



Report of the Camping & Storage Ordinance Stakeholder Group

Background

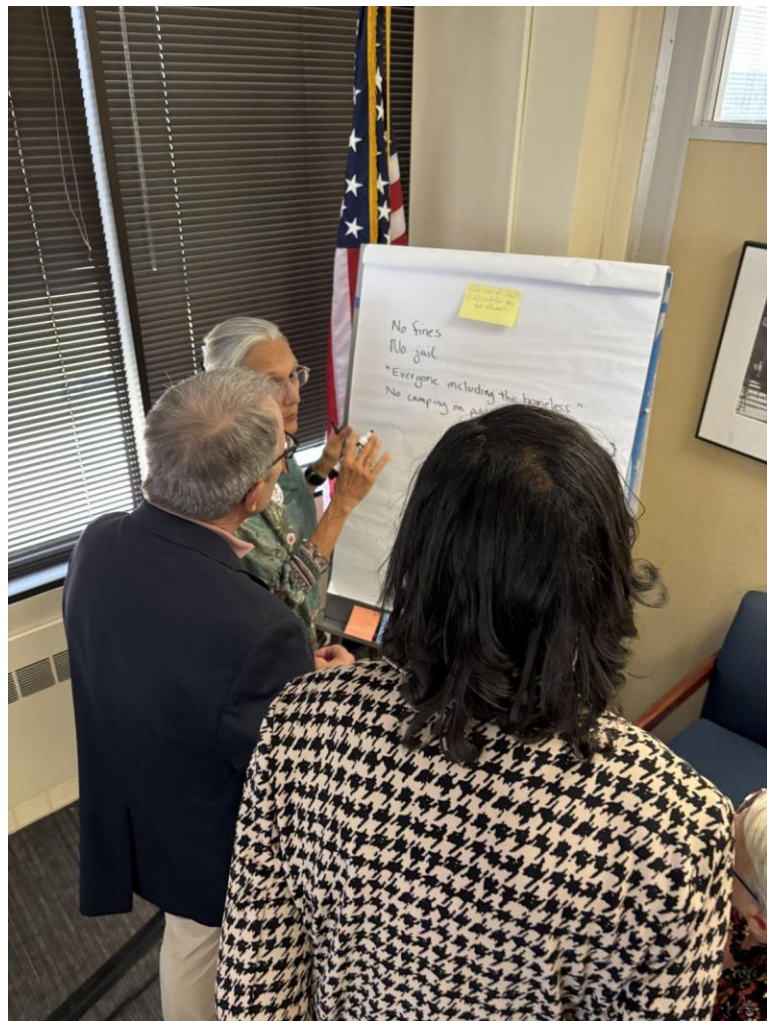
- The Camping and Storage Ordinance was introduced last year to address problematic behaviors occurring in the City's right of ways, specifically in front of business and neighborhood properties
- The original ordinance proposed a Misdemeanor 1 penalty for individuals or groups that would not leave the right of way after being asked to do so
- This ordinance was labeled by many outside of government as a "homeless" ordinance, although the ordinance did not specify it as applying only to homeless individuals
- There was widespread concern that the ordinance sought to "criminalize" homelessness
- Council and staff believed there was potentially a way to address the legitimate concerns of businesses and homeowners while also addressing the problems which lead to the original draft ordinance
- A Stakeholder committee made up of residents and business owners that had both supported and objected to the initial ordinance was convened

“How Might We...address public concerns about safety and cleanliness while upholding the dignity and rights of people experiencing homelessness?”

Goal

Our goal was to co-design actionable, humane, and community-supported alternatives to the City of Hampton's proposed camping and storage ordinance. To do this, we facilitated listening and co-design sessions with a diverse committee of stakeholders—including residents, individuals with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, business leaders, public safety officials, and city staff.

Through this process, we aimed to surface insights, build empathy, and generate viable recommendations that respected human dignity, addressed public concerns, and aligned with Hampton's values as a compassionate city.



Problem Frame

Public discomfort and safety concerns related to behaviors associated with individuals perceived to be homeless (e.g., public urination, nudity, obstruction of right-of-way) have prompted a proposed ordinance aimed at addressing these issues. While the intent is not to criminalize homelessness, the approach must be carefully considered to avoid unintended consequences that could further marginalize vulnerable individuals. **The challenge is to develop a community-informed, compassionate, and effective response that upholds public dignity, health, and safety—while advancing solutions that reflect our shared values and work for all residents.**

Design Steps

- 1. Small groups to share concerns and generate ideas for amending the camping and storage ordinance — to develop practical, compassionate solutions grounded in lived experience and community input**
- 2. Align on the term “Camping & Storage Ordinance” which helped clarify the conversation scope and shift the narrative away from broader homelessness debates toward the specific policy at hand**
- 3. Work on changes that affirmed the importance of having a camping ordinance while shifting the tone toward a more balanced and compassionate approach**

Recommendations

1. Start with proper tone and framing:

- Any ordinance should reflect a service-first approach rather than an enforcement-first one.
 - We aim to lead with care and compassion, not punishment
-

Recommendations

2. Clarify intent — compassionate compliance, protect the community while never giving up on the individual

- Most people will accept housing when it is safe, dignified, and appropriate. A small number repeatedly refuse help because they are deeply traumatized.
 - For this group, the answer is not simple tolerance nor simple enforcement — it requires balanced strategy.
 - We will pair persistent outreach with a variety of housing options and insist that public spaces remain safe and usable.
 - When someone's behavior is dangerous or disruptive, we address that behavior directly through outreach/co-responder teams and community court programs if that can be worked out. No one has the right to endanger others, and no one should be abandoned.
-

Recommendations

3. Review whether or not our goals can be accomplished through a City policy versus an ordinance

- Some cities, most recently Newport News, have adopted policies that attempt to achieve the same goals
 - This is the preferred approach
 - However, if the City Attorney's Office determines such a policy would not be enforceable without additional ordinance adoption, an ordinance will be acceptable
-

Recommendations

4. Suggested Changes to Ordinance

- Incorporate language that makes clear that law enforcement shall prioritize voluntary compliance and relocation to lawful areas or shelter
 - If enforcement is needed, because voluntary compliance is not achieved, the following steps must be taken first:
 - Notification of the prohibition
 - Offer of service
 - Coordination with outreach workers to offer the services and alternative sleeping locations where reasonably available
-

Recommendations

4. Suggested Changes to Ordinance — continued

- Change the penalty for non-compliance from a Misdemeanor 1 to Misdemeanor 4 for the first violation and Misdemeanor 2 for subsequent violations
 - Misdemeanor 4 does not have any potential jail time implication
 - Misdemeanor 2 does have the potential for jail time, but that also means the individual would get the support of a public defender and access to the Behavioral Health docket
-

Recommendations

5. Ensure sufficient support for emergency sheltering and continue to develop transitional/permanent supportive housing options

- Add funding for temporary hotel stays — as was done during COVID — for those individuals willing to access support while year-round sheltering and/or transitional and permanent housing projects (such as converted hotels and/or tiny home communities) are explored/developed
-

Recommendations

All recommendations were supported by all stakeholders who were present at the final meeting.

How Would Recommendations Be Operationalized

- **If adopted, the Police Chief will provide a training bulletin to all officers that outlines the following procedures:**
 - Complaint is received from that an individual is causing problems on the public right-of way
 - Officer and outreach team visit site to offer services and explain that the individual cannot continue to stay on the public right-of-way, doing the type of activities that caused the problem — the verbal warning and offer of services is documented
 - If a repeat complaint occurs, the officer and outreach team will again visit the individual in question to offer service and ask the individual to leave; if the individual refuses to leave, they will be given a citation for Misdemeanor 4
-

How Would Recommendations Be Operationalized

- **If adopted, the Police Chief will provide a training bulletin to all officers that outlines the following procedures:**
 - Misdemeanor 4 — UP TO a \$250 fine; however, typically the court will explain the issue and give a withhold finding or another warning
 - Third time for the same individual the officer and outreach team will again visit the individual in question to offer service and ask the individual to leave; if the individual refuses to leave, they will be given a citation for a Misdemeanor 2
 - Misdemeanor 2 — UP TO \$1000 fine and 6 months in jail; however, this level was selected because it is the level at which a public defender is assigned and access to the Behavioral Health Court is opened
-

What is Available to Be Offered by Outreach Team?

- **Outreach team includes social services and community services board personnel**
 - **Can offer temporary housing**
 - **Can offer access to mental health and substance abuse services**
 - **Can offer employment services**
 - **Can assist with documentation (such as IDS, SSN, etc.) needed for employment**
-

What Else is Being Considered?

- **This ordinance is not intended to be the homeless strategy — it is intended to help with a very small group causing issues in our community**
 - **Council has provided additional resources for temporary housing while staff provides the services both in the current and in the proposed FY 27 budget under consideration**
 - **Council is pursuing tiny home transitional housing units in the FY27 budget**
-