required steps including outreach and documentation. Resources must be offered to help people off the streets and into housing.
- The City offers behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse resources.
- Moving encampments without housing options only causes these encampments to move nearby, and the process restarts. The priority is to address what is deterring them from accepting assistance.
- Several city agencies monitor large encampments for health hazards.

CDC Guidelines

During the height of the pandemic, the Center for the Disease Control guidelines advised that local governments should not move encampments to reduce risk of COVID-19 among persons experiencing homelessness.

"If individual housing options are not available, cities should allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are because persons experiencing homelessness who contract the virus may be at higher risk for complications due to age and underlying health conditions, and face additional challenges isolating while residing in congregate shelter settings."

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The pandemic reduced shelter capacity by more than 50% due to physical distancing requirements (from 2,134 beds to 935). Together with sheltering partners, the city deployed a range of tactics to increase system capacity and keep individuals safe from virus spread:

- Existing shelters transitioned from serving guests overnight to around-the-clock sheltering
- Opened 24/7 auxiliary emergency shelters, with screening and testing of guests
- 800+ hotel rooms to protect vulnerable individuals, and those medically referred for isolation
- 200+ hotel rooms to meet capacity needs in non-congregate shelter
- Temporary managed campsites that will help 100 households safely shelter outside

Early Intervention Team (EIT)

In the months of March and April 2021, the City received about 2400 calls each month regarding homelessness encampments. As of June 2021, the City is now receiving 450 calls a day.

Started in October 2020 via a directive issued by Mayor Hancock, the Early Intervention Team (EIT) was developed to serve as a response team to mitigate the growth of encampments. The EIT consists of resource navigators, coordinator and lead from Denver Human Services, Denver Fire Department firefighters/EMTs, and leadership from the Dept. of Public Safety. EIT sometimes deploys with Denver Police Department Homeless Outreach Team, Denver Public Health and Environment/Denver Health Substance Misuse Case Manager and Peer Navigators, Denver Police Outreach Case Managers, and Outreach from the Mental Health Center of Denver. EIT also coordinates with other shelter and outreach providers through HOST and Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Denver Street Outreach Collaborative and Strategic Outreach to Large Encampments.

The formal process to request EIT assistance is to call 311 or pocketgov.org. Reporting to 3-1-1 on condition changes at encampments that you notice helps the City track what is happening and will initiate the process and required steps for an encampment clean-up. These calls are then triaged based on certain characteristics: size, location (near homes? Or schools?); presence of needles, rodents, trash, excrement, etc. When EIT shows up (and they often do multiple visits), the team will engage with each individual to address an immediate crisis or emergency -- like physical health needs, mental health crisis, extreme intoxication, fire hazards and other immediate harms. The EIT offers resources and assistance for shelter or other alternatives to living in the encampment. Depending on the nature of the response and engagement at each encampment, the amount of camps responded to each day can vary. Several conditions can trigger a clean-up including significant encumbrances located on the rights-of-way (blocking sidewalks, for example), a large accumulation of trash and debris, discarded sharps, human waste, propane and active burning, etc.



The goal for EIT is quality engagements, which may take time, and persistence over quantity of responses. The goal isn't to move encampments to the next block but rather to resolve the underlying issues about why folks are refusing services/shelter. While the City continues to enforce unauthorized camping ordinance, such enforcement requires compliance with a multi-step process. Therefore, the process sometimes takes some time.

- For the health and safety of people living in and near large encampments, we have a responsibility to clean and close them when the risks and hazards become significant.
- Campers will be asked to move from the location and offered all possible resources.
- Large encampments must be served a seven-day notice of intent to clean the area and remove the camp.
- All tents/campers/structures including shopping carts must have this notice posted on them to be compliant with the law.
- If parties do not comply, written warnings are issued followed by citations.

Law Enforcement's Role

Criminal activity is something that EIT does not respond to or have authority to address, such as trespassing or blocking the entrance to a business, or residential area (private property is trespassing). These are matters addressed by the Denver Police (DPD). Other types of crimes that DPD will enforce include: damaging, defacing or destruction of public or private property and trees; trespass; and urinating or defecating in public. Situations needing immediate action or if a crime is actively taking place, call 911. Call the non-emergency (720-913-2000) to report a crime that has already taken place or is not urgent in nature.

If unwanted camping is occurring on your private property, you can sign a no-trespass agreement with your DPD district. They will ask that you post no trespass signs on your property. This agreement allows DPD to enforce on your private property without you having to report it. Our office can put you in touch with the Community Resource Officers to start this process or if you have additional questions.

Enforcement of the Camping Ban on Public Property

- The city is currently enforcing the camping ban, however, there are a number of legal rulings and existing law that requires the City to take numerous steps -- including postings with notice periods, and communication with unsheltered residents -- before the City can take further action to clean up an area. Small and large encampments can be also initiated by other agencies such as Right of Way Enforcement (DOTI), Public Health & Environment, Denver Fire, etc.
- Campers will be asked to move from the location and offered all possible resources.

- Encampments must be served a seven-day notice of intent to clean the area and remove the camp. All tents/campers/structures including shopping carts must have this notice posted on them to be compliant with the law.
- If parties do not comply, written warnings are issued followed by citations. These are non-jail-able offenses with a fine.

Street Enforcement Team (SET)

SET is a new program from the Department of Public Safety (DOS) under the Mayor that will launch fall 2021. SET is composed of unarmed civilians that will respond to low level enforcement calls in the City and will have authority to write tickets for ordinance violations such as destruction of property, trespassing, scooter infractions, and unauthorized camping on public or private property. In partnership with the City Attorney's Office and other civilian enforcement departments like Park Rangers and Right of Way Enforcement, DOS is developing policies and a robust training curriculum on sensitivity, crisis intervention, mental health, and first aid that will help guide the success of the SET program.

Alternative 911- Support Team Assisted Program (STAR)

Alternatively, you may also call the Support Team Assisted Program (STAR). STAR funding was expanded in 2021 by City Council and is seen as a national model for alternative law enforcement response. The STAR Program redirects calls from 911 and deploys Emergency Response Teams that include Emergency Medical Technicians and Behavioral Health Clinicians to engage individuals experiencing crises related to mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse. If you see someone experiencing a mental health episode and would like an immediate response, call 720-913-STAR.

People living in Vehicles and RVs

If someone is living or suspected living in a vehicle, the Early Intervention Team will address these concerns. Right of Way Enforcement and Abandoned Vehicles Unit (through Denver Sheriff Department) assist with this effort but only after the EIT is involved. RVS are considered a domicile, meaning they are treated as homes, and a warrant is needed to gain entry. Previously, COVID-19 restrictions made it very difficult to enforce RVs/people living in vehicles due to CDC guidelines. It is not illegal for people to be living in their RV on the street, but they do have to abide by the oversized vehicle ordinance. An RV (or a camper pulled behind a vehicle) parked on the street in a residential area needs to move at least 100' every 24 hours. Call 311 to report an issue.

What the City and Councilman Clark are doing to Address Homelessness

Denver's housing costs, both for-rent and for-sale, have risen dramatically. Even with robust construction, Denver's supply of housing is unable to keep pace with demand. An estimated 87,000 households who are cost-burdened (paying more than one-third of their monthly income on housing).

The good news is that, according to HOST, we will have enough funds to help obtain or preserve up to 6000 affordable homes in the next 5 years within these three focus areas: affordable home ownership; affordable rental; and homelessness resolution. Here are a few real solutions that are underway:

- This month, we opened a 46-bed crisis-stabilization center for people experiencing behavioral-health emergencies, including our unsheltered neighbors currently living in encampments
- The City will be opening a new 450-bed shelter in northeast Denver this summer
- Investing more than \$10 million to create 250 apartments for people exiting homelessness
- Support for two sanctioned campsites (Safe Outdoor Spaces), and dedicated \$900K for their operation
- Support for emergency shelter and services in response to COVID-19, including 24/7 sheltering options and more than 800 hotel rooms for isolation
- The city is exploring different options to increase residential treatment services for those who are addicted to drugs and currently living on our streets
- Congresswoman Diana DeGette worked with Mayor Hancock to obtain a hotel that will provide 240 units of affordable housing
- As part of the \$2 trillion American Rescue Plan, Denver and all cities will benefit from housing vouchers and other funds to help our homeless neighbors. We are working on plans to:
 - Rapidly re-house people who have recently fallen into homelessness
 - Improve the quality of shelters to better accommodate partners, pets and personal property
 - Purchase motels to convert to homeless housing with support services
- The City is expanding our outreach, engagement and enforcement efforts to better connect people to shelter, housing, treatment and other services, and to protect against the public health and safety hazards caused by large unsanctioned encampments
- Support for the Caring for Denver ballot initiative that generates \$30 million dollars that goes toward addressing mental health and substance misuse needs

Long-term:

- [Five-year strategic plan](#)
- [Original 2021 action plan](#)
- [Addendum to 2021 action plan](#)
- [Three-year shelter expansion plan](#)

City Council Legislation

- Initiative 2B- Homelessness Resolution Fund, created an increase of .25% of sales tax to establish a new dedicated funding that will generate \$40 million a year. Eligible uses for the fund include housing development, rental assistance and supportive services for housing; expanding shelter capacity and access to 24/7 services, mental health care, substance treatment,

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housing/employment counseling, and COVID-19 prevention; providing multiple services at a single site; and other programs and services for those experiencing homelessness. Denver voters approved the tax increase in 2020.

- Developer Impact Fee - created the first-ever dedicated fund for affordable housing funded in part by a linkage fee on commercial and residential development and a portion of a property tax mill already approved by Denver voters. In 2018, City Council voted to increase the city's sales tax on marijuana (from 3.5 percent to 5.5 percent) to add to the fund. The fund is estimated to raise \$150 million over the next 10 years to create or preserve 6,000 affordable homes for low-to moderate-income families. Prior to 2017, Denver has not charged development impact fees, except in the Gateway area.
- Approved providing legal assistance to residents facing eviction
- Urban Camping Ban prohibiting camping in parks and the public right of way
- Funding for landlords to help people behind on rent
- Loosening outdated restrictions on who is allowed to live together
- Funding for new housing developments for those with lower area median incomes
- Re-zonings for development of new housing requiring more affordability
- Funding for services, like the early intervention teams and STAR program
- Rules and regulations that protect and bolster wages at the lower end
- Updating zoning rules and regulations to accommodate more housing options
- Job training and retention programs
- "Healthy Residential Rentals for All" legislation that requires all rental properties to obtain a license and inspection to ensure rental units are complying with Denver's minimum housing standards. The goal is to prevent housing conditions that adversely affect the life, safety and general well-being of tenants.

This is not an all encompassing list of every program that Denver is doing to address housing and homelessness. Visit denvergov.org/housing to learn more.