

Tacoma, Washington

Community Encampment Report



Tacoma, Washington

Community Encampment Report

Submitted by:
Kimberly Burnett
Will Yetvin
Lauren Dunton
Jill Khadduri
Abt Associates

January 2020

About This Report

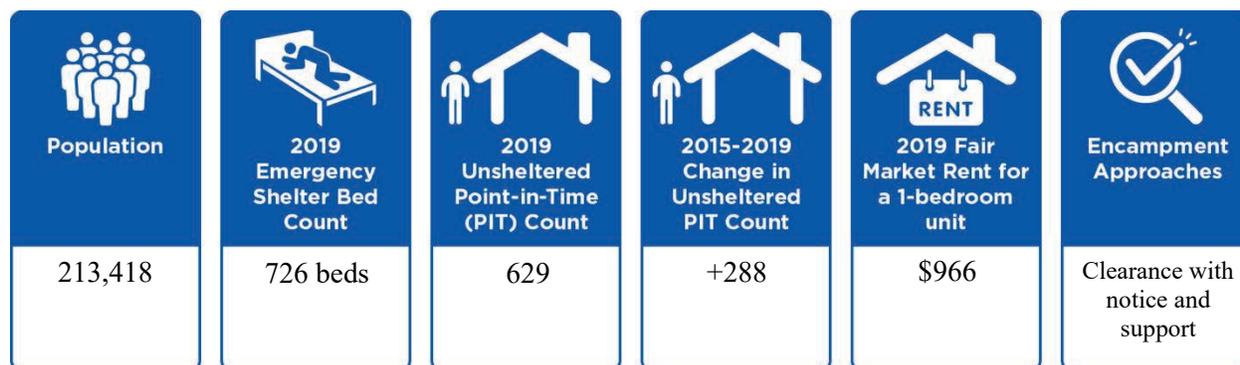
The community encampment reports are among the products of a study called *Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Costs*. The study is sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Office of Policy Development and Research at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

In the fall of 2019, Abt Associates conducted site visits to four communities to collect information about each community's response to encampments and the costs associated with those responses. The study team met with stakeholders involved in encampment response, including city staff, nonprofit outreach workers, and emergency service providers. In each community, the study team conducted observations of encampments and interviewed two people who have lived in encampments. In addition to this report, community encampment reports are available for Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; and San Jose, California.

CONTENTS

Description of Tacoma Encampments	1
Encampments in Tacoma	1
Description of encampments	2
People’s Park	2
Characteristics of people living in encampments	4
Stakeholders Involved in Encampment Responses	5
City departments	5
Neighborhood and Community Services	5
Police Department	5
Fire/EMS Department	5
Public Works and Environmental Services Departments.....	5
Tacoma Public Utilities.....	6
Public parks.....	6
Homeless services providers.....	6
Tacoma’s Encampment Response	7
Encampment response strategy	7
Mitigation site.....	7
Stability Site	7
Clearing and closing encampments	9
Changes to the homeless system in response to encampments.....	10
Public Response to Encampments	11
Resident and business reactions	11
City ordinances.....	11
Encampment Costs in Tacoma	13
Overall spending	13
Spending by encampment response activity.....	13
Spending by implementation partners	15
Spending by source of funding	15
Stability Site expenditures	15
One-time expenditures	16

Description of Tacoma Encampments



Encampments in Tacoma

In recent years, encampments have become a key concern for the City of Tacoma. From 2015 to 2019, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased by 84 percent in Pierce County¹ (which includes the City of Tacoma), at least in part because of the tight housing market in the entire Seattle region.² Stakeholders reported that until recently, Tacoma had only a small number of encampments, usually composed of three to four people.

By early 2017, a tent encampment underneath Interstate 705 known as “The Jungle” had grown to more than 100 people. Responding to the growing health and safety issues caused by The Jungle, Tacoma police and city officials cleared and closed the encampment in mid-April 2017. Two weeks later, the mayor and the Tacoma City Council declared a state of public health emergency related to encampments and began to implement a three-phase *Emergency Temporary Aid and Shelter Plan*. In its first phase, the plan funded the creation of a mitigation site, which offered basic services to residents and operated for about 6 weeks. In phase two, the city created a Stability Site to provide emergency shelter and intensive wraparound services, mostly to people who had been relocated from the mitigation site. The Stability Site is still in operation as of late 2019 and currently has capacity for 85 people.

Facilities Created Following the Emergency Declaration in May 2017

May–June 2017: The city created the **mitigation site** by blocking off a preexisting encampment in the Tideflats area of Tacoma at East 18th Street and Portland Avenue. The mitigation site offered basic health and safety amenities, such as portable toilets, trash services, and 24/7 security.

June 2017–Present: The city closed and fenced off the mitigation site and opened the **Stability Site** at Portland Avenue East and Puyallup Avenue in the Dome District. The Stability Site has a large, industrial-style tent that can hold up to 100 individual camping tents, which are provided by the city and which offer residents privacy. Tents are assigned to one person or to couples. The site also has one-room units called pallet shelters, as well as trailers for bathrooms, showers, laundry, and 24/7 supportive services.

¹ The increase in Pierce County was from 341 in 2015 to 629 in 2019. In King County, which includes the city of Seattle, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased by 37 percent (from 3,803 to 5,228) from 2015 to 2019.

² From 2014 to 2019, the HUD Fair Market Rent for a one-bedroom unit in Tacoma increased by 26 percent (from \$767 to \$966).

Since closing The Jungle, the City of Tacoma’s general approach has been to clear and close encampments, often focusing on smaller encampments and providing resources to people who continue to reside in larger encampments. As of late 2019, the city is actively providing services to people living in the large People’s Park encampment to connect them with supportive services and temporary and permanent housing. The city is working with existing shelter providers and faith-based organizations to create the additional shelter capacity that will make closing People’s Park possible. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals case *Martin v. Boise* prevents local governments from requiring people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to relocate from public property if no space is available in a shelter.

Description of encampments

As of late 2019, encampments in Tacoma range from individual or small groups of tents on sidewalks and in wooded areas to a 45-tent community adjacent to People’s Park. Encampments have formed primarily in two types of areas—urban sidewalks and secluded areas in nature. The location of encampments is affected by city policies, such as those that prohibit people from camping on public property or being in parks overnight, and the proximity of homeless services. Common features of encampments in both types of locations are tarps covering tents and other areas for privacy and protection against the weather and residents’ belongings (often in shopping carts) around the encampments.³ According to outreach workers, most encampments persist throughout the winter, although shelters see increased demand during the cold weather. During that time, shelters expand their capacity to meet the increased demand.

Tacoma’s Definition of Encampments

The City of Tacoma defines *encampments* in its 2017 policy on encampment removal as “one or more tent, lean-to, structure, tarpaulin, pallet, or makeshift structures used for purposes of habitation.” Encampments do not include sites that “a reasonable person would conclude are no longer in use.”

Encampments in urban areas. Because police routinely enforce the ban on unauthorized camping on public property, most encampments in visible urban areas are located along sidewalks near homeless shelters and services. Maintenance for the property between the sidewalk and the street, called the planting strip, is generally considered the responsibility of the adjacent landowner, not the city. According to some stakeholders, the city prioritizes enforcement of the camping ban in some areas of Tacoma, such as the Business Improvement Area. Outreach workers encourage people not to set up camp in that area and try to connect them to resources because police will quickly relocate people who set up a tent there.

Stakeholders report that sidewalk encampments have become more common in recent years. For example, a row of tents arose across from the Nativity House, a large shelter and supportive housing project, as well as a smattering of tents on planting strips and sidewalks in the Hilltop neighborhood, a historically diverse and less affluent part of Tacoma. Stakeholders also reported that encampments have been found in Wright Park, a large park to the north of downtown Tacoma.

People’s Park

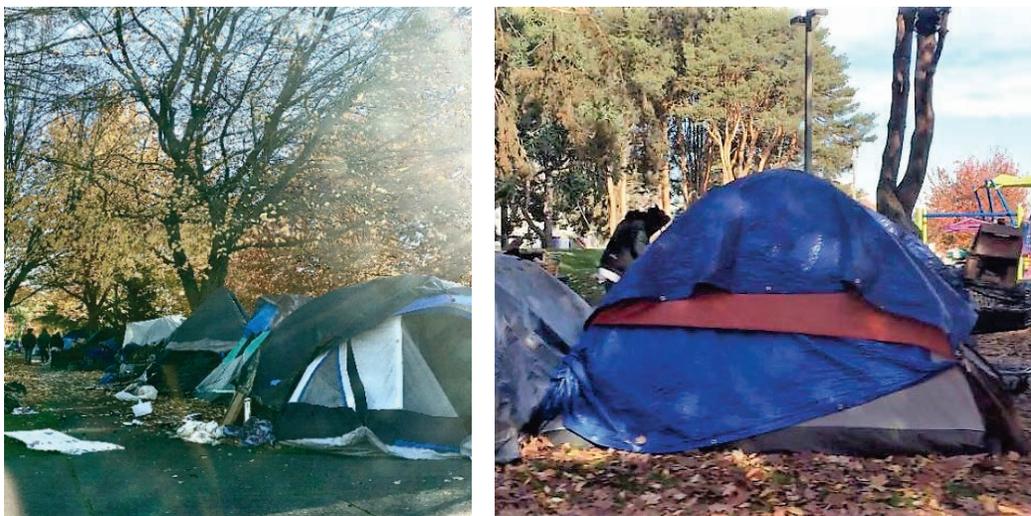
Since the fall of 2018, the City of Tacoma’s largest and most persistent encampment has been in and adjacent to People’s Park, across the street from the Tacoma Housing Authority in the Hilltop neighborhood. Despite municipal code that bans overnight camping in parks, an encampment began to form inside People’s Park during the fall of 2018, starting with three to four tents. Tacoma police regularly enforced the ban on camping on public property, however, so residents were required to move their tents to a sidewalk across the street from the park every night. To avoid the constant relocation, and

³ The study team was only able to observe visible encampments on sidewalks, so descriptions of secluded encampments are based solely on interviews with city officials and outreach workers.

as the People’s Park encampment continued to grow, residents moved their tents to the planting strip between the sidewalk and the street rather than in the park itself. Locating the tents in the planting strip adjacent to the park resulted in a temporary truce between the city and encampment residents—in part because the encampment’s nearest neighbor, the Tacoma Housing Authority, has been tolerant of the encampment. As of October 2019, a total of 45 tents lined two edges of People’s Park.

According to two People’s Park encampment residents we spoke with, the stability achieved by locating in the planting strip has made the camp more structured. The city provides trash barrels for the residents that are emptied regularly, so the encampment is also cleaner. The residents described the encampment as a “developed community” where everyone knows everybody else and people borrow things from each other and help each other out. Inside the park are a cooking area and a community gathering place, where residents meet during the day. Local churches bring donated food and clothes on occasion, and outreach workers visit the encampment frequently. According to one resident, who described himself as one of the “overseers” of the encampment, residents generally get along well, and encampment leaders help people resolve disagreements. Residents generally do not call the police unless a serious emergency occurs. Although the city regularly picks up trash from the encampment, it has not provided other services, such as bathrooms or showers. The main concerns of residents living in the People’s Park encampment are the lack of bathrooms and consistent water access.⁴

The City has not cleared the encampment on the edge of People’s Park because of insufficient shelter capacity or ability to make housing placements for encampment residents. However, the City is in the process of creating a tiny home village made up of 22 structures the City calls “temporary emergency micro-shelters (TEMS)” near the park. These one-room units will have capacity for up to 35 individuals. According to City staff, individuals living at the People’s Park encampment will be given top priority to move into the micro-shelters, and the City expects some form of shelter to be available for everyone at the encampment. The City cleared the People’s Park encampment in January 2020 once the TEMS site became operational.



Tents at People’s Park encampment, October 28, 2019.

Encampments in secluded areas. Some encampments in Tacoma are in wooded areas, under bridges, or along rail lines. Those areas include parks farther from the urban core that contain more woods and

⁴ Since the site visit, the city has begun providing people living at the People’s Park encampment with restrooms, hand sanitizer, and potable drinking water.

vegetation, making the prevention of camping more challenging. Such encampments are generally small and more scattered than the sidewalk encampments. City and outreach staff believe that the individuals who camp in secluded areas do not want to be bothered and are initially less likely to be receptive to services from outreach workers. Encampments have been found dotting the more than 1,000 acres of Tacoma Metro Parks property, in railway areas owned by Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU), and under the bridges leading to the industrial port area of the city (which are City of Tacoma property). TPU is particularly concerned about encampments that threaten public water supplies or could result in train accidents. The company once spent \$35,000 clearing an encampment near a water facility that was across the street from a homeless shelter.

Vehicular encampments. Like other communities on the West Coast, the city of Tacoma has recently experienced a significant increase in the number of people living in cars and RVs. Tacoma devotes some resources to responding to people sleeping in vehicles when they generate complaints or when they block sidewalks, but that is not part of the city's efforts to prevent or clear encampments. Instead, people inhabiting parked vehicles that have been in one location for more than 72 hours are asked to move. City staff report that police will only tow a vehicle if a crime is occurring, however, and generally do not issue tickets for people inhabiting vehicles.

Characteristics of people living in encampments

City staff and outreach workers report that people of all ages, races, and ethnicities live in encampments. Stakeholders describe a typical encampment resident as an older individual with mental health or substance use conditions or both. Encampments generally do not have families with children or people fleeing domestic violence. Outreach workers reported that those populations tend not to want to stay in groups.

Stakeholders Involved in Encampment Responses

Many stakeholders said that the coordination between city and nonprofit service providers is key to the success of Tacoma’s encampment response strategy. Stakeholders are in regular contact, often share information, and work to fill each other’s gaps and needs. After the emergency declaration, the Neighborhood and Community Services Department started holding monthly encampment strategy meetings attended by representatives of city departments with a role in encampment response. The meetings help the city understand the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder responding to encampments. The primary stakeholders involved in Tacoma’s encampment response are described below.

City departments

The Tacoma Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) Department leads the city’s response to homeless encampments, executing the city council’s policy and funding decisions. They work closely with a Homeless Outreach Team made up of police officers and NCS staff members, as well as other city departments, Metro Parks Tacoma, and a number of homeless service providers. The Continuum of Care covers all of Pierce County and does not have a direct role in the city’s response to encampments.

Neighborhood and Community Services

NCS responsibilities as the lead department for responding to homeless encampments on City of Tacoma property include documenting and responding to public complaints through the 3-1-1 system, contracting with homeless services providers to do outreach and operate the Stability Site, and coordinating encampment clearances and closures. NCS administers all of the city contracts related to outreach and to the operation of the Stability Site and works closely with other city departments involved in responses to encampments. NCS also assesses areas where encampments routinely occur for the feasibility of physical changes, such as installing fencing designed to prevent future encampments.

Police Department

The Tacoma Police Department (TPD) has a special unit of five full-time police officers who are part of the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). The department’s community liaison officers also assist with removing unauthorized encampments from Metro Parks Tacoma and Tacoma Public Utilities property. The TPD also responds to calls for service at homeless encampments in the course of their regular duties.

Fire/EMS Department

For the Tacoma Fire Department (TFD), the most common activities related to encampments are responses to calls for emergency medical services, but TFD also has seen a recent increase in calls related to fires. A TFD staff person estimated that about 10 percent of all calls to TFD are related to encampments. In July 2019, TFD received a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to send a mobile unit to co-respond to EMS calls relating to opioids. This mobile unit can provide medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and divert people from the emergency room. The TFD mobile unit responses are not primarily within encampments, but the unit does provide treatment to encampment residents on occasion.

Public Works and Environmental Services Departments

Tacoma’s Public Works Department clears encampment-related debris considered an immediate public safety concern, such as on roadways, at freeway entrances, and in areas with high pedestrian traffic. For nonemergency encampment clearing and cleaning, the Environmental Service Department (ESD) funds a contract with Cascadia Cleaning—a company that specializes in homeless encampment abatement and removal—to clean solid waste and other debris after encampments are removed, although NCS and the HOT actually schedule the cleanups. ESD’s Solid Waste Management also sends a truck to remove blight from encampments on a case-by-case basis. ESD also routinely picks up trash from city containers provided for the People’s Park encampment.

Tacoma Public Utilities

TPU provides power, water, and rail services for the City of Tacoma. TPU maintenance crews are responsible for identifying, reporting, and coordinating with NCS and the TPD about encampments on TPU property.

Public parks

Metro Parks Tacoma is a municipal corporation that oversees about 1,000 acres of parks and recreational areas in and around Tacoma. Metro Parks responds to encampments on its property in a process that is separate but similar to the city's process. Encampments are identified through community complaints or through the regular patrols of maintenance technicians. Metro Parks also pays for vegetation management to clean up encamped areas and make them less desirable for camping (for example, placing logs over habitable areas or cutting vegetation to increase visibility).

Homeless services providers

The City of Tacoma funds numerous nonprofit organizations to provide outreach, shelter, or other services to people living in Tacoma's encampments. The Projects of Assistance in Transitioning from Homelessness (PATH) team run by the organization **Comprehensive Life Resources** provides financial assistance and referrals to housing, shelter, and other services for people experiencing homelessness in encampments. The **Tacoma Rescue Mission** (TRM) maintains the waitlist for the Stability Site and has an encampment outreach program that identifies and assesses individuals who could be referred to the Stability Site or other available shelters. The TRM outreach team also provides transportation to service appointments for encampment residents who are on the waitlist for the Stability Site. **Catholic Community Services** (CCS) operates all the day-to-day aspects of the Stability Site, including supervision, security, meals, and coordination of services. The **Salvation Army** also transports residents of the Stability Site to medical appointments, employment services, and services related to securing housing stability.

Tacoma's Encampment Response

Encampment response strategy

The City of Tacoma's current approach to responding to encampments stems in large part from the May 2017 emergency declaration that funded the ***Emergency Temporary Aid and Shelter Plan***. The plan was to be implemented in three phases: (1) mitigation of encampments, in particular the Jungle; (2) establishment of temporary shelters or Stability Sites as alternatives to encampments; and (3) creation of additional affordable housing.

Mitigation site

In May 2017, the city blocked off a preexisting encampment with about 30 residents to create a ***mitigation site***. Many people who had been evicted from the Jungle came to the mitigation site, increasing the population of the site to approximately 80 people. Although mitigation site residents used their own shelter (usually tents), the City of Tacoma and local organizations provided services and amenities, including screening for housing programs, health care, mental health and substance use counseling, 24-hour security, waste receptacles, handwashing stations, and potable water. Blocks at the site prevented vehicles from entering the mitigation site, but individuals could come and go as they pleased, and there was no waitlist to stay at the mitigation site; thus, the mitigation site could be considered a temporary, "sanctioned" encampment.

Stability Site

In June 2017, the city closed the mitigation site and opened a ***Stability Site***, a temporary emergency shelter, nearby.

Like the mitigation site, the Stability Site's location in the industrial area of Tacoma reduced its impact on businesses and neighborhood residents. The majority of the original residents of the Stability Site were referred and relocated directly from the mitigation site. The city originally intended to use the Stability Site for about 6 months but is planning to extend the site's operation into its third year, albeit with reduced funding.

The Stability Site is composed of one large, industrial-style, temperature-controlled tent containing rows of up to 61 individual camping tents, which are provided by the city. Outside the large tent are 24 eight-by-ten foot, one-room units (called pallet shelters, which are very similar to the units at the TEMS site), which are provided for residents actively working with supportive services and making progress on their housing stability plans. The Stability Site complex also includes trailers with showers, bathrooms, laundry facilities, and meeting space for connecting with service providers (88 percent of residents are actively working with a case manager). The site guarantees one meal a day to residents, but most days residents are provided with three meals because the site receives donated meals from community members and organizations.

Clearing and Closing the Jungle

In March 2017, about a dozen agencies and homeless services providers worked collaboratively to link people in the Jungle encampment to emergency shelter, supportive services, and in-patient treatment programs, with the ultimate goal of closing the encampment. In mid-April 2017, Tacoma police and city officials evicted the remaining Jungle residents. Existing fencing around the area was repaired, and the site is monitored routinely to prevent re-encampment. As a result, former Jungle encampment residents simply set up camp elsewhere. Two weeks later, the mayor declared the state of emergency that funded the Emergency Temporary Aid and Shelter Plan.



Outside view of Stability Site, October 30, 2019.

The population of the Stability Site fluctuates below its maximum capacity of 100, at approximately 85 people, with about the same number on the waiting list. In the Stability Site's second year of operation, the site operator changed the maximum length of stay to 90 days, with exceptions made for people taking meaningful steps to get housing or employment. In practice, however, the average length of stay as of October 2019 was 321 days for people in tents and 540 days for those in the pallet shelters. The individuals on the Stability Site's waitlist are ordered from highest to lowest vulnerability, using assessments conducted at encampments by Tacoma Rescue Mission outreach workers. People staying in the Stability Site therefore have higher barriers to housing than do other unsheltered individuals—for example, they are more likely to have criminal records, chemical dependency, mental health issues, or trauma from domestic violence. Catholic Community Services (CCS), the organization contracted by the City of Tacoma to operate the Stability Site, reports that 99 percent of those staying at the site were previously unsheltered and that their average total period of homelessness is 4.3 years.

Of the people who had exited the Stability Site as of October 2019, 39 percent are currently housed, 33 percent have an unknown housing status, and 28 percent are homeless. Stakeholders consider that, given their high levels of vulnerability, the outcomes for residents of the site have been largely positive. The city receives significantly fewer 9-1-1 calls from the site than from other emergency shelters and from street encampments.

Clearing and closing encampments

As encampments continued to be established following the closure of the Jungle, the city developed a set of policies and procedures for clearing and closing other encampments.⁵ To report an encampment, Tacoma community members can call the city’s 3-1-1 information hotline or submit information through the 3-1-1 online system. When an encampment is reported, NCS outreach workers are sent to determine who the property owner is, how many people are residing in the encampment, and the impact on the surrounding area (e.g., needles, debris, drugs, and animals). The NCS Department and the HOT jointly decide which encampments are prioritized for clearance and closure (the term used in Tacoma is *encampment removal*).

Prioritizing Encampments for Clearing

The city considers several criteria, with no predetermined relative importance, when deciding whether to close encampments:

- Physical hazards, such as traffic and steep slopes
- Other health hazards to occupants or the surrounding neighborhood.
- Criminal activity.
- Quantities of garbage, debris, or waste.
- Difficulty in bringing emergency services to the site.
- Imminent work scheduled at the site.
- Damage to environmentally critical areas.
- Proximity to land uses of special concern (e.g., schools).

Once the NCS Department decides to clear an encampment, the city posts a 72-hour notice to vacate at the encampment site. The HOT and other outreach workers are sent to the location at least once to try to connect encampment residents to shelter and social services before the encampment is cleared. Alternative locations offered to encampment residents include transitional housing, subsidized rental units, units in affordable housing developments, and emergency shelters, including the Stability Site. Stakeholders in Tacoma say that, although some individuals do not accept shelter (for reasons such as shelter rules, restrictions on belongings, and curfews), even those who want emergency shelter may not always be able to get it. Many shelters are full every night, even though shelters create extra capacity during colder weather by putting beds in the shelters’ common areas.

The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)

The HOT consists of two NCS outreach workers, five police officers, and one mental health professional. All officers in the HOT commit to being on the team for six years and receive 40 hours of crisis intervention training. The HOT’s philosophy is to first connect people experiencing homelessness with services and try get them help, rather than immediately enforcing laws. The HOT takes a long-term approach and expects that there will be many repeat interactions with people who initially refuse to accept services.

On the day of the scheduled closure, the HOT is sent to the encampment to ensure that the encampment is cleared of residents and to offer services and referrals. The HOT collects any personal property remaining at the encampment and transports it to a city facility to be stored for a maximum of 60 days. After the encampment is cleared of people and personal belongings, Cascadia Cleaning (the city contractor) rigorously cleans the area. In most cases, the city is not able to prevent people from returning to previously cleared encampment locations because it does not want to restrict public use of the area; however, the city conducts what it calls “site reclamation” of public areas to make them less desirable for camping by trimming vegetation, leveling the ground, and adding lighting to increase visibility. In places such as under

bridges and freeways, the city puts up fencing, boulders, or other obstacles to discourage public use of the space.

⁵ City of Tacoma. “Enforcement and Removal Policies and Procedures Relating to Unauthorized Encampments on City Properties.” June 2017.

Tacoma’s overall strategy is to prevent large encampments from forming and remaining (with the current exception of People’s Park) because of the health and safety risks associated with large encampments. Also, the larger the encampment, the more it costs the city to monitor, provide outreach, and eventually clear and close it. Cleaning up a cleared encampment can take anywhere from 2 hours to 2 days, depending on the size and location of the encampment. After cleaning, a notice is posted at the site providing instructions for retrieving personal property. From March to October 2019, the city completed 130 encampment clearances and cleanups in approximately 65 distinct locations. If an encampment recurs at the same location, the city may need to clear and clean it again.

Changes to the homeless system in response to encampments

The most notable change to the homeless services system in Tacoma has been investment in different types of temporary emergency shelter in an effort to relocate encampment residents. The Stability Site accounted for 90 year-round emergency shelter beds in Tacoma’s 2019 Housing Inventory Count. The temporary emergency micro-shelters near People’s Park provide shelter for up to 35 people for an anticipated 8 months. Construction has begun on a \$4.3 million, 50-bed shelter to be run by the Tacoma Rescue Mission. The city is also funding a coalition of faith-based organizations to identify a location and entity to run one or more additional temporary shelters.

In addition to increasing the capacity of the emergency shelter system, the city is attempting to create more affordable permanent housing. Housing is more affordable in the southern part of Pierce County, but stakeholders reported that people who relocate there often struggle to succeed without their community and support networks. Access to jobs is also a problem in that area because there is little public transportation outside Tacoma.

The city’s Housing Division, with the support of the Tacoma Housing Authority and the NCS Department, began to implement an affordable housing action strategy in September 2018. The strategy’s 10-year targets include creating 6,000 more affordable housing units, preserving 2,300 currently affordable units, and reducing barriers to staying in affordable housing for 1,000 households.⁶

⁶ See <https://cms.cityoftacoma.org/cedd/housing/affordablehousingactionstrategy.pdf>.

Public Response to Encampments

Resident and business reactions

The most visible encampments in Tacoma draw the majority of complaints from neighborhood residents and business owners. The city maintains an encampment response map so residents can see the status and outcome of complaints reported through the city's 3-1-1 system (either over the phone or online).⁷ Outreach staff explained that a majority of the 3-1-1 requests are for trash removal from sites that are not active homeless encampments. To respond to the concerns of businesses, the city funds a homeless outreach response service called Positive Interactions. The program, operated by Comprehensive Life Resources, offers tailored services to Tacoma businesses that are affected by people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including those living in encampment settings.

City officials report an increase in complaints in recent years, in particular about safety issues, such as fights, fires, and the presence of used needles. Since the emergency declaration in 2017, the city has framed its response to encampments as a public health and safety issue. Although the city is concerned about all people living in encampment settings, its priority is to focus on encampments located in more populated areas that may create environmental hazards and quality-of-life issues for neighborhood residents, as well as for the encampment residents themselves. Advocates for people experiencing homelessness attend city meetings and are loudly critical of the city's response to encampments. Feeling pressure from both sides, city officials describe their approach as balancing the concerns of neighborhood residents and people experiencing homelessness. Tacoma is trying to be transparent about its encampment response strategy by publishing meeting notes and issuing FAQs and media releases.

City ordinances

Since the emergency declaration in May 2017, the City of Tacoma has continued to adopt ordinances and policies related to encampments.⁸

- **May 2017:** The city council adopted Resolution No. 39716, directing the City Manager to prepare an Emergency Temporary Aid and Shelter Program in response to the current homelessness crisis. The city council later adopted Ordinance No. 28430, declaring a State of Public Health Emergency.
- **June 2017:** The city council adopted Ordinance No. 28432, enacting interim zoning and land use controls as an emergency measure to permit the city to site temporary emergency shelters in response to a declared public emergency.
- **June 2017:** The city adopted "Enforcement and Removal Policies and Procedures Relating to Unauthorized Encampments on City Properties." The policy provides "consistent processes and procedures for removing unauthorized encampments from City of Tacoma property and, where applicable, temporarily storing personal property in a manner that is in harmony with other local, state, and federal laws."⁹

⁷ City of Tacoma, Washington. Homeless Encampment Response Map.
<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=153621>.

⁸ This timeline is adapted from the timeline on the City of Tacoma's website, with supplemental information from stakeholder interviews.
https://www.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/planning_and_development_services/planning_services/current_initiatives_and_projects/emergency_temporary_shelters_regulations.

⁹ This policy has not been updated since 2017, although the city is planning to review it in the future.

- **April 2018:** The city council passed Ordinance No. 28498, adopting permanent zoning regulations to allow sponsoring religious, nonprofit, and governmental organizations to use property they own for operating temporary homeless shelters (previously referred to as homeless camps). As of late 2019, a local community action agency is hosting planning meetings to identify religious or nonprofit organizations that can host temporary emergency shelters on their property.
- **October 2019:** The city council passed Ordinance No. 28615, amending park code to address emerging public safety issues affecting public parks. The ordinance prohibits installing structures in any park, defined as “any structure or shelter, including but not limited to any temporary makeshift dwelling units, lean-tos, shacks and/or trailers, comprised of tree branches, wood, plastic, metal, nylon, tarp, or any other materials.” Notably, the ordinance does not apply to a “temporary structure” that has only a roof and no walls. A city official stated that as long as the structure is visible from the outside, the structure will probably be allowed to remain; however, the ordinance also states that any person entering or remaining in a park when it is closed (30 minutes after sunset) is subject to arrest and prosecution for criminal trespass. The ordinance was slated to go into effect on December 1, 2019, but the city is delaying enforcement until it can guarantee available shelter spots for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, in compliance with *Martin v. Boise*.¹⁰

¹⁰ Matt Driscoll, “Tacoma Preparing To Clear People’s Park Homeless Camp. Where Folks Will Go Remains Unclear,” *The News Tribune*, December 5, 2019, <https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/matt-driscoll/article238001719.html>.

Encampment Costs in Tacoma

Tacoma’s comprehensive encampment response requires significant resources. This section summarizes the costs associated with the city’s response, including overall spending, spending by encampment response activity, spending by implementation partners, and spending by source of funding.¹¹

Overall spending

Based on the data collected, the total reported cost of Tacoma’s encampment response for 1 year¹² was about \$3.9 million (in 2019 dollars). To put this in context, the expenditure amounted to \$18.29 per resident of Tacoma and \$6,207 per unsheltered person in HUD’s 2019 point-in-time (PIT) count for Pierce County (see Exhibit 1). Note that it is *not* the cost per encampment resident, as the unsheltered count includes encampment residents as well as people staying by themselves or in locations other than encampments.

The total cost of \$3.9 million includes the cost of operating the Stability Site that was opened specifically to serve people leaving “The Jungle.” It does not include the cost of stays for encampment residents at other city shelters. This total cost also does not include costs associated with housing interventions to which encampment residents may be referred other than the Stability Site, beyond the costs of outreach.

Exhibit 1. Total estimated spending on Tacoma’s encampment response in FY 2019

Total spending on encampment activities	Population of Tacoma	Cost per capita	Unsheltered homeless per 2019 PIT	Cost per unsheltered homeless in 2019 PIT
\$ 3,904,042	213,418	\$18.29	629	\$6,207

PIT = point-in-time.

Spending by encampment response activity

Of the roughly \$3.9 million in reported spending on responding to encampments in 2019, about \$3.4 million was for labor and roughly \$460,000 was for nonlabor expenses including financial assistance to encampment residents (Exhibit 2). Labor costs were primarily associated with operating the Stability Site, the Homeless Outreach Team, and encampment prevention.¹³ It also included outreach, encampment clearance and closures, and management.

Nonlabor expenses included travel costs for outreach workers; facility expenses and supplies for the Stability Site, including hygiene stations, laundry facilities, trailers and pallet shelters; and financial assistance for residents, such as bus and train fares to help encampment residents look for housing and employment.¹⁴

¹¹ For details on the methodology used to gather and analyze these costs, please see the methodology discussion in the cross-site report, *City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost*, forthcoming.

¹² The City of Tacoma’s FY 2019 was from July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019. Most of Tacoma’s implementation partners reported data for the same period. A few reported data from slightly different periods. In all cases, we have included costs for only the most recent year available.

¹³ “Encampment prevention”—called “site hardening” by the City of Tacoma—encompassed efforts to change the landscape after clearing an encampment to make it less desirable for human habitation.

¹⁴ The value of meals donated to encampments is not included; those data were not available.

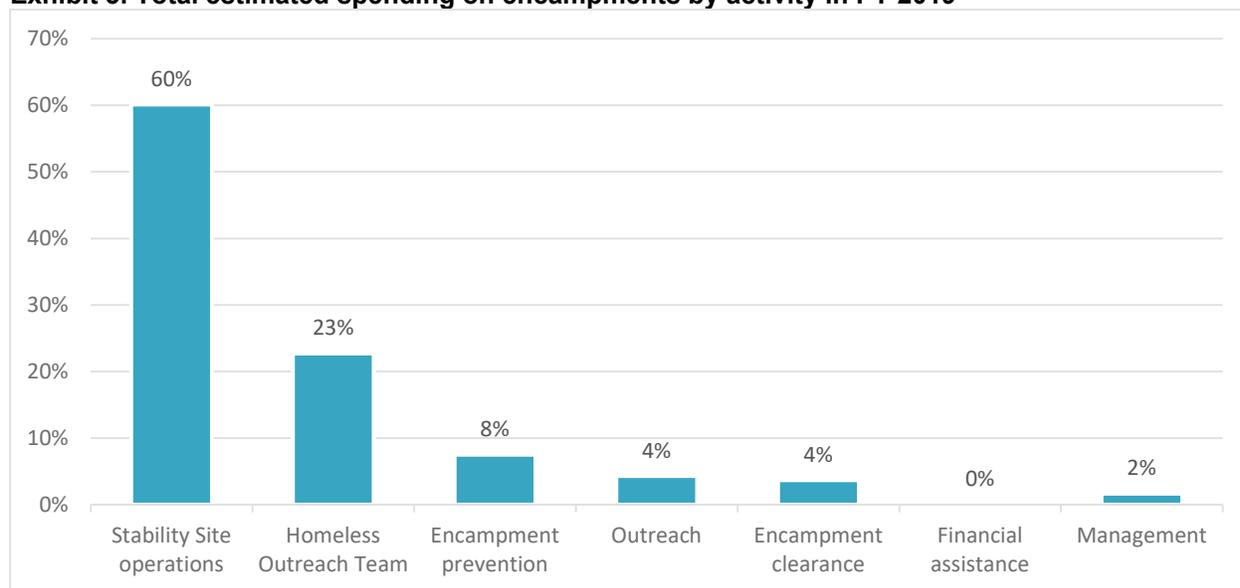
Exhibit 2. Total estimated spending on responding to encampments in FY 2019

	Labor	Nonlabor	Financial Assistance	Total
Stability Site operations	\$ 1,903,197	\$ 409,907	\$ 34,167	\$ 2,347,271
Homeless Outreach Team	\$ 886,528	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 886,528
Encampment prevention	\$ 293,000	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 293,000
Outreach and engagement	\$ 154,829	\$ 13,374	\$ 0	\$ 168,203
Encampment clearance and closures	\$ 143,637	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 143,637
Financial assistance	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 900	\$ 900
Management	\$ 64,505	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 64,505
Total	\$ 3,445,694*	\$ 423,281	\$ 35,067	\$ 3,904,042*

*Totals do not sum due to rounding.

Operating the Stability Site accounted for 60 percent of encampment-related spending in Tacoma in FY 2019 (Exhibit 3). With an average occupancy of about 85 people, this is roughly \$28,000 per person per year. Stability Site residents are provided a broad range of outreach, employment, transportation, and other services; these are described in detail in Exhibit 5. The next-largest share of reported expenditures was for the Homeless Outreach Team, at 23 percent of the total.¹⁵

Exhibit 3. Total estimated spending on encampments by activity in FY 2019



Encampment prevention made up 8 percent of costs. Outreach and engagement (in addition to that conducted by the Homeless Outreach Team and that provided to Stability Site residents) made up 4 percent of spending. Encampment clearance and closures made up 4 percent of spending, and encampment response management made up 2 percent. Financial assistance to encampment residents (other than Stability Site residents) was less than 1 percent.

¹⁵ The cost of police responses to crimes and disturbances related to encampments was not available.

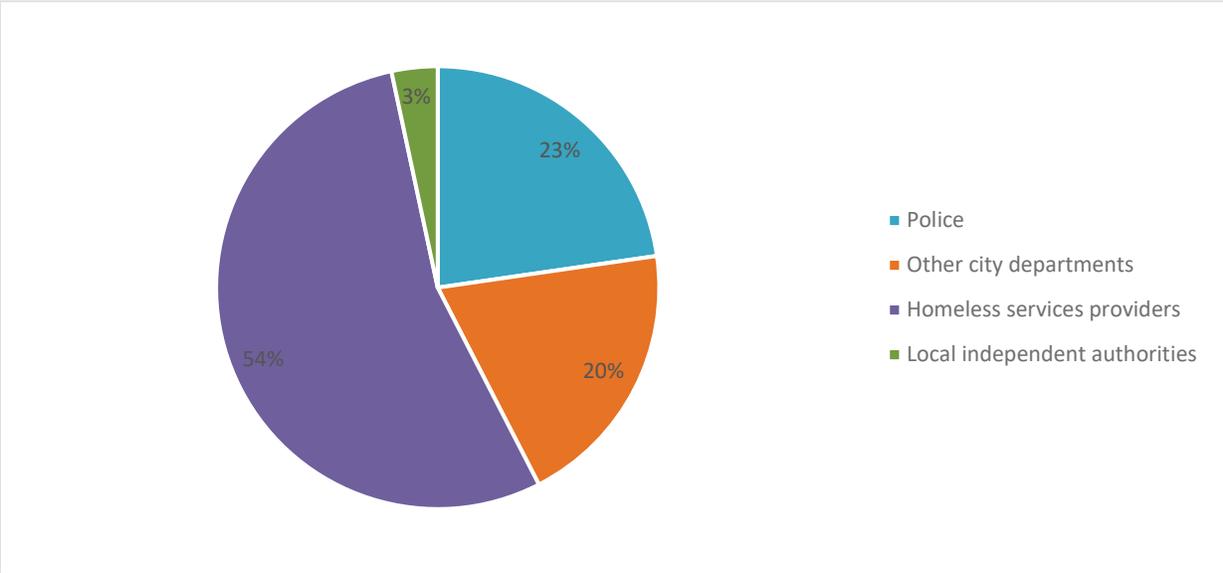
Spending by implementation partners

At least 12 different stakeholders participated in Tacoma’s response to encampments during FY 2019. Those stakeholders included city departments (Neighborhood and Community Services Department, the Tacoma Police Department, the Tacoma Environmental Services’ Solid Waste Department, and Tacoma Public Utilities), Metro Parks Tacoma (which is independent from the city), and five homeless services providers. The participating partners in Tacoma’s encampment response were not necessarily the same entities that funded those efforts. As shown in Exhibit 4, homeless services providers incurred more than one-half (54 percent) of the expenses related to encampment activities, at about \$2.1 million. City departments incurred the large majority of the remainder of expenses (43 percent), at about \$1.7 million. The police department incurred more than half of this, or 23 percent of the total; other city departments accounted for 20 percent. The remaining 3 percent of expenditures were incurred by Metro Parks Tacoma.

Spending by source of funding

Although the City of Tacoma did not directly conduct most encampment-related activities, it is by far the largest funder of the encampment response, spending more than \$4.5 million, or about 97 percent of the total. Some of those costs are funded with a “mental health sales tax,” which applies a 0.1 percent charge to taxable purchases made within the City of Tacoma. The tax has raised revenue of about \$5 to \$6 million annually in recent years, about one-half of which is used for homelessness and housing stability programs. The remaining 3 percent of funding came from the independent park district.

Exhibit 4. Encampment activities by implementation partners

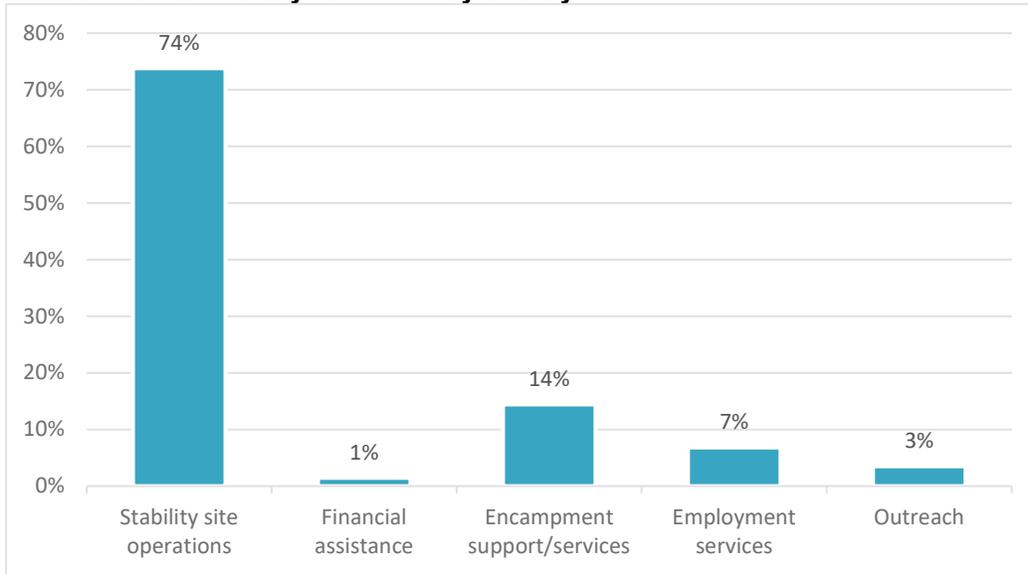


Stability Site expenditures

As noted above, Stability Site operations accounted for about 60 percent of the costs of Tacoma’s encampment response. In addition to site operations and supportive services staff, those expenditures included employment services, transportation for encampment residents, financial assistance such as bus and train fares, and portable hygiene stations and laundry facilities provided exclusively to residents of the Stability Site.

Exhibit 5 shows total Stability Site expenditures by activity. Of the \$2.3 million, operations (including operations and supportive staff, HVAC, and janitorial) made up 74 percent. Encampment support and services (such as pallet shelters, portable hygiene stations, and furnishings) accounted for another 14 percent. Most of the remaining 11 percent was divided between employment services (7 percent) and encampment outreach (including transportation and a program that identifies and assesses individuals who could be referred to the Stability Site) (3 percent). Financial assistance for encampment residents accounted for the remaining 1 percent.

Exhibit 5. Total Stability Site costs by activity



*Totals do not sum due to rounding.

One-time expenditures

In addition to spending for ongoing activities during 2019, the City of Tacoma incurred some costs in prior years that provide additional perspective on the 2019 costs. Those activities include the creation of the mitigation site so that the city could clear the Jungle in 2017; the setup costs for the Stability Site (primarily site prep costs, a large tent structure, and pallet shelters), also incurred in 2017; and an unusually large encampment cleanup conducted by Tacoma Public Utilities in 2018.¹⁶ Those one-time expenditures occurred in different years; they are summarized in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6. City of Tacoma one-time expenditures

Event	Description	Date	Key Stakeholders	Cost
Mitigation site	Creation of a site for residents of the Jungle	May–June 2017 (FY 2017)	City of Tacoma	\$169,286
Stability Site	Setup costs for the Stability Site	2017 (FY 2017)	City of Tacoma	\$900,000

¹⁶ The costs for establishing the Temporary Emergency Micro-Shelters (TEMS) and the 60 additional emergency shelter beds are not included in this analysis because costs will be incurred in FY 2020, outside the range of the study period.

Large encampment cleanup	Clearance and closure of a large encampment	2018 (FY 2018)	Tacoma Public Utilities	\$35,000
--------------------------	---	----------------	-------------------------	----------

Although those efforts may not be repeated in future years, they account for a large commitment of resources from the City of Tacoma and other stakeholders related to encampments.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development and Research
Washington, DC 20410-6000



January 2021