

Shelter Spaces and Homelessness in the Tri-Cities

Homelessness and encampments are complex challenges facing communities across Metro Vancouver and British Columbia. While Coquitlam continues to address immediate public safety concerns related to encampments, the broader issues of housing, mental health, and addiction services remain the responsibility of the Province.

This FAQ document aims to provide answers to common questions about the Gordon Avenue encampment, the City's role and the resources available to support unhoused individuals.

The Gordon Avenue Encampment

What factors are contributing to the encampment along Gordon Avenue?

Homelessness in the Tri-Cities has increased 86% since 2020, reflecting challenges in areas such as housing affordability, poverty, mental health and addiction, which are primarily the responsibility of the Province.

The crisis is being felt more acutely in our region due to the net loss of shelter and support services for the unhoused in recent months, including:

- Permanent closure of the expansion shelter at the SureStay Hotel, which had provided approximately 20 – 35 beds;
- Reduction of temporary shelter beds at 3030 Gordon from 30 down to 12 beds;
- No Emergency Weather Response (EWR) location;
- Reduced winter shelter program at local churches and associated outreach services, which has decreased from the standard 6 months to 4 months;
- Outreach service providers in the Tri-Cities receiving little to no funding through the Federal Reaching Home Program for new or enhanced services; and,
- The end of Provincial grant funding for essential community service providers.

The Province has not replaced the spaces lost. The increasing number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and the reduction of spaces and services, along with compounding affordability, mental health, and poisoned drug supply crises have contributed to the development of an encampment along Gordon Avenue.

Why hasn't the City done more to prevent encampments in our community?

The homelessness crisis in our region reflects broader challenges, such as the rising cost of housing, food insecurity, and gaps in mental health and addiction services. While the City works to address public safety concerns and advocate for more resources, long-term solutions require substantial provincial coordination and investments in housing and support services by the province.

Why can't the City of Coquitlam just remove the encampment?

The City is limited in their ability to legally remove and prevent the reestablishment of the encampment without a court injunction, as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the right to shelter in public spaces when no accessible shelter alternatives are available. Without enough shelter spaces, the City is limited in its ability to enforce removal of the encampment while also balancing its public safety and legal obligations as well as a compassionate approach to those in need.

What is the City doing to monitor the Gordon Avenue encampment?

The City is closely monitoring the encampment through regular patrols by Bylaw Enforcement and coordinated efforts with Coquitlam RCMP and Coquitlam Fire Rescue. These measures aim to address safety concerns, manage impacts on the surrounding area, and support ongoing communication with residents and businesses.

City Actions and Responsibilities***What actions is the City taking to address the encampment?***

The City is actively managing the immediate impacts of the encampment by coordinating safety measures, conducting regular cleanup efforts, and advocating to the Province for additional housing and support services. City staff also work closely with local agencies and the provincial government to seek long-term solutions to homelessness, including the need for more shelter and supportive housing options.

How is the City supporting the safety of local residents and businesses?

The City has increased patrols, worked with law enforcement, and coordinated efforts to manage litter and other safety concerns around the encampment. While there are limits to what the City can do without more provincial resources, community safety remains the top priority in our response.

How is the City supporting businesses affected by the encampment?

The City engages with local businesses to understand their concerns and provides support through regular communication and resources. Efforts include maintaining cleanliness in commercial areas, offering security advice, and facilitating discussions between business owners and social service providers to address specific issues related to the encampment.

How is the encampment affecting City resources and taxpayer funds?

The encampment requires daily involvement from various City departments, including Bylaw Enforcement, Public Works, and Coquitlam Fire/Rescue and the RCMP. This places a strain on local resources and highlights the need for additional provincial support to address homelessness.

Why hasn't Coquitlam provided portable toilets or sanitation stations at the Gordon Avenue encampment?

Providing portable toilets and sanitation stations is not a simple solution. Past experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted significant challenges, including vandalism, theft, and hazardous materials like drug paraphernalia, which created safety risks for workers and the public. Further, these temporary unsupervised and unsupported facilities may also present safety risks to those using them. The City is working with the Province,

through BC Housing, to explore solutions to address hygiene concerns at the encampment.

How is Coquitlam supporting affordable and supportive housing?

Coquitlam works within its municipal mandate to support affordable and supportive housing by facilitating partnerships, providing funding, and offering land for housing projects that assist vulnerable residents. Broader housing, mental health and addiction services remain the responsibility of the Province. The City is continuing to engage with and advocate to the Province to provide supportive housing and wrap-around supports.

Key contributions by the City include the donation of land for 3030 Gordon Avenue in 2009, the only facility of its kind in the Tri-Cities, and over \$17 million allocated through the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund to create hundreds of affordable and supportive housing units. The City has also committed \$14 million to future projects, with plans to deliver more than 1,300 new units through additional funding requests. To learn more, visit coquitlam.ca/Housing.

What is being done to address the lack of supportive housing in Coquitlam?

The City has consistently pushed for additional supportive housing through partnerships with BC Housing and local organizations. Despite these efforts, more provincial funding and resources are needed to meet the growing demand and ensure appropriate services are available for residents in need.

How does the City collaborate with other organizations to address homelessness?

Coquitlam is an active member of the Tri-Cities Homelessness and Housing Task Group, which includes various non-profit organizations and agencies working across Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody to respond to homelessness. The Task Group provides resources like the Tri-Cities Street Survival Guide and coordinates efforts to support vulnerable residents.

Shelter Spaces and Support Services

Is there a plan to provide more shelter or housing options in Coquitlam?

The City continues to advocate to the province for more shelter and supportive housing options through partnerships with the Province and local agencies. Coquitlam has repeatedly requested additional resources to meet the growing needs of the community.

What temporary shelter is available to local unhoused individuals during extreme cold weather?

In the Tri-Cities, two primary temporary shelter options have traditionally been available during extreme cold weather:

- **Extreme Weather Response Shelter:** Typically Extreme Weather Response shelters are opened in communities during the winter season on the worst weather nights of the year. While the Tri-Cities has had an Extreme Weather Response program in the past, due to location constraints, these shelter beds will not be available in the Tri-Cities during the 2024-2025 winter season.

To locate Extreme Weather Response shelters in other communities, use the map at <https://smap.bchousing.org/> or contact the BC211 Shelter and Street Helpline

(<https://shelters.bc211.ca/bc211shelters>) for information about open shelter services.

- **Tri-Cities Winter Shelter Program (Cold Wet Weather Mat Program):** Operated by Progressive Housing Society in local churches, this program offers temporary overnight shelter during the winter months. The program has faced challenges in recent years due to increased demand and the complex needs of unhoused individuals, including mental health and addiction. For the 2024-2025 winter season the program will be open for four months (December – March) rather than the usual six month (October – March) time period. The City continues to advocate for provincial intervention to sustain and regularize these vital resources.

The lack of a local Extreme Weather Response shelter program for the 2024-2025 winter season and the shorter opening period of the Tri-Cities Winter Shelter Program highlight the urgent need for the province to provide additional support and resources to assist unhoused individuals during extreme cold weather.

How is the City preparing for the winter season regarding encampment residents?

The City supports the Tri-Cities winter shelter program traditionally hosted by local churches, which has provided temporary overnight shelter during winter for over 15 years. However, the program is at risk due to the complex needs of unhoused individuals. Without provincial intervention, this vital program will be operating at reduced capacity for the 2024/2025 winter season and may not be sustainable in the future.

Why doesn't the City provide temporary overnight shelters during extreme cold or rain?

In British Columbia, the responsibility for housing, including emergency shelters, primarily falls under provincial jurisdiction. The Province, through agencies like BC Housing, funds and manages these services. While municipalities like Coquitlam support these efforts by facilitating land use, zoning, and local partnerships, the City does not have the staffing resources or expertise needed to operate shelters independently. The City continues to advocate for increased provincial support to address the needs of unhoused individuals during extreme weather conditions.

Why are winter/cold-wet weather shelter programs at risk?

The winter/cold-wet weather shelter program has traditionally provided temporary overnight shelter during winter in local churches supported by volunteers. However, increased demand and the complex needs of unhoused individuals, have strained the program's capacity. The City has advocated for provincial intervention to sustain this vital resource for the 2024/2025 winter season and beyond.

What kind of housing and shelter does the 3030 Gordon facility include?

Currently, 3030 Gordon is the only supportive housing in the Tri-Cities. The facility includes 30 supportive housing units, 30 shelter units (i.e., individual shelter rooms), and 12 shelter beds in dorms.

What emergency shelters are available in Coquitlam?

- **3030 Gordon Shelter:** Operated by RainCity Housing, this facility provides 30 private shelter beds and 12 year-round dorm-style beds, along with on-site support services. For more information, visit RainCity Housing or call 604-474-0435.
- **Tri-Cities Winter Shelter Program:** During colder months, additional shelter spaces are available through local churches, operated by Progressive Housing Society. Please call 604-209-1587 to arrange pick-up. Pick-up locations include Lincoln SkyTrain Station, Kingsway near Jane Street, and Pheasant Drive south of Superstore.

Community Concerns and Reporting***What should I do if I feel unsafe or experience issues near the encampment?***

If you feel unsafe or encounter issues near the encampment, please report your concerns to [Coquitlam RCMP's non-emergency line at 604-945-1550](tel:604-945-1550) or the City's [Bylaw Enforcement](#). For emergencies, contact 9-1-1 immediately.

How can I report concerns about property damage or litter around the encampment?

You can report property damage, litter or other public concerns to the City's [Bylaw Enforcement](#) team. The City coordinates regular cleanups and maintenance to manage these impacts.

Who is responsible for addressing homelessness and supporting encampment residents?

While the City provides some services, the Province is responsible for funding and delivering homelessness support, mental health support and addiction services, and supportive housing. Coquitlam continues to advocate for increased provincial resources to address the root causes of homelessness in our community.

The Tri-Cities is represented by five Members of the Legislative Assembly:

- Coquitlam-Burke Mountain – [Honourable Jodie Wickens](mailto:Jodie.Wickens.MLA@leg.bc.ca) (Jodie.Wickens.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- Coquitlam-Maillardville – [Jennifer Blatherwick](mailto:Jennifer.Blatherwick.MLA@leg.bc.ca) (Jennifer.Blatherwick.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- New Westminster-Coquitlam – [Honourable Jennifer Whiteside](mailto:Jennifer.Whiteside.MLA@leg.bc.ca) (Jennifer.Whiteside.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- Port Moody-Burquitlam – [Honourable Rick Glumac](mailto:Rick.Glumac.MLA@leg.bc.ca) (Rick.Glumac.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- Port Coquitlam – [Honourable Mike Farnworth](mailto:Mike.Farnworth.MLA@leg.bc.ca) (Mike.Farnworth.MLA@leg.bc.ca)

I would like to do more to help, how can I access information about services for unhoused individuals?

The City provides resources such as the [Tri-Cities Street Survival Guide \(PDF\)](#), which offers information on essential services, including shelter, food programs, and health resources. Additionally, BC211 is a free, confidential service that connects people to local resources, including housing, shelter, mental health support, and other essential services. Dial or text 2-1-1, or visit [BC211](https://bc211.ca).

Learn more at coquitlam.ca/Homelessness