Tent City Narratives: A Rights-Based Approach to Encampments as a Temporary Housing Solution

by

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A Masters Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Urban Planning

McGill University, Montréal, Quebec, Canada

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Urban Planning

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August 26, 2024

Abstract

Tens of thousands of individuals across Canada experience homelessness each night. The housing crisis and systemic failures in the shelter system have forced many unhoused folks to live outside, resulting in the growing prevalence of encampments in Canadian cities. Encampments can provide safety, autonomy, and dignity to residents, and when in groups, they foster community and mutual support. However, these are challenging places to live, often marked by poor conditions and suffering, as residents grapple with substance use, mental health, trauma, and the complications of communal living. By creating makeshift solutions to the housing crisis, residents are addressing government shortcomings themselves and exercising self-determination. However, governments remain adamant that encampments will not be tolerated. This firm stance has led to violent evictions and encampment clearances, upheld by the strict enforcement of by-laws that criminalize unhoused individuals for meeting their basic needs in public space. These punitive policies have isolated unhoused individuals, pushing them into unsafe locations and deepening their vulnerability and exclusion. The existence of encampments is a testament to the State's failure to provide adequate housing, violating both international and federal human rights law. Furthermore, forced evictions undermine residents' claims of the right to adequate housing, emphasizing the urgent need for policy change to protect residents' rights and dignity. Our project aimed to understand how unhoused individuals experience and shape encampments as complex sites of survival, the impact of government policy on the ground, and the potential for housing justice, as informed by those with lived experience. Our research centred the perspectives of unhoused individuals, who are often excluded from formal decision-making processes but are the most affected by the top-down policies that govern public space and their right to use it. This involved extensive fieldwork and meaningful engagement and collaboration with residents, valuing their knowledge and perspectives as experts on their own lives and needs. Our objective was to develop a series of recommendations for planners and policymakers to support encampments, while careful not to position them as an acceptable substitute for adequate housing or a permanent feature of emergency housing responses. Our findings are presented in five narrative accounts of encampments across Montréal, told through the stories and voices of residents. The paper concludes with a series of resident-informed and rights-based recommendations to support encampments as a temporary housing solution.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. Anna Kramer, for her guidance, expertise, and support; my co-supervisor Dr. David Wachsmuth, for his valuable feedback; to Liz Singh, Ann-Catherine Lamonde, and Geoff Meugens for their thoughtful collaboration and perspective during the fieldwork; to Adri Stark for her insights and encouragement; and most of all, to everyone who shared their stories and time with us over the summer.

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1. Introduction

Tens of thousands of individuals across Canada experience homelessness each night (Gaetz et al., 2016). As of 2022, there were nearly five thousand unhoused individuals in Montréal alone, representing a 33% increase over four years (Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux [MSSS], 2023). Canada has the capacity to address homelessness but suffers from a lack of political will, poor coordination within and across governments, and ineffective resource allocation (Office of the Federal Housing Advocate [OFHA], 2024). Municipalities, while on the frontlines, often lack the resources and authority needed to respond effectively and with a human rights-based approach (OFHA, 2024). The City of Montréal has repeatedly criticized the Québec government for ignoring the housing crisis and neglecting social housing, arguing that insufficient resources have left them powerless (Leblanc et al., 2022). In the meantime, Montréal relies on a prolonged stopgap approach, warehousing individuals in unsafe and overcrowded shelters (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024). These emergency accommodations and services perform a crucial role in meeting the immediate needs of many unhoused folks, but they are not effective in reducing or ending homelessness (Homeless Hub, n.d.), nor are they equally available, accessible, or suitable for everyone (OFHA, 2024).

Systemic failures within the overstrained shelter system and the burgeoning housing affordability crisis have forced many unhoused individuals to live outside, often in public space (Flynn et al., 2022). Facing harsh conditions, many folks set up encampments, which we define as one or more individuals living in tents or makeshift shelters on public or privately owned land, usually without permission. Approximately one-quarter of the unhoused population across Canada now lives in these settings (Infrastructure Canada, 2023). Encampments are a means for unhoused folks to claim their right to adequate housing, meet their basic needs, and exercise autonomy and self-determination (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024). They can offer individuals a semblance of comfort, stability and dignity, and when in groups, may provide folks with security, community, and mutual support. However, encampments are challenging places to live, marked by poor conditions, chaos, and suffering, as residents grapple with substance use, mental health, trauma, and the complications of communal living. At the intersection of multiple crises, encampments are a testament to governments' failure to provide adequate housing, health care, and support (Flynn et al., 2022).

Encampment residents are actively creating their own makeshift responses to the housing crisis (Flynn et al., 2022). However, the actions of the municipal and provincial governments demonstrate their adamance that organized encampments are not a viable solution (Leblanc et al., 2022). This firm stance has led to the forced eviction of encampment residents, dismantling of their shelters, dispossession of their personal belongings, and upheaval of their communities, often through violent and costly raids by the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) (Leblanc et al., 2022). These actions are prompted by the disproportionate enforcement of municipal by-laws, provincial codes, and other regulations that prohibit shelters and criminalize unhoused individuals for performing basic life-sustaining activities in public spaces (Flynn et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2023). Although these laws are ostensibly designed to uphold public order and safety, they make it nearly impossible for unhoused folks to meet their basic needs outdoors without facing perpetual harassment, instability, and legal repercussions (Flynn et al., 2022). Rather than addressing homelessness, the government's punitive approach has further isolated unhoused

individuals, forcing them into remote and potentially hazardous locations, thereby deepening their suffering, systemic exclusion, and entrenched vulnerability (Flynn et al., 2022).

Adequate housing refers to that which is available, affordable, accessible, habitable, suitable, culturally appropriate, and within a reasonable distance from essential services (OFHA, 2024). The existence of encampments reveals the failure of Canadian governments to fulfill their legal obligation to ensure access to such housing, as mandated by the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* and the *National Housing Strategy Act* (Farha & Schwan, 2020; OFHA, 2024). In essence, each encampment represents a violation of its residents' right to adequate housing. However, this is a two-fold crisis. As articulated by Leilani Farha, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, and her lead investigator Kaitlin Schwan, encampments are "instances of both human rights *violations* of those who are forced to rely on them for their homes, as well as human rights *claims*, advanced in response to violations of the right to housing" (2000, p. 15). The latter points to the violence, harassment, and forced evictions that residents endure while striving to create and claim shelter and safety for themselves. There are clear and harmful discrepancies between the right to adequate housing enshrined in international and federal law and the lived realities of encampment residents (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024). These human rights concerns are echoed by advocates on the front lines of preventing and ending homelessness, who call on the government to rethink its policies and improve supports. According to Leblanc et al. (2023), it is "inconceivable to maintain the status quo when people are denied their rights, such as the right to housing, safety, dignity, and life" (p. 7).

Despite the growing prevalence of homeless encampments across urban and rural Canada, these spaces remain an understudied phenomenon (Flynn et al., 2022). This research project sought to understand how unhoused individuals experience and shape encampments as complex sites of survival, the impact of government policy on the ground, and the potential for housing justice, as informed by those with lived experience. Importantly, our research centred the experience and perspectives of unhoused folks, who are often excluded from formal decision-making processes, but are the most impacted, or targeted by, the top-down policies that govern public space and their right to use it. This required meaningful engagement and collaboration with encampment residents, valuing their knowledge and perspective as experts on their own lives and needs (Leblanc et al., 2023). Our findings are presented in narrative accounts, allowing residents to share their stories and experiences in their own words. This blended approach, integrating analysis and storytelling, was used to convey the complexity and nuance of the data while preserving residents' voices and their visions for the inclusive use of public space both intact and in context.

To address gaps in both the literature and the government response to homelessness, our objective was to produce a series of recommendations for planners and policymakers that will protect encampments, improve conditions for the residents, and support their claim of the right to adequate housing. At the same time, while it is important to recognize the effort and resourcefulness required to maintain an encampment and the resilience of residents who are addressing government shortfalls themselves, it is important to reiterate that makeshift shelters in public space do not replace the need for adequate housing (Farha & Schwan, 2020; Flynn et al., 2022; Leblanc et al., 2023; OFHA, 2024). As such, the proposed policies are intended to support encampments as a temporary solution while residents

wait for housing that meets their needs and systemic issues are addressed, while being careful not to position them as an acceptable long-term substitute for adequate housing or a permanent fixture in the emergency response to homelessness. Ultimately, this research is motivated by an understanding that considerable changes to the current government policies and practices are imperative to support the human rights of people experiencing homelessness.

The paper begins with a brief overview of encampments in Canada, before examining them through the lens of international and federal human rights law. It then unpacks the management of homelessness and encampments across three strands and scales. The first introduces the mechanisms of policing homelessness in Canada, the second reveals the criminalization of unhoused individuals in Montréal, and the third reviews the academic literature on strategies for managing homelessness in the North American context. The final introductory section underscores the integral role of meaningful engagement with encampment residents in rights-based responses and research, followed by a methods section, with an emphasis on how we prioritized lived experience throughout our research process. The body of the paper is comprised of five[1] narrative accounts of encampments across Montréal, told through the stories and voices of those who live and spend time in these spaces. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the key themes emerging from residents' stories followed by a series of policy recommendations to foster inclusive public space and support encampments as a temporary solution to the lack of affordable and adequate housing.

[1] This version of the paper includes the first five of the ten narrative accounts that will be produced from this research.

2. Encampments in Context

2.1. Mass Homelessness in Canada

Mass homelessness in Canada emerged in the 1980s, following substantial government disinvestment in affordable housing, economic shifts that reduced stable, well-paying jobs, and cuts to social welfare programs and health services nationwide (Gaetz et al., 2016). Since then, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has surged. It is estimated that 35,000 individuals experience homelessness on any given night, with at least 235,000 affected over the course of a year, and 1.3 million having faced homelessness at some point in their lives (Gaetz et al., 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016). Given the challenges of systematically and ethically counting the unhoused population[2] and that these figures predate the COVID-19 pandemic, the actual number of unhoused individuals is almost certainly much higher.[3] A more recent survey suggests that as of 2022, approximately 4,700 people are experiencing visible homelessness in Montréal alone, representing a 33% increase in just four years (MSSS, 2023). The unhoused population, once predominantly a small number of single men, has grown not only in size but also in diversity, with Indigenous peoples, racialized individuals, youth, families, seniors, immigrants, and people identifying as LGBTQ2S+ all more likely to become unhoused (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Canada has the capacity to address the homelessness crisis but suffers from a lack of political will, poor coordination across and within governments, and ineffective resource allocation (OFHA, 2024). Municipalities, while on the frontlines, often lack the resources and authority needed to respond effectively and with a human rights-based approach (OFHA, 2024). In Montréal, the administration has repeatedly criticized the provincial government for ignoring the housing crisis and neglecting the need for social housing, arguing that insufficient resources have left them powerless (Leblanc et al., 2022). Mayor Valérie Plante has frequently voiced frustration over the persistent lack of funding for social housing in provincial budgets (Scott, 2021; Magder, 2023; Laframboise, 2024). "We lack money," she says, "despite good will on the part of the City of Montréal, it is Québec that finances social housing and we need new units" (Scott, 2021, par. 3). In a recent report on encampments in Canada, the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate (OFHA) emphasized the need for provinces and territories to collaborate closely with municipalities, and for the federal government to take a leadership role, underscoring that this national crisis calls for a national response (2024). In the meantime, Montréal, like most Canadian cities, relies on prolonged stopgap measures to address the growing issue of homelessness, namely, warehousing unhoused people in an overstrained and underfunded shelter system or, in some cases, shelter hotels (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024). While these emergency accommodations and services perform a crucial role in meeting the immediate needs of many unhoused individuals, they are not effective in reducing or ending homelessness (Homeless Hub, n.d.). "An emergency response is not the only answer," says James Hughes, CEO of the Old Brewery Mission, which runs one of the largest emergency shelters in Montréal (Leblanc et al., 2022, p. 22). Ultimately, relying on temporary shelters,

[2] Especially folks experiencing homelessness under broader definitions (e.g., provisionally accommodated with relatives, friends, or strangers).
[3] This does not account for those living in inadequate housing, at risk of eviction, or facing landlord harassment and neglect.

intended for short-term stays before individuals are rehoused, can trap people in chronic homelessness and make it harder to access safe and stable housing, especially given the shortage of affordable units (Homeless Hub, n.d.).

As outlined in the OFHA's report on encampments, there are several reasons why someone might not want, or be able to stay in a shelter (2024). First, individuals seeking shelter are routinely turned away due to a shortage of space. Second, living conditions in these overcrowded shelters are often dire, with clients citing theft, violence, and exposure to illnesses, including COVID-19, as some of the many reasons they prefer to live in encampments. Thirdly, shelters are not equally available, accessible, or suitable for all unhoused individuals (OFHA, 2024). They offer little to no autonomy, privacy, security, stability or freedom of movement; impose strict rules on sobriety, schedules, belongings, and length of stay; fail to accommodate couples, families, or pets; present physical barriers for those with disabilities; lack appropriate spaces for people with mental health, sensory, or environmental conditions; and can expose people to substances, violence, and cause or trigger trauma (OFHA, 2024). Additionally, most shelter beds are designated for men, leading to a shortage of gender-specific space and services for women, trans, and gender-diverse individuals, which increases the risk of violence towards them (OFHA, 2024). Finally, many shelters enforce strict admission criteria, particularly around drug use, and are known to ban clients for not meeting these extensive and often unreasonable requirements and expectations, which are challenging for many people living on the street (OFHA, 2024). These abysmal conditions and the systemic failure that characterize shelters violate the government's obligation to provide adequate housing. Ultimately, there is a clear link between the inaccessibility and poor conditions of shelters and the increasing number of encampments, where unhoused individuals are asserting their right to housing in the void created by long-term State failure (OFHA, 2024).

Although encampments have long been a feature of homelessness in Canada, they have become "more numerous, more densely populated, and more visible" in recent years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (Flynn et al., 2022, p. 7). The growth in both the presence and size of encampments was initially attributed to economic factors and diminished shelter capacity during the pandemic. However, due to persistent systemic issues with the shelter system and the lack of progress in addressing the affordable housing crisis, encampments remain the best or only option for many individuals (Flynn et al., 2022). Consequently, an estimated quarter of the unhoused population across urban and rural Canada now lives in outdoor encampments (Infrastructure Canada, 2023). Encampments represent a means for unhoused individuals to claim their right to adequate housing, meet their basic needs, and exercise autonomy and self-determination (OFHA, 2024). In this regard, encampments represent a DIY response to the shortage of affordable housing, offering relative safety, stability, and dignity to Canadians without adequate alternatives. Additionally, many residents have mentioned the mutual support and sense of community they have experienced when living in encampments alongside others facing similar struggles (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024). However, encampments are challenging places to live, marked by poor conditions, chaos, and suffering, as residents grapple with substance use, mental health, trauma, and the complications of communal living. Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the effort and resourcefulness required to sustain an encampment and the resilience of residents who are addressing government shortfalls themselves, it is crucial to reiterate that these makeshift shelters do not replace the need for adequate housing (Farha & Schwan, 2020; Flynn et al., 2022; Leblanc

et al., 2023; OFHA, 2024). As encampments continue to proliferate across Canada, governments must adopt a rights-based approach to housing solutions and their interactions with residents, recognizing that, in the absence of adequate alternatives, individuals have the right to live in encampments (Farha & Schwan, 2020; OFHA, 2024). The following sections elaborate on encampments as both a violation and a claim of the right to adequate housing.

2.2. Encampments and the Right to Adequate Housing

Encampments are a testament to the systemic failure of Canadian governments to uphold their legally-bound human rights obligation to ensure that everyone has access to adequate housing (Farha & Schwan, 2020; OFHA, 2024). Adequate housing refers to that which is available, affordable, accessible, habitable, suitable, culturally appropriate, and within a reasonable distance of essential services (OFHA, 2024). This section will situate encampments in Canada as a violation of the right to adequate housing as articulated in international and federal law.

In 1976, Canada ratified the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), which articulates "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for [themselves] and [their] family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions" (1966, Article 11.1). Over time, Canada has ratified several international treaties that codify the right to adequate housing as it pertains to different contexts, including the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* in 1970, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* in 1981, C*onvention on the Rights of the Child* in 1991, and *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in 2010. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the human rights outlined in the ICESCR and ratified by Canada "extend to all parts of federal States without any limitations or exceptions" (Article 28). Therefore, as Farha and Schwan point out in their proposed national protocol for encampments, all governments in Canada are "equally bound by these obligations" (2020, p. 11). Moreover, the CESCR states that "the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity" (General Comment No. 4, p. 1991).

In 2019, the right to adequate housing was established in Canadian legislation through the National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA). The NHSA was the first piece of federal legislation to formally enshrine housing as a human right, thus aligning national laws with the standards and obligations outlined in the ICESCR four decades earlier. The NHSA states that the Government of Canada's housing policy is to: "(a) recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law; (b) recognize that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities; (c) support improved housing outcomes for the people of Canada; (d) and further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the [ICESCR]" (Section 4, 2019). However, there are clear shortcomings in effectively translating the rights provisions of the ICESCR and NHSA into real-world outcomes. As noted by Flynn et al., in their *Overview of Encampments Across Canada* (2022), the delegation of various elements of housing

policy to provincial and municipal governments that lack corresponding legal and policy framework creates chasms in the implementation of the right to housing. Moreover, the articulated rights have not been considered alongside municipal by-laws, there has been little explanation from the court or governments of how the right to housing applies to encampments, and municipalities have been slow to adopt rights-based approaches (Flynn et al., 2022). Consequently, governments at all levels have failed to provide adequate housing for folks living in encampments.

There are critical discrepancies between the human rights enshrined in international and federal law and the lived realities of encampment residents on the ground. Those living in encampments endure serious threats to their health, security, and overall quality of life. The extreme conditions of these encampments, often devoid of basic necessities such as sanitation, heating, waste disposal, and safe shelter, typically fall far short of international human rights standards (Farha & Schwan, 2020). In essence, each encampment constitutes a direct violation of the residents' adequate right to housing. However, this is a two-fold crisis. As Leilani Farha, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, explains, encampments are "instances of both human rights *violations* of those who are forced to rely on them for their homes, as well as human rights *claims*, advanced in response to violations of the right to housing" (2020, p. 15). The latter alludes to the violence, harassment, and forced evictions that encampment residents face when striving to improve their living conditions in the absence of adequate State support. The following two sections delve into the management of homeless encampments in Canada and Montréal.

2.3. The Management of Encampments in Canada: Laws, Authorities, and Human Rights Violations

In Canada, the policing and regulation of encampments, whether on public or privately owned land, is governed by a complex web of laws and authorities. This section provides an overview of the most notable laws, who holds the power to enforce them, and how they impact encampment residents, through a human rights lens.

Although various laws at different levels of government impose restrictions on encampments and their residents, municipal by-laws are unique in their ability to precisely define what is or is not permissible in public space (Flynn et al., 2022). In this sense, despite being generally regarded as having less authority compared to provincial and criminal statutes, they are tailor-made to regulate the use of public space and by extension, the people who are using it (Flynn et al., 2022). Municipalities across Canada have passed by-laws that have adverse implications for unhoused individuals. For instance, given that many encampments are in public parks, managing them tends to involve by-laws that prohibit or restrict sleeping, camping, or building shelters in these spaces (Flynn et al., 2022). Encampments on private property are subject to different use and access regulations than those on public land, with infractions often addressed through trespass laws, leading to police involvement and the risk of eviction (Flynn et al., 2022). These private spaces often face varying degrees of tolerance from property owners and neighbours, who may or may not lodge complaints. This selective enforcement, where some encampments are tolerated for months or years with accompanying outreach, while others are carelessly dismantled within days, often hinges on the absence or volume of complaints (Flynn et al., 2022). The enforcement of these laws, particularly when it involves forcibly removing folks from public or private spaces without providing safe alternatives, is an urgent human rights issue.

The government response to homeless encampments in Canadian cities, supported by the aforementioned legal tools, has been "overwhelmingly punitive" (Flynn et al., 2022, p. 8). Residents are frequently subjected to violence, harassment, discrimination, and criminalization, and are deprived of their basic necessities (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024). Besides exceptional circumstances, government responses lead to the eviction of encampment residents, forced dismantling of their homes, and the dispossession or destruction of personal belongings (Flynn et al., 2022; Leblanc et al., 2023). People living on the street need safety and stability, but evictions ensure the opposite. Those being evicted are exposed to a greater risk of harm, violence, stress, exhaustion, and trauma as individuals are repeatedly removed from their homes, communities, and support systems, losing the equipment, materials, and resources they count on for survival (Flynn et al., 2022; OFHA, 2024; Leblanc et al., 2023). Rather than reducing homelessness, avoiding this punitive State response has driven unhoused individuals into hidden, potentially dangerous, and remote areas out of reach of essential support services and resources (Flynn et al., 2022).

The management of public space involves a range of personnel with varying levels of legal and administrative authority (Flynn, et al., 2022). This group includes police officers, special constables, bylaw officers, provincial offences officers, park wardens, park ambassadors, parks and recreational staff, private security, construction crews, and emergency responders. While some of these agents have limited policing authority, many can still enforce by-laws and trespass laws. Unlike the traditional model of law enforcement carried out predominantly by police officers, this array of actors introduces complexity and informality into the regulation of encampments, complicating efforts to uphold human rights (Flynn et al., 2022). Allison Evans (2022) sought to demystify the convoluted role of the local state in governing public space, particularly public parks, and the ambiguities around enforcement and encampment clearances. Through a document analysis and interviews with disparate stakeholders (e.g., activists, City staff, and developers), Evans identified a prevailing City policy of clearances and the dispersal of unhoused folks to less visible areas. According to Evans (2022), City staff believe encampments do not belong in parks, viewing them as incompatible with the normative visions and expectations of these spaces held by the predominantly white, middle-class constituents who use them. These views have led to violent evictions and clearances, supported by various City agencies and upheld by an assortment of legislative and regulatory frameworks that criminalize visible poverty and life-sustaining activities in public space. In this context, the rights and basic survival needs of encampment residents are rendered illegal through municipal ordinances (Evans, 2022).

As discussed, the necessary existence of encampments reflects the failure of Canadian governments to uphold the right to adequate housing. Given the lack of adequate alternatives, encampments must be recognized as rights claims, where residents have created shelter and safety for themselves, exercising autonomy and self-determination (Flynn et al., 2022). As such, the de facto response of Canadian governments to evict residents and dismantle their homes without providing safe alternatives represents a violent escalation of their ongoing infringement on residents' human rights. According to Leblanc et al. (2024), it is "inconceivable to maintain the status quo when people are denied their rights, such as the right to housing, safety, dignity, and life" (p. 7). In light of the untenable realities on the ground, the OFHA has urged all levels of government to ensure that their laws, by-laws, and regulations do not destabilize encampments or their residents or exacerbate the risk of harm or violence toward them. Additionally, the

OFHA emphasizes that the role of law enforcement should be minimized in responding to encampments and that practices such as surveillance, harassment, and the confiscation of personal belongings must stop. Ultimately, new measures must be adopted to respect the dignity and human rights of unhoused individuals (OFHA, 2024).

2.4. Criminalizing Homelessness in Montréal: Anti-Homeless By-Laws that Govern Public Space

Public spaces in Montréal are subject to strict regulations (Fortin, 2018). Numerous by-laws can be used to manage homelessness in these areas, with some directly targeting encampments on public property and the basic life-sustaining activities within them. Although these laws are ostensibly designed to maintain public order and safety, they can prompt the disruption, ticketing, and displacement of encampment residents, exacerbating their already precarious situations and leading to the loss of their homes, communities, and personal belongings.

The *By-law concerning parks under the authority of Montréal city council* (B 10-020) and its amendments (B 10-020-1 and B 10-020-02); the *By-law concerning parks under the authority of the urban agglomeration council of Montréal* (RCG 10-016) and its amendments (RCG 10-016-1 and RCG 10-016-2); and the *By-law concerning parks* (R.B.C.M. c. P-3), impose stringent restrictions on the use of Montréal's parks and green spaces. These laws explicitly prohibit camping, remaining in parks after closing hours, sleeping overnight, or installing obstructive equipment such as tents, tarps, and other makeshift shelters - directly targeting encampments and providing legal grounds for their removal. Additionally, it is prohibited to stray off designated paths onto grass, lawns, or natural environments not intended for use, thereby preventing informal camping spots; to use, move, or alter street furniture for unintended purposes, such as sleeping on benches; or to access parks through unofficial entrances and exits, such as holes in fences. Open fires, barbecues, and stoves used for heating and cooking are banned, unless in designated picnic areas where encampments are unlikely to be tolerated. It is also prohibited to bathe oneself or their pet; commit indecent acts such as urinating or defecating; use offensive language; or behave in a manner that disrupts the peace and tranquillity for other users. These by-laws criminalize basic survival activities, such as building encampments, thus denying residents safety, stability, and their self-made semblance of adequate housing, in violation of their fundamental human rights.

The *By-law concerning cleanliness and protection of public property and street furniture* (R.B.C.M. c. P-12.2), the *By-law concerning peace and order on public property* (R.B.C.M. c. P-1), and the *by-law concerning noise* (R.B.C.M. c B-3) cover similar ground but extend the scope of restrictions to include all areas of the public domain, including sidewalks, public squares, and sections of roads. These bylaws introduce additional provisions that apply to encampments, specifying that no one is permitted to leave garbage or debris on public property. Broad by-law definitions of trash can be easily misconstrued to include personal belongings, shelter materials, means of transport, and survival equipment relied upon by unhoused individuals. Regarding behaviour and freedom of movement, these laws prohibit loitering or standing still without cause on all public thoroughfares, including sidewalks; lying down or loitering while intoxicated in any public space; consuming alcohol on public property, or in a park without an accompanying meal; or making disruptive noises, be that crying, yelling, or singing. These bylaws reveal how

diverting attention and resources from the structural causes of homelessness, such as the housing and healthcare crises, the City criminalizes unhoused individuals and encampments in public spaces, reframing their presence as a disturbance or cleanliness issue that must be legally enforced under the pretense of public order and safety.

The by-laws enacted by Montréal's boroughs, public transportation authorities, and the provisions in provincial codes can all play an outsized role in managing homelessness. The *By-law pertaining to civic behaviour, Respect, and cleanliness, Ville-Marie* (CA-24-085), outlines a familiar set of rules for public space in downtown Montréal (Ville-Marie), where many unhoused individuals live or visit to access the concentration of homelessness services. Similarly, by-laws enacted by the Société de Transport de Montréal (STM), the city's public transit agency, impact unhoused individuals by regulating their behaviour, restricting their movement, and limiting their access to last-resort shelter and warmth. The *By-law Regarding the Terms and Conditions on the Possession and Use of Any Transit Fare Issued by the STM* (STM R-105) mandates fare payment for entry into buildings or vehicles, creating a barrier for unhoused individuals who cannot afford to ride. Once inside, the *By-law on the standards of safety and conduct to be observed by persons in the rolling stock and buildings operated by or for the STM* (STM R-036) prohibits obstructing the movement of others; lying down on seats, benches, or the ground; being barefoot; consuming alcohol; or making disruptive noises such as crying, yelling, or singing. These bylaws contribute to the exclusion of unhoused individuals from public spaces and essential public services, leaving them with fewer and fewer safe spaces to exist. Finally, the provincial *Highway Safety Code* (RSQ c. C-24.2), although primarily focused on motorists and traffic legislation, also regulates the behaviour of pedestrians and cyclists, affecting the movement and work of unhoused individuals in the city. The code mandates the use of sidewalks and designated crossings and prohibits jaywalking and the use of roadways to deal with vehicle occupants. These regulations criminalize panhandling, squeegeeing, and street-based sex work in these spaces - activities that provide informal income for many unhoused individuals and encampment residents - further undermining their ability to sustain themselves.

The State's failure to provide adequate housing leaves a glaring service gap, and the City, through these bylaws, criminalizes individuals' efforts to fill it. These laws create an urban environment that is hostile to unhoused individuals by framing their presence as an issue of public order and facilitating their banishment through punitive measures and fines. Essentially, by making it illegal to experience homelessness and establish encampments in public space, these laws define the conditions that make survival nearly impossible without facing perpetual instability, fines, and legal repercussions. For instance, individuals who violate the arsenal of city-wide and borough by-laws can face fines ranging from $100 to $300 for a first offence, $500 for a second, and $1000 for subsequent offences, while STM fines vary from $50 to $500. Explicitly targeting encampments, survival, and consumption, these fines disproportionately affect unhoused individuals, who are often unable to pay them, resulting in financial burdens, increased interactions with the criminal justice system, and risk of police violence (Knox et al., 2023). In a legal review of Montréal's bylaws, Knox et al. (2023) found that nearly 40% of all tickets for municipal bylaw infractions are issued to unhoused individuals, even though they make up less than 1% percent of the population. Thus, through the threat and disproportionate enforcement of evictions and fines, Montréal's legal and regulatory

approach contributes to the systemic exclusion and entrenched vulnerability of unhoused individuals, driving them out of heavily policed public space into unsafe shelters or hidden, remote, and potentially dangerous locations.

According to Knox et al., (2023), these by-laws contribute to the systemic oppression of unhoused or precariously housed individuals and breach quasi-constitutional human rights legislation and the Quebec Charter. Knox et al., (2023) advocate for legal and policy reform to align municipal by-laws with basic human rights standards to address their inequitable impact on people experiencing homelessness. This perspective is supported by Laniyonu & Brais (2023), whose analysis of SPVM officers' attitudes revealed widespread skepticism that ticketing and arresting unhoused people would solve anything. Instead, SPVM officers acknowledged that organizations serving unhoused groups are better suited for intervention and frontline work and supported their expansion (Laniyonu & Brais, 2023). Nevertheless, interactions with the unhoused have become a growing part of routine police work in Montréal, with fines and citations rising eight-fold between 1994 and 2018 (Bellot et al., 2021). Laniyonu & Braise (2023) suggest that policymakers in Montréal should explore and implement programs that re-evaluate police interactions with unhoused individuals and consider alternative municipally-funded resources. Additionally, the Federal Housing Advocate (2024) recently called for the de-emphasized role of police and by-law officers in the response to encampments, urging for clear directives to end the confiscation of belongings, surveillance, and harassment, which infringe upon residents' human rights. Ultimately, the literature calls for a shift away from punitive and discriminatory policing strategies and by-laws that criminalize the existence and survival of unhoused individuals to better support communities living outdoors as they exercise their rights to housing and the use of public space.

2.5. Shelters to State-Sanctioned Tent Wards: A Review of Ethnographic Ressearch in the North America

The previous section reviewed the anti-homeless by-laws and quality-of-life policing strategies that adversely affect unhoused individuals in Montréal. This section takes a broader look at the management of homelessness across North America, drawing on academic literature informed by long-term ethnographic fieldwork in encampments.

In cities across North America, the enforcement of municipal ordinances and the removal of unhoused individuals from public space has forced them into crowded, underfunded, and unsafe shelters (Speer, 2018). These shelters function as the primary site for the management of homelessness, rooted in a history of regulating poverty through punitive mechanisms, often overlapping with the functions of jails (Speer, 2018). In the OFHA's recent report on encampments in Canada, several individuals with lived experience of homelessness described shelters as having "prison-like conditions" (2024, p. 12). In this sense, the management of homelessness across North America can be situated within a broader context of mass incarceration, highlighting a shift from the welfare state to punitive institutions. In response to the carceral nature of shelters and the numerous reasons that unhoused individuals avoid them, the discourse on supporting encampments often weighs the prospects and pitfalls of legalizing them.

Jamie Speer (2018) examined instances where U.S. cities have begun to tolerate or even legalize encampments, marking moments of departure from shelters as the predominant site and strategy for managing homelessness. To identify this pattern, Speer (2018) conducted three months of ethnographic fieldwork in shelters and encampments

in Fresno, California, and interviewed twenty-four encampment residents, homelessness officials, and homeless rights activists. Speer (2018) found that sanctioned “tent wards” can provide some autonomy, security, community, and privacy for unhoused individuals, suggesting that legalization could be a viable policy direction to better support encampment residents. However, employing strategies to maintain control and closely govern the lives of residents, these camps are often “quasi-carceral” environments linked to law enforcement and managed by outside authorities (Speer, 2018). They often feature strict rules, regulations, and inspections - including background checks, screening, and surveillance (Herring & Lutz, 2015; Mitchell, 2016; Speer, 2018) - mirroring the carceral shelter system and anti-homeless policies that encampment residents are actively trying to evade. This underscores the risks of State co-optation of encampments and the slippery slope of increased institutionalization (Herring, 2014).

Chris Herring and Manuel Lutz (2015) investigated the emergence of legalized large-scale encampments in the U.S. through a comparative study of Seattle, Washington, and Fresno, California, based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews. They found that municipalities have positioned these sanctioned encampments as legitimate institutions of social welfare, offering an alternative to traditional shelters and in some cases providing a sense of self-sufficiency and self-worth for their residents (Herring & Lutz, 2015). However, they argue that City officials’ tolerance of encampments should not be misconstrued as benevolence. Instead, encampments serve as strategic spatial tools for managing the poor at lower costs amid welfare austerity and the expansion of anti-homeless by-laws (Herring & Lutz, 2015). Their analysis illustrates how legalizing and tolerating encampments is not necessarily a form of support. Rather, it is a crisis response to the shortcomings of current care policies and the criminalization of homelessness, underlining the need for wholesale policy reform (Herring & Lutz, 2015).

Having studied homelessness extensively over the past few decades, Don Mitchell (2016) concludes that while encampments can provide a favourable alternative to sleeping rough, they are not a solution to the broader issue of homelessness. According to Mitchell (2016), defending encampments is imperative, but the deeper issue lies in the failures of the capitalist city to provide for its residents and the need to address the root causes of homelessness. Mitchell (2016) urges us to protect encampments, but more crucially, to dismantle the systemic conditions that make them a regular feature of our urban landscapes. This requires new policies that support encampments alongside non-commodified solutions to the housing crisis, ultimately removing the need for encampments.

2.6. Meaningful Engagement with Encampment Residents in Rights-Based Responses and Research

The insights in the previous section are based largely on fieldwork in American encampments. In fact, most academic and ethnographic research on encampments is conducted in the U.S., while their prevalence in Canada remains an understudied phenomenon (Flynn et al., 2022). This section introduces the urgent need for meaningful engagement with encampment residents in Canada, presents recent research from Montréal that demonstrates the value of such collaborations, and concludes with an explanation of how our research aims to address these gaps in the literature while amplifying the voices of encampment residents through meaningful engagement.

In 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, and lead researcher, Kaitlin Schwan, released *A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada: A Human Rights Approach [National Protocol].* In it, they outline eight principles to guide governments toward the adoption of a rights-based approach to encampments. The principles are based on international and federal human rights law and "the recognition that encampment residents are rights holders and experts in their own lives" (p. 2). The latter notion is articulated in Principle 2, which calls for the "meaningful engagement and effective participation of homeless encampment residents" (p. 16). To summarize Farha and Schwan (2020), meaningful engagement and effective participation mean that encampment residents have early and ongoing involvement in the design and opportunities needed to directly influence these decisions; and that their views must be afforded adequate and due consideration in all decision-making processes. Ultimately, meaningful participation and the recognition of encampment residents as experts in their own lives is central to respecting residents' autonomy, dignity, agency, and self-determination.

In their recent report on encampments across Canada, the OFHA (2024) endorsed the *National Protocol* developed by Farha and Schwan (2020), reinforcing their call for a human rights-based response. The OFHA affirms that a new rights-based approach must start by engaging with encampment residents and respecting their rights and ability to make choices about their own lives (2024). This means ensuring that encampment residents lead decision-making processes that affect them, honouring their right to self-determination, and valuing their knowledge and insights gained from their lived experiences. To do so, governments must establish ongoing participation with individuals living in encampments and this must not be facilitated by the police or emergency responders (nor should any contact between residents and the government). Instead, all engagement must be respectful, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive. It should be managed by individuals who have built trust and communication with residents, acknowledge significant power imbalances, and respect informal structures, Indigenous protocols, and alternative decision-making processes (OFHA, 2024). Ultimately, governments must respect the rights of individuals to live in encampments and to decide for themselves if shelter solutions meet their needs.

The role of meaningful engagement in the *National Protocol* and OFHA guidelines is presented in the context of how governments must rethink their interactions with unhoused individuals. However, the need for meaningful engagement extends beyond the role of governments. Scholars and practitioners whose research culminates in recommendations for how governments should address homelessness must also ensure that their proposed policies value and prioritize the experiences of those most impacted by them. The FACE team, which stands for Forces, Actions, Change, and Equity, demonstrates this principle by prioritizing the voices of those directly affected by homelessness, showing how researchers can ensure their recommendations reflect the lived experiences of unhoused individuals. Led by doctoral candidate Caroline Leblanc, comprised of individuals with lived experience, and under the academic guidance of Professors Christine Loignon and Karine Bertrand from the Université de Sherbrooke, the FACE team conducted a study on the non-utilization of shelter facilities in Montréal. Their project emerged from the systems-thinking event, *Living in the Street: Rethinking Our Response to Homelessness*, which sought "to open a dialogue by taking a systemic view of encampments in Québec, and to give a voice to people living on the streets, as many had expressed they were not being heard or considered" (Leblanc et al., 2023, p. 7). In their culminating

report, Leblanc et al., (2023) outlined several key issues, courses of action, and options for providing appropriate support to encampments, all informed by experiences of those who live or have lived through homelessness. The findings from their report, which will be explored in detail below, offer a strong foundation for our research.

Participants of the systems-thinking event called for a humanistic, rights-based approach and shared ideas for the inclusive use of public space and support of encampments. They discussed the importance of an inclusive urban plan, implemented with the participation of unhoused individuals; floated the idea of legal squats; and proposed an encampment pilot project based on self-determination, self-management, mutual support, and the valuing of the strengths and abilities of residents. In this sense, encampments could be organized and secured, while respecting and promoting residents' autonomy. Residents would have support in "accessing resources to meet their basic needs (e.g., running water, toilets, showers, food services), measures to keep their homes clean (e.g., waste management), and tools and knowledge to reduce safety risks such as fire, theft or assault" (p. 26). At the same time, participants stressed that these should not be the only areas where encampments, squats, and shelters are accepted and supported, recognizing that not all unhoused individuals can access these spaces or are willing or able to cohabit with others. Additionally, participants suggested equipping a parking lot with resources like electricity, water, and internet for those living in vehicles and proposed a welcoming street café for socializing, doing laundry, storing belongings, resting, caring for pets, and offering other supportive services, all managed "by and for" those living on the street. On homelessness services more generally, there was a call for increased investment in facilities that reduce barriers and minimize exclusion, providing more options for those living on the street. On that note, discussions emphasized the need for inclusive shelters that increase safety and privacy, particularly for women and trans individuals; are managed by social workers rather than security guards; and offer practical support, 24/7 harm reduction, and accommodation for couples and pets. It was concluded that "it can be difficult to identify the real needs of people living on the street, but that involving them in the implementation of various initiatives would help to do so" (p. 26). In response, the authors stressed the importance of trusting and recognizing unhoused individuals as experts in their own lives and needs, and "above all, enable them to dream about a life project" (p. 26).

Although some grey and scientific literature exists on encampments, most of it focuses on the U.S., leaving Canadian scholarship and empirical evidence sparse (Flynn et al., 2022). Our project aims to address this gap, contributing to the academic and ethnographic research on Canadian encampments, with a focus on those in Montréal, and an emphasis on the lived experience of residents. As academic researchers in the context of urban governance, making recommendations to municipal policymakers, our work falls well within the scope of the *National Protocol* and OFHA guidelines that stress the importance of meaningful engagement with encampment residents. As such, our project is based on the understanding that encampment residents are acutely aware of the supports required to address their most pressing needs and are entitled to ongoing, meaningful participation (OFHA, 2024). Moreover, there is an inherent responsibility for us to engage with the individuals most affected by the policies we propose, especially when working with marginalized and vulnerable groups, and that we do so meaningfully, thoughtfully, and ethically. The FACE team answered this call, effectively collaborating with residents and sharing their visions for better ways to support encampments, thereby validating both the approach and

objective of our own research. Building upon the important findings from the FACE team, our project aims to develop policy recommendations to support encampments that are truly "by and for" the residents.

3. Methods

The methodological framework of this project is rooted in the traditions of advocacy planning and action research, both of which guide our broader efforts to identify housing solutions that prioritize marginalized groups. By taking an advocacy planning approach, which emphasizes supporting and advancing the interests of marginalized communities in the planning process (Davidoff, 1965), we ensured that our recommendations reflect the priorities and lived experience of encampment residents. Guided by the principles of action research, a participatory method that fosters community collaboration and reflective problem-solving (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), we worked closely with residents, recognizing them as experts in their own lives. This collaboration allowed us to understand their needs and translate our advocacy goals into actionable rights-based recommendations for policymakers.

To connect with residents, we used an ethnographic approach adapted from anthropology. This immersive method involved extensive fieldwork at encampments across Montréal, guided by a trauma- and violence-informed (TVI) approach. Often used in social work, psychology, and public health, a TVI approach acknowledges the profound impact that trauma and violence have on individuals' lives and behaviours. In this context, a TVI approach means creating an emotionally and physically safe environment to prevent retraumatization or cause additional harm, while promoting opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection throughout the research process. To inform and complement our fieldwork, we engaged with scholarly articles, news publications, policy documents, press releases, social media, government legislation, and other grey literature. This continuous phase of desktop research was crucial for developing the initial questions we asked in the field and for understanding the social, economic, and legislative landscape that unhoused individuals must navigate, and in which we must situate our recommendations.

Our fieldwork spanned three summer months (June to August) during which we visited encampments regularly to make observations, take notes, and conduct interviews. Initial contact with participants was established through in-person visits, and subsequent participants were recruited via referrals and word-of-mouth. Upon meeting potential participants, we explained the project, disclosed our affiliation with McGill University, and provided bilingual consent forms for the interviews, audio recordings, and use of their information. The interviews were conducted in French or English, recorded on a phone, and transcribed using AI software. In total, we conducted 20 interviews across 10 encampments and talked to many other folks with lived or living experience in these spaces. In the spirit of TVI research, we met people where they were at, with respect, and without judgement. If people wanted to talk, we sat down and established rapport, often across multiple visits. What began as flexible semi-structured interviews often evolved into open-ended conversations. These trauma-sensitive dialogues were supported by choice, trust, and active listening. We brought food, drinks, and supplies to encampments and paid everyone for their time.

Our analysis began with the preparation of detailed reports for each of the encampments we visited over the summer. These reports compiled transcripts, observations, images, desktop research (e.g., historical context; land ownership; news coverage) and preliminary notes on emerging topics within and across encampments. A thematic analysis was used to unpack the content, context, and meaning within these reports and identify recurring themes, patterns, and tensions that reflect the experience of encampment residents and the impacts of government policy on the ground.

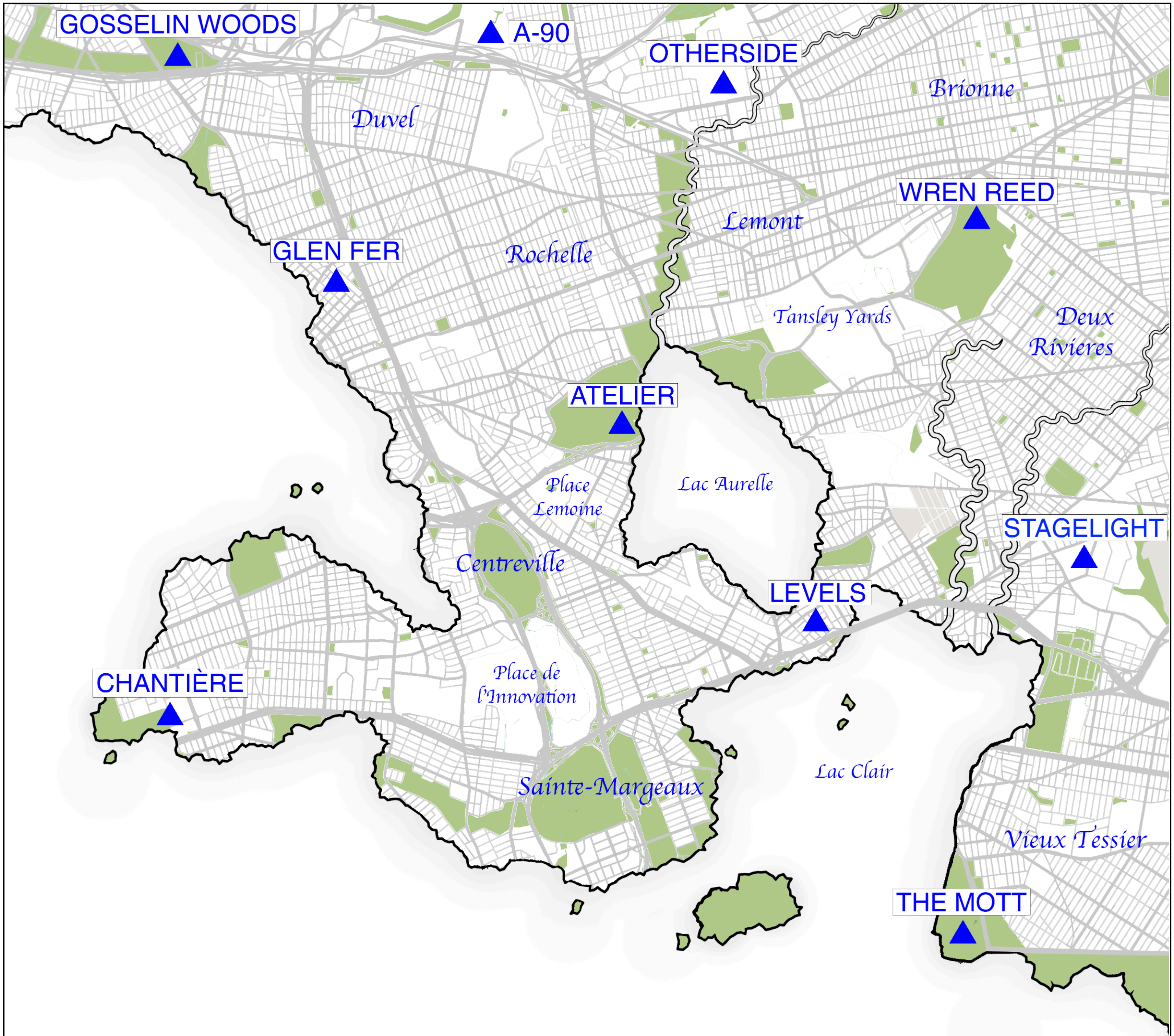
To present our findings, we used expressive voicing, which allows individuals to share their stories and perspectives in their own words (Lofland et al., 2022). More specifically, the conversation transcripts, emerging themes, and our contextual observations were distilled into narrative accounts expressed through the voices of those who live and spend time in these spaces. This blended approach, integrating analysis and storytelling, was chosen to effectively convey the complexity and nuance of the data while preserving residents' experiences intact and in context. From start to finish, our methods centre the expertise of encampment residents, aligning with the project's objective to make recommendations directly informed by people who have experienced homelessness.

4. Encampment Narratives

Tent City

Residents' ability to survive outdoors and meet their basic needs often depends on hiding and navigating complex legal regulations. Therefore, it is imperative for researchers to protect the locations of encampments and the identities of their residents. As such, everyone who participated in our research and whose experiences are included in the following narratives have been given pseudonyms. Additionally, the names of all locations and landmarks, as well as as businesses, metro stations, and other identifiable features that could be used to locate encampments have been changed. Large government agencies, authorities, landlords, and corporations like the SPVM, Hydro-Québec, and the Ministry of Transport have not. At the same time, the spatial characteristics of encampments and their surroundings are needed to illustrate encampment conditions, link these homespaces to broader housing dynamics in their neighborhoods and the city, and understand how individuals navigate policy and between various homespaces, services, and sites of work. To address this dilemma, we created a physically and nominally pseudonymized map of Montréal, referred to as Tent City. This map was designed to place encampments in fictionalized areas that correspond to their real environments, allowing us to write freely about them without losing the context that is essential to present our analysis or jeopardizing the confidentiality of those who placed trust in us over the summer.

Figure 1. Tent City



Wren Reed

> *Before I was evicted, I had my shack. Hydro-Québec and the Ministry of Transportation had plans for here and they all came to see me. One after the other. All these nice little groups there, from the environment, from the City, the firefighters, the police, the ambulance drivers, the politicians. They all came to see me. They all made me great promises. My comment today? They can eat shit… The MP came here… a real asshole. - Peter*

Peter is a white, middle-aged, Québécois man with short brown hair. He is tall and long, with a muscular build. His tucked-in shirt, dark jeans, leather belt, and newish shoes give him a sharp look. He was sitting quietly each time we arrived, rocking in his chair, sipping a beer. His calm demeanour and quiet speech match the tranquillity of the natural space he lives in. Peter had spent the previous month camping in Wren Reed, a large, wooded area far from downtown. The area features a blend of open fields, tall grasses, wetlands, and dense pockets of trees with a variety of plants and flowers. It is one of the few remaining natural spaces in an area dominated by warehouses, industrial facilities, surface parking, and transportation infrastructure. It was not his first time living in the Reed. "*A few years ago, there was a cabin built here. It was me who was there. I had been there for four years,"* he recounts.

Peter had built the cabin himself, using three thousand screws. It was a laborious job and a feat he reminisces on proudly. "*My cabin measured ten by nine by seven. I built it from recycled materials… All screwed together by hand… The roof was plywood, two by four. I made a door. I made two small windows. I insulated the whole thing with four inches of cardboard."* The cabin provided Peter a quality of life, especially in the winter, that is hard to replicate on the street. "*It was wonderful. I'd made myself a nice little wood-burning stove from a tool case I'd picked up in town*" he says. The four years Peter spent in the cabin reflect a level of tolerance and stability that is increasingly rare. *"When you know you don't have to leave, it's less complicated,"* he says, appreciating the uniqueness of his past situation. Peter had a strong understanding of the complex ownership of the Reed and maintained unconventional working relationships with his private, municipal, and provincial landlords. There is only one gravel road leading into the space and although the landlords insisted that the gate remain closed, they accepted a duplicate key from Peter, who used his own padlock and chain to secure the property without losing access to his cabin. Peter also shovelled the road, ensuring that ambulances could reach him in case of an emergency.

Peter recounts living peacefully in his cabin, *"until a gang of homeless people got here and made a mess of everything."* This displaced group had been violently evicted during the dismantling of a large encampment nearby. They intended to establish another safe and organized encampment, but the City and provincial landlord remained adamant that organized encampments would not be tolerated. An eviction notice was issued by the provincial landlord, once again citing fire hazards, despite the fire precautions taken by the residents and their request for additional support on this front. Peter's cabin and fragile tenure in the space became collateral damage in another violent and expensive ($100,000) eviction carried out by SPVM. "*They kicked me out, they demolished everything. I*

lost everything," says Peter. When a riot squad surrounds you, *"you don't argue for long,"* he adds jokingly. After the eviction, Peter found another spot where he stayed for three weeks before tending to a family emergency. "*I had to leave in a hurry and leave my stuff there. I came back after four days. Shaved, nothing left. It was the same year…"* he says, recounting how he lost everything twice in rapid succession. "*After that, I slept here and there."*

The four years Peter spent in the cabin were the only time in the past decade that he had a fixed home space. The rest of the time he had been sleeping rough, *"in a corner that I found quiet for a few hours."* Peter points out that during this time, he never slept in the city centre. He associates downtown with a type of person experiencing homelessness that panhandles, uses drugs, and steals. "*I don't go into the city centre… There's too much stuff I don't want to see. Someone defecating along a wall or door or window. It doesn't appeal to me. Violence, I'm not attracted to that. Crimes. Drugs. Thefts. That's the reality. That's why I don't go, quite simply,"* he explains, making a point to distance himself from those hardships. Peter elaborates on the difference he sees between the people living downtown and people like himself, who are employed, live alone, and have a chance to get off the street: *"There's a big difference… People like me, who want to get by, who want to get out of it. There aren't many of them. They exist. There are a few. I know a few. There's one who lives in Place Lemoine* and *he works. He's not a junkie,"* he explains. After a few months, Peter was off the street. He had found a job and rented a room.

Two years later, after losing his job, Peter was forced to make a difficult choice. "*I couldn't pay for my room anymore so I said, thanks, we're done here. I left. I didn't want to be in debt."* He returned to the Reed, hoping to find the peace he had lost. *"It's the tranquillity, it's the joy of nature. I enjoy nature. My favourite thing is listening to the wind in the leaves mixed with the sounds of the birds. It's so relaxing… we all live stressful lives,"* he says, explaining his decision to come back. "*What happens at night? The unknown. You never know,"* he says, referring to the uncertainty of sleeping rough. *"Here, I know that at midnight, the little family of skunks passes by. You get used to it, you know the times, you know the sounds."* However, a lot had changed this time around. He no longer had the space to himself nor the relative comfort and privacy of his cabin. Peter was now one of several people living in the space, with more and more tents appearing throughout the summer. "*You have no room to move. I hate it. It's used for sleeping, that's it,"* he says of his small tent. Peter recognizes some of the other people camping in the area by sight, but he does not interact with them. *"It's not the kind of world I frequent,"* he says, explaining his preference to keep to himself. Peter prefers to *"stand back, to have peace and quiet,*" which he predicates on living alone. *"Many people, many problems. Just one, just one problem,"* he adds, referring to larger encampments. He avoids them for many of the same reasons he avoids downtown, "*Well, more is stolen*" and "*violence… I avoid it.*"

The police continue to visit the space, but Peter has never had a problem with them. *"When I had my cabin, the police came to visit me regularly. On average once every month or two. They were so nice, so nice… I have nothing to say. They were perfect. Even today, when I meet them, number one. I've already slept under the Lemieux Bridge. They came to see me, they woke me up gently. 'Sir, you can't sleep here.' Ah, ok! I'll pick myself up. 'Take your time, we're in no hurry,'"* he whispers. He credits the ease of their interactions to the civility of his approach: "*I know how to talk. I don't get into fights with them. They respect me, I respect them. They're there to do what they've been told*

to do. Normally everything's fine. To date, for me, it's always been like that," he explains. Peter's generous depiction of SPVM officers as just 'doing their job' and the effectiveness of being friendly as a strategy to avoid dangerous and destabilizing conflict with them were echoed by residents of encampments across Montréal.

In regard to his chances of continuing to camp in the space, Peter is most concerned about complaints from other people who use the space. "*The less they see me, the safer I am. That's the way it is too."* The main road branches out into several footpaths of different widths and conditions. A few of the wider paths that cut through the middle of the Reed are used by the public who come to enjoy the natural setting. *"In general, they go around, they don't come here. You will see the walkers who will pass through. We have a bit of chat with them."* The narrower paths that meander through the wooded areas are used more often by dogwalkers, joggers, and unhoused people camping in the space. *"If a citizen walks with his dog here… he doesn't like me, calls the cops, and finish,"* warns Peter. However, eviction is less of a concern this time around. *"I don't care. I have five other places… I took the time to study each place… I'm learning."* These alternative locations are scattered across the city, but not downtown. At the time of our interview, Peter was self-employed, working as a bike delivery person. This allowed him to passively scout several spots around the city that would serve him well if displaced. In a city where unhoused individuals are routinely and forcibly evicted from their homes in public and private space, forming one or several contingency plans is an important strategy to maintain some degree of stability during forced transitions.

In any case, Peter sees his current stint in the woods as temporary. "*For me, it's a matter of months. Not the month of August, probably September or October…"* he says confidently. *"I'm paying for my equipment, my electric bike… Once that's paid for, well, I'm going back inside. That's all. It's summer, it doesn't matter. But, in winter… No, no, no, no,"* he explains. His strategy to prioritize work and live outside while the weather is better, to afford housing during the winter, speaks to the drastic sacrifices that people in precarious housing situations are forced to make. In Peter's case, given the soaring costs of housing, an unfortunate but ordinary life event that could happen to anyone, losing a job, has pushed him back into homelessness, making him vulnerable to further evictions and violence.

The importance of this space to Peter cannot be overstated. "*For me, this place here, this land there, represents so much suffering. It's not possible. So much laughter. This land here, in a way, saved my life. Quite simply. That's why it's my special attachment,"* he says. For several years, the Reed provided Peter with a stable alternative to the hard life he was living on the streets and over those years, Peter took care of the land. His deep connection and appreciation for the woods shaped his vision for the health and use of the space. *"All the cleaning I've done on the land to make the trees grow bigger. When I see it, it's already changed in three years. For the future, it would be fun if it stayed the same,"* says Peter, underscoring the natural qualities that called him back. *"Or, it could perhaps be transformed into small developments,"* he adds, imagining the opportunity for people to have a space of their own and the freedom to build shelters like the one he built, loved, and lost. *"I'd like that, if they'd give me a chance… What would it cost? A small piece of land, that no one has used for 30 years. You let me live, as long as I respect the rules. We can have a dialogue... 'I'll give you 50 square feet. I'll be back, I'll be back every week. If I see trash,*

you're out,'" he suggests, proposing an alternative to the routine and traumatic evictions carried out by the State. Peter is asking to be recognized, for the benefit of the doubt, for a sliver of tolerance, and a chance to rebuild the relative comfort, privacy, and dignity that was taken from him. *"It would be nice if this kind of conversation existed. That's not what's happening. That's the injustice."* Peter then makes a squishing motion with his hands and asks the government, *"Why would you want to squash someone? My life is worth as much as yours. No more, no less."*

Otherside

> *The fucking cops say to everybody sleeping in the park and shit like that, they say go to the otherside, go to the otherside, the camping… It's not a fucking camping here. - Victor*

The otherside is a large, privately-owned industrial parcel of land in a gentrifying, working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city centre. It includes a wooded area, a large clearing, a parking lot, and a deteriorating warehouse. It is bordered by a fast-moving arterial road frequented by trucks and heavy vehicles, another large industrial operation, and a series of train tracks where locomotives horn, clank, and rattle while dragging shipping containers around amid other noisy port activities. Access to the site is restricted by bollards and a gate on the lone gravel road, signaling that visitors are not welcome. The land is owned by a private individual and a numbered company linked to their industrial enterprise. On one hand, it is a natural space that offers moments of peace within an otherwise loud and harsh environment. On the other, it is an inaccessible piece of private land with several risks. The dilapidated warehouse is dangerous for those who enter it, the woods are thick and dark, the negligemce of the property owner introduces uncertainty and insecurity, and it is surrounded by hazardous land uses. This combination of spatial characteristics and concerns is one particular example of the type of marginalized spaces to which unhoused Montréalers are often relegated to when seeking to establish encampments and avoid State enforcement.

Passing by piles of former encampments, the main gravel path narrows and eventually splinters into two footpaths that encircle a wooded corner of the site. Nestled among these trees, Victor and four unhoused neighbours have built a home and community. Victor is an upper-middle-aged, white, Québécois man. He is muscular with a dark tan, long hair, and tattoos. His weathered appearance reflects the toll that physical labour, drug and alcohol consumption, incarceration, and living outdoors for many years have on the body. "*I don't want to be there,*" says Victor, referring to shelters and his preference to live outside. "*I say no fucking way, it's better to stay in the woods… I'm happy man. I go get my food every fucking day by cash, bring it here, put it in the charcoal, you know, it's all barbecue, it's better like that man,"* he adds, explaining the advantages of the camp he has built over the past six years. "*I take care of my people you know… I respect them,*" he says proudly. Immediately following the interview, as we spoke with one of his neighbours, we could hear Victor hammering in the background, wasting no time to improve the living conditions for him and his community. Consequently, in terms of infrastructure and design, their camp is among the most substantial and organized in Montréal. The camp is arranged around an open communal area at the centre, with shelters and tents set among the surrounding woods. In the central space, there is a fully covered and furnished living room with leather couches, a carpet, and a coffee table, alongside a shipping container that Victor plans to winterize for his friends. Victor embraces his leadership role and takes pride in his work, which feels never-ending.

The longevity of the encampment and in turn, the opportunity to improve its conditions can be attributed to an unconventional arrangement between Victor and the property owner, a long-time acquaintance of his. Victor and his neighbours pay rent through a combination of cash and labour, which includes an envelope each month and the

responsibility to secure and clean the property. In this case, securing the property means keeping unwelcome campers out of the space. As a partially wooded and inactive industrial land in a remote area, the property is highly conducive to camping and attracts an increasing number of unhoused individuals that are looking for a place to live. According to Victor, people often show up before winter, hoping to find relative warmth and comfort in the building. Along with the teenagers who hang out in there, Victor worries that the use of the building by unhoused residents increases the risk of fires and given his role as security, jeopardizes his arrangement with the property owner. People showing up on their own accord account for the expected portion of a broader surge and source of stress for Victor. At the time of our interview, Victor was furious about the reason that an increasing number of people were showing up that summer. *"Yeah, because it's the fucking cops throwing everybody here… people sleeping on the bench and shit like that and the cops say go to the otherside, go to the otherside… I don't want that fucking shit man… go to the otherside, go to the otherside... I want no-fucking-body here… You know, respect that man. It's fucking private territory. Nobody supposed to be here. It's private, private,"* Victor says passionately. In this troubling scenario, SPVM officers are evicting unhoused individuals from nearby public parks and directing them to the property that Victor rents, is tasked to protect, and as a result of his efforts, provides shelter and support for his small community. He plans to tell the police to stop this practice because neither he nor the property owner wants more people camping on the site. *"I'm going to say no, no, no, the proprietor don't want no more here. No. More. Here. I'm gonna tell the cops don't fucking bring that here man. Bring it somebody else. It's private, private, private property here."* He knows that a larger camp would be hard to organize and could prompt the owner to issue a trespass notice, displacing him and his community. "*Next time, they're going to send me a paper… no more property here, poof, gonna put the fucking sign…"* he adds. This specific form of SPVM involvement in the geography of homelessness - whether a tactic that some officers use unilaterally, perhaps recognizing the punitive and futilite nature of continuously displacing the same individuals in the same area, or a broader department-wide directive - contributes to a larger pattern in Montréal whereby the State removes unhoused people from public space and pushes them into a shrinking realm of marginal private spaces. This not only harms those who are evicted, it also threatens the fragile conditions through which stable long-term encampments on the receiving end have been tolerated (E.g., size, visibility, order), reduces the City's liability to support unhoused folks and encampments that are no longer in public space, and by driving people into hidden areas, serves to further invisibile homelessness.

Victor feels strongly that as long-term, de facto tenants who pay rent and protect the property, his community has exclusive rights to the space and that others should not camp there without permission. His experiences with theft and violence in the encampment reinforce his determination to keep people off the property. "*A lot of people just steal it anytime… when want to get stoned, shit like that, you know, try to have the money, stealing. It's not supposed to be like that. That's why bing, bang, boom. Get the fuck out of here,"* he explains. A few days earlier, Victor had caught someone with his belongings and kicked them out. "*I found some shit... my shit… what the fuck do you think is going to happen there, shhh, shhh, get the fuck out of here…"* he says. While theft, violence, and other interpersonal conflicts are commonplace in encampments, Victor has zero tolerance for this behaviour. "*We don't need a fucking daycare here... that's why I kick out everybody… 'I didn't do nothing'… get the fuck out you're not*

supposed to be here… respect the people who get stoned… peace and quiet... that guy is doing coke… the other ones do mescaline… the other one do smack… every tent is different…" he explains. Although Victor no longer uses drugs, his descriptions of the encampment reveal that his motivations to maintain the peace include the creation of a space where his neighbours can consume safely and without conflict.

It is clear that to maintain the order and safety of encampments, especially those on the dwindling number of properties that are conducive to camping, residents are forced to police the access and behaviour of other unhoused individuals. In this case, the inadequate State response to homelessness in an area with a growing unhoused population and troubling SPVM eviction strategies have put immense pressure on the private land that Victor rents. As a result, he carries the emotional and physical burden of intimidating, removing, and denying people a place to sleep in order to protect the stability of his own community. When we arrived, Victor was carrying a large knife, drinking liquor from the bottle, and distraught over his responsibility to kick people out of his encampment and off the property. "*I was in jail, in the pen, ok. I want peace and quiet, with the birds. I don't want to fucking fight like that with the motherfuckers you know…*" he says. Despite his hardened exterior and uncompromising defense of the property, Victor's understanding of the trenches and his propensity to care for people sometimes override his duty to turn away those in need of a home. At times, Victor tolerates a few people living outside of the encampment if they are calm, but on rare occasions, he welcomes people into the encampment. Four years ago, he invited Félix.

Félix is a tall, white, middle-aged Québécois man with short dark hair. As a kid, Félix had a damaging experience in the foster care system, which was a precursor to homelessness for him and many people living on the street. At the time of the interview, his daughter had recently been placed in foster care. It was clear from his soft voice and dejected body language that losing her to the same system that has been the source of so much trauma was weighing heavily on him. For the past four yeas, Félix has spent summers in the encampment. Otherwise, he has spent the colder months incarcerated, in shelters, and at one point, involved in a housing program. The latter offered cheap rooms and was intended as a springboard to get folks off the street but it suffered from organizational issues and lacked supervision, proper staffing, and space for residents to get involved. Félix feels that housing programs need more opportunities for residents to discuss ideas and become stakeholders, allowing them to take a more active role in shaping their community. He values a sense of community and feels that, while people living alone outside get lonely, encampments created important opportunities for community building. This underscores the consequences of perpetual displacement and the rupturing of community ties and support systems as camps are dismantled. Félix sees importance in learning survival strategies in a time of soaring housing costs and emphasizes that this is best accomplished as a team. "*To be several people is to have several ideas,*" he says, speaking to residents' collaboration over the years. When it comes to work ethic and ability, Victor is unmatched as a mentor, and as a leader, he must have recognized Félix's genuine desire to become a contributing member of the community.

In addition to securing the property and maintaining order, cleaning the property is another important form of rent and a determinant of encampment tenure. This is a daunting task considering the magnitude of garbage and debris

that has amassed across the property. Naturally, Victor continued to work during our interview, burning piles of garbage in a clearing near the encampment. Much of the interview revolved around Victor's intense feelings about cleaning, which visibly upsets and angers him at times. *"I gotta clean it fast. That's why I need a fucking truck and shit like that…. get all the shit outta here… cause it's six years I did the cleaning, that's full of shit there…"* he says, motioning to a row of overflowing garbage bins. There is an implication that if Victor does not keep the area clean and orderly, the property owner will have it cleaned formally, possibly leading to the dismantling of the camp and community. At the time of our interview, someone had recently visited the site regarding the mess and Victor feared that they would return to finish the job. This puts immense pressure on Victor and underscores the notion that maintaining the cleanliness of encampments is a key determinant of security regardless of who owns the land.

The emotional weight of his ongoing battle with garbage stems from not only his fight to secure tenure for his community but also his personal struggles and complex relationship with the space. In the early 1980s, following a head trauma and subsequent coma, Victor suffered memory loss and continues to have difficulties with reading and comprehension. "*I lose my memory. I stay here to clean the place now. See Victor is good to clean the place… Don't remember nothing... still alive... can do the cleanup,"* he says. Compounding with the pressure he feels from the property owner is an urgency to retrieve something he left in the space earlier in his life. *"That's why I try to remember where I put the thing, you know. So, I'm here. I try to remember where I put it. That's why I clean and shit like that,"* he adds. Victor recounts that it was a large sum of money, but is haunted by his inability to locate it amid all of the garbage. "*'Where is the money?' 'I don't know, I don't remember!' 'I don't believe you Victor!'"* he says, interrogating himself. His deep connection to the property extends to a respect for the water and energy that flows beneath it, capable of inciting spontaneous combustion, and his lost cash, "*... I know it was underneath the ground."*

Victor has a profound attachment to the space, emerging from his role as a leader, his endless work to establish and maintain a safe camp, his decades-long relationship with the property owner, his reverence for the supernatural qualities of the land, and his ongoing struggle with memory loss. In this sense, securing and cleaning the property are not just practical tasks for Victor, they are ways to recover what he has lost and defend what he has built. *"Here is my place, me I'm gonna die here. I don't fucking care man, all my friends they're gone… Nobody's going to move it, nobody's fucking bringing a fucking truck here and throw everything down like the other place,"* he says powerfully, referring to the dismantling of a nearby encampment. In the face of mounting pressure from the property owner and the fallout of City strategies that force unhoused people onto private land like his, there is no doubt that Victor will continue to fight for the safety of his community and their right to remain in this special place.

Gosselin Woods

> *That's why there's only the three of us here, because nobody really knows about this place… If people come here... what's gonna happen, the cops are gonna come and nobody will be allowed to stay - Steven*

I picked up the phone and through a wall of noise, Steven introduced himself. We had never met but he had heard about our research and wanted to be interviewed. Steven is a short and stocky middle-aged man with a military background, black hair, and a stutter. He lives with his friend Brian in the Gosselin Woods, a large, forested area far from the city centre. The Gosselin woods are wedged between a major transportation corridor on one side and a long stretch of businesses on the other. There is a wide bike path that runs for several kilometres along one side of the woods and a sparse network of lightly used hiking trails that runs through them. Some of the trails taper off into thick walls of brush while others dead-end at locked gates and fences. Most notably, the informal trailhead of the beautiful main path, which offers a feeling of total escape from the city, ends abruptly, spitting hikers out into a large concrete valley dominated by a towering knot of bridges, ramps, and roads. The most established encampment in this space, which sits on a protected plateau, wrapped in vines, and accessible from a curved mud staircase, is a few metres from this stark junction. Steven and Brian live in a simple camp roughly half a kilometre further into the woods. A recent storm had flung their belongings around the space and battered their tents, loosening their grip to the mud slope. It was a surprise to learn that someone still lived there. In fact, Steven had lived in the woods for five months. "*I'm a survivalist. You know what I mean? I can live anywhere. I lived all the way in the Arctic for a while… In Thailand for a while… the Jungle… so here, living in an urbanscape, it's no big deal…"* he says proudly.

Until recently, Steven was living and working in the Laurentian Mountains. But after his boss died, Steven moved back to Montréal where he could no longer afford to live inside. "*Once you come into the city… you just can't afford it… When I was living in the country I could rent a decent place, but here, you just can't do it,"* he says. Instead, Steven lived outside in Rochelle, a gentrifying neighbourhood with a great deal of high-quality and high-traffic public space and a large visibly unhoused and street-involved population. "*You get some people who are mentally ill… have serious problems… They get too drunk, too high, they would bother people on the paths, and basically just be a general nuisance right? Or they leave garbage everywhere, no respect for land at all,"* he says, describing the emergence of conflicts over public space that he saw in the changing neighbourhood. As Steven explains, the woods offered an escape from the uncertainty and danger of his past environment: "*There was one guy he stabbed someone and some other weird shit… so I decided enough of that. I thought I'd find somewhere where it was safer where I don't have to worry every night that someone is going to steal your sleeping bag…"* he says, explaining his departure. "*So me, I came into here. I realized that there's no one really here right?"*

Over the years, unhoused people have lived and died in the Gosselin Woods. At the time of the interview, Steven was one of just three people camping there. *"We're the only ones you'll find here"* he says, referring to himself,

Brian, and their friend at the trailhead. Brian had arrived a few months after Steven. He had been living in an abandoned building in Rochelle, but after it was sold, he had nowhere to go and Steven invited him to the woods. *"'Listen, I'm going to tell you something but don't you dare tell anybody else 'cause I don't want the problems and all the bullshit…'"* he recalls telling Brian. *"That's why there's only the three of us here because nobody really knows about this place…"* he adds, underscoring the State-manufactured relationship between encampment stability and secrecy. *"If people come here... what's gonna happen, the cops are gonna come and nobody will be allowed to stay."* Steven attributes their safety in the woods to there being fewer unhoused individuals living in the space, lower levels of recreational use, and a lack of police attention, all relative to his previous site in Rochelle.

Steven has the capacity and a strong preference to live alone or in a small group. "*I won't live in camp cities. No, no…"* he says adamantly. Having had conflicts and witnessed the risks of living or spending time in group settings, Steven understands that the resulting fallout can have a detrimental effect on both his stability and safety outside. This is reflected in his firm stance to avoid larger encampments. "*If you've ever been to them you know… most of them are high on drugs, or they're drunk, most of them have severe mental health problems, that's usually cause for what? Cause for violence… I have a lot of patience but after a while, there's only so many times you can be robbed and be harassed…"* he adds. At the same time, while adamant about eliminating those risks by distancing himself from other unhoused people, Steven recognizes the risks of complaints made about him by housed neighbours. "*I came here so I wouldn't be bothering anybody you know what I mean. Where we are down here, we ain't bothering anybody,"* he says. In this sense, Steven frames his own presence in public space as a problem and one that he must solve by relocating to a remote area where he is less likely to bother others. Steven's spatial and interpersonal decisions illustrate how the growing number of unhoused people being squeezed into a shrinking and increasingly privatized public realm increases the threat of conflicts and complaints, leading to potentially dangerous, displacing, and destabilizing interactions with law enforcement, and in turn pressuring people to police themselves, relocate to marginal spaces, and satisfy underlying government strategies to invisibilize homelessness.

To some extent, the woods have shielded Steven and other unhoused folks from potentially harmful interactions with their neighbours and law enforcement. Whereas the police would regularly visit public spaces in Rochelle, serving the interests of newer, more affluent residents, they had been largely absent from the woods. *"Only way the police is to come here is if you're burning down the forest you know, and they're… not coming… unless someone really complains. The only way they're complaining is if you leave a big mess or some nonsense right? But that's why I come here..."* he says. In Steven's experience, the people who use the trails tend to be more accepting of people living outside than the new condo dwellers, but this too is predicated on self-monitoring. "*They see us, but they see us as campers… they don't see us as anything else. They don't bother us cause, as you can tell you know, we don't have alcohol problems, we don't scream at people, we're sociable, we're just living in a tent for now,"* he says, illustrating their solidarity but also distancing himself from the large proportion of unhoused people living with addiction and mental illness. Steven has a similarly uneventful record with law enforcement, which he credits to the same classification. "*If they realize you don't have any mental problems... if you're not an alcoholic…they ask you*

why [are you living outside]… and you tell them why… and they understand…" he says, referring to officers' general understanding of the housing crisis. However, despite having had civil interactions with officers and having expressed sympathy for the rigours of police work, Steven shared his concerns about the qualification and training of SPVM officers, particularly their ability to properly de-escalate conflicts with people experiencing homelessness. Recently, Steven witnessed three police officers draw their guns on an unarmed man with his head down. "*So is the city getting safer, hell no, and the ones who are supposed to keep the city safe, a bunch of untrained kids... young kids… I feel bad for them in a way, but the thing is, if you're going to do the job, do it properly,"* he adds.

As a long-time renter on the margins, Steven knows the housing crisis inside and out. *"The thing is right now… an apartment… if you're working minimum wage… you just can't afford it… if you can it's in a rooming house."* Steven has no desire to live in a rooming house ever again. *"I'm safer out here than being in there,"* he says, citing theft, the presence of drug dealers, and constant visits from law enforcement. Having watched housing costs soar in recent years, while more and more people sleep on the street, Steven is increasingly frustrated with the lack of affordable and safe options. At the same time, he has witnessed the proliferation of luxury condominiums in the same areas where he sleeps outside. *"Myself, sooner or later, I'm just gonna leave. I know waiting on a social housing [unit], that's going to take forever and I don't have five years to be waiting,"* he says, with a frustrated laugh. Given the lengthy waitlists for a stagnant stock of social housing units, his pessimism is well-founded. *"This guy here [Brian] has been waiting for over five years. He's almost 70 for Christ's sakes. So the government, what are they doing really? Not too much."* In this context, his frustrations are directed towards the government and their dwindling commitment to building and maintaining low-income housing, as well as towards immigrants who he feels are taking units away from born Québecers. These sentiments were common among encampment residents we spoke with over the summer. Steven has seen protests, news exposés, and politicians advocating for housing affordability for years, but he has not seen corresponding results on the ground. "*You guys have a budget every year… what happens to that money…"* he wonders. Ultimately, the lack of options and urgency on the City's part to address the burgeoning crisis makes him feel that, as an unhoused individual, he is no longer welcome in the city. "*They're telling you, basically, go away. I don't know, go live in St. Jerome, that's what they're telling ya…"* he says angrily.

With adequate housing options off the table, Steven remains steadfastly opposed to the idea of staying in a shelter. He views them as institutional settings for people with mental illness and addiction, which he does not relate to and more broadly, as symbols of systemic failure. Steven is also critical of the medical system which he blames for failing to properly address mental health issues. "*You see them [people with mental illness] walking around the streets of Montréal and… they're all messed up, fucked up, it's a sad thing to say, but just, the system is failing,"* he says. Steven explains that, as a result, individuals with mental illness end up in shelters, in jail, or on the street, without access to proper care. *"A lot of them, they just throw them in jail and then after they let them out a few months later, it hasn't helped their mental problems, it hasn't helped,"* he says. A lot of these perspectives come from the year and a half he spent working security and cooking in a shelter. He emphasizes that these services are just temporarily warehousing people who need proper long-term health care. "*They really should be in some kind of*

path of care…all they're doing is shutting them in shelters. Here you go stay there for a while, without really helping them and… they just sent them back onto streets… I know the system, I know what they're doing, it's pitiful," he says.

It is clear that short of an affordable apartment, Steven would like to remain in the woods with Brian. *"You can sit here and in the morning, what do you hear? Birds. You see those squirrels running around? You don't see people bothering you…"* he says. Steven appreciates the beauty of the forest, but his connection to the space comes from the stability he has found in the absence of other people, housed and unhoused, and how that minimizes the risks that he has experienced elsewhere on the streets. *"What does the space mean to me? It means peace. It's the only place in the city where you could go where there aren't people trotting through, alcoholics, drug addicts…"* he says. However, his connection to the space is conditional given that stability is subject to changes in his surroundings. *"I hope the space stays the way it is, they leave it untouched. I don't want them coming here and putting up chain link fences and have a whole bunch of people trotting through… I want it to be a grassroots space,"* he says.

In this case, while the City-owned bike path has new benches, planters, and covered lookouts, the unofficial hiking trails are maintained by a local grassroots environmental organization. *"I think what happened here is probably a few of the people who live around here… they know the place, they're the ones, but as far as the City coming in here and doing stuff, no. So I'm happy about that,"* he says. Their efforts in the space include DIY interventions such as hanging laminated pieces of paper from tree branches with information on different plant species alongside a large installation by a local artist whose work connects this space to other contested woodlands across the Island. *"That's why I like this area, it hasn't been corrupted. It hasn't been overrun, you know what I mean, and the people who are here, they aren't the type of people to be like 'oh my god' [when they see camps], they're like 'hey, nature,'"* he says.

Unhoused individuals live in forests for a variety of reasons, including privacy, autonomy, tranquillity, low visibility, and a lack of alternatives, but there are only a few high-quality natural spaces remaining in Montréal, making them the foci of environmental activism. This forces the unhoused, activists, and other groups connected to the space - whether they are using it, protecting it, living in it, or all of the above - into a lopsided arrangement. In these cases, the interests of more publicly palatable and privileged groups can come at the expense of those living in the space if their activities erode the qualities that make it conducive or available to camping. Ultimately, the activities and goals of environmental groups, however well-meaning they may be, do not necessarily consider or align with the interests of those relying on these rare spaces as complex sites of survival. We found that although environmental programming has disturbed campers in other wooded areas of Montréal, Steven does not see them as a threat. *"As long as you don't dirty the place you ain't bothering nobody, they ain't going to bother you. I've been here since April and not one person bothered me. Not one"* says Steven. In addition to the baseline solidarity that Steven feels from the environmentalists and recreational users by virtue of their doing exactly nothing to either support or harm him, they are united in their vision for the woods which is predicated on resisting change and the absence of threats to their interpretation of sustainability. "*Now, whatever they're doing, whoever decided to put the bike trail, great, good thing to do. I hope they don't plan on putting some condo here or something…"* he says laughing. "*I doubt they*

will because of the train tracks… but then again, I wouldn't put it past them. Never say never," he says, while expressing indifference to the City's recent cosmetic upgrades. Steven recognizes the signals of investment and displacement, however faint they may be. "*You know, they said for years, oh we're not going to develop Rochelle. Now you've got a million-dollar condo… and all those areas where they did… used to be somewhat affordable."*

The Mott

> *We have to do something to ensure everyone has a safe place at night. It's disgusting…. The government have to wake up, open their eyes, especially for women, most for women. - Nora*

Quinton looked up from the hot stew he was stirring and waved me into a small wooded camp. He lived there with his wife Nora, who was panhandling outside of a nearby grocery store. We got to talking and immediately connected over our shared roots in Toronto. Marvin is a charming, middle-aged, Black man with short locs, a big smile, and a large scar across his face. He is a gifted conversationalist and despite facing a chain of adversities, he radiates positivity. Quinton was recently stabbed and spent four months in a Toronto hospital requiring intensive care. He later relocated to the Mott Woods in Montréal where he has been sleeping in a tent, listening to the birds, and sifting through garbage cans for scraps of food. Quinton plans to move back to a tough Toronto suburb before the weather turns, where he expects to receive social housing linked to his medical condition. Over the summer, despite living outside, Quinton frequently mentioned that he was not homeless, often citing his future apartment and its view. Talking about the apartment made it feel certain and reminding himself that his current circumstances were temporary made his hunger and the harsh outdoor conditions feel endurable. Quinton was resourceful during this time and was happy to chat about his survival strategies. However, not identifying as homeless, he insisted that Nora was the person to talk to about how people experience life on the street. He pulled out a few phones with cracked screens and took my number. A few hours later, Nora called to set up an interview. We met a few days later and she proved Quinton right. *"When I talk about society, people tell me that I can be very powerful"* she said confidently.

Nora is a thin, middle-aged, white, Québécois woman with blonde hair. She has been in pain her whole life, is a natural leader, and advocates passionately for those experiencing homelessness. She has battled multiple health issues since childhood and over time, having developed a tolerance to medication, she has leaned on drugs to mitigate the pain. As an unhoused person who smokes heavily and self-medicates, she has not been taken seriously by medical professionals and not received adequate care (she was recently discharged despite needing treatment). Quinton drinks occasionally and although he does not smoke or use drugs, he has voiced an understanding of Nora and other people who do. Undertreated health conditions and substance use, in this case linked through pain, are known antecedents to homelessness, present barriers to stable housing, and make life outside even harder.

The previous summer, after difficulties with her housemates, Nora was thrust back into homelessness. "*I've been [homeless] before, but I was ok for 15 years,*" she says, referencing a long period of stable housing. Nora spent most of the following year sleeping in homeless shelters, "*but that's shitty,*" she says. "*I don't like to be treated as a number… I like to be treated as a human. Not as a dollar bill sign, you know. I'm not a pay cheque, I'm human,*" she adds. Nora attributes her dehumanizing experience at shelters to the way she was treated by the staff. "*They don't make you feel like they are there for the person, for helping… They are there more for the pay than the human…*

that's what you can feel." Nora hopes for a more thoughtful hiring process to ensure frontline workers are motivated by genuine care. *"That they really apply to be for the human, not for the cheque, you know, that's important."* When asked what else needs to be changed to improve the shelter system, her answer was simple. "*The rules,"* she says, without hesitation, echoing the frustration of encampment residents across Montréal who avoid, are banned, or must sometimes resort to these carceral spaces. Nora also calls for more outreach to ensure unhoused people receive the information they need to get off the street. "*People need to be approached... because there's a lot of people who are too shy to ask."* As Nora hints at, shyness can be a response to the lack of sensitivity towards people who are accessing these services. "*There's a lot of places that are going to ask questions and you're going to feel [bad],*" she adds, rounding out the degrading shelter experience. However, with no choice but to spend the winter bouncing between them, Nora tried to improve the situation for herself and the people around her. "*I'm kind of a leader there you know, because I'm doing my things… just trying to keep my people that I'm caring for, you know…"*

At the time of our interview, Nora had been living in the Mott Woods with Quinton for two and a half months. The Mott is a remote woodland on the margins of Vieux Tessier, a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood outside of the downtown core. In this sense, it is spatially consistent with the type of isolated, sometimes unsafe, and increasingly coveted spaces where encampments are typically situated across Montréal. The Mott is an extended strip of trees, vegetation, and concrete slabs located at the end of the popular Marceau Waterfront. The Lower Mott, pinched between a busy bike path and sloped shoreline, feature a well-used multi-purpose trail and several spots where people hang out, drink, and swim. After a few kilometres, the bike path curves towards the city while the dirt trail branches off into a secluded pocket of wooded hills in the Upper Mott. These wild spaces and the activities within them are a hidden exception to the large, City-owned, and well-maintained Parc Garnier, which encompasses The Mott. Nora and Quinton built their camp in a small clearing along one of the narrow trails that sneak through a remote neck of the Upper Mott woods. "*It's hard sometimes, with the weather…*" says Nora. A few days earlier, Montréal was hit with torrential rain and strong winds that damaged encampments around the city. "*Oh my lord, my husband didn't tell me that it was a tornado!... It was boom, so hard you know, then I was jumping…"* she exclaims, recalling the intensity of the freak storm. "*We got flooded but then we changed our management, we built on the woods and things like this, made a frame and everything…"* she adds, motioning to a wood base for their tent and other upgrades to weatherproof their camp. While they could be evicted on short notice at any time, the relative longevity they are experiencing in the woods supports their efforts to establish a safer and more comfortable home.

Aside from inclement weather and the odd rave, the Upper Mott is conducive for camping. It offers privacy and the possibility of stability, with access to water fountains, public bathrooms, and a shallow river to bathe in. For the duration of the summer, there were several small camps sited along the same trail that Nora and Quinton lived on. One of their neighbours had weaved a smooth dirt path through little gardens demarcated by miniature white picket fences, both claiming and personalizing the space around their camp. The thoughtful design of the garden, like Nora and Quinton's wooden frame, shows how stability and a sense of security allow residents to invest time, resources, and care in their homes. This suggests that official, rather than coincidental tolerance of encampments could

promote agency, self-determination, and quality of life. This type of setup also suggests that the resident is organized and independent, which tends to be the case for most people who are able to establish and maintain an encampment, especially when alone. Across the city, this level of independence was associated with less interest and less need to live in groups, which bring different combinations of community and chaos (e.g., mutual support, work opportunities, and safer consumption, with an increased risk of theft, violence, and instability).

Nora and Quinton were aware of the camps around them but preferred to keep a low profile and live alone. "*We keep here, quiet, we don't mix, there was someone in the corner who [we are] sometimes seeing or saying hi, but not much,"* she says. Despite shared struggles, Nora views her unhoused neighbours as most people living on the same floor or street might, as someone to say hello to from time to time without feeling compelled for a relationship beyond that. In this sense, while proximity and common ground might make relationships more likely, they are by no means certain. Living in the woods offers privacy and the possibility of stability, which Nora and Quinton are careful not to jeopardize. Once in a while, someone will walk by their camp. "*Oh my lord, some gonna be curious, some going to be very, very, very, very curious. Some going to look at you as shit you know…"* she says, as a nervous young man glances into the camp. "*They don't think twice about the fact that [they could lose their housing or] maybe worse,"* she adds. However, while some dogwalkers and joggers familiar with the area venture through the woods, most visitors keep to the manicured public spaces along the Marceau Waterfront or the Lower Mott.

Living in the Mott Woods offers privacy, but comes with obstacles. *"The distance to accomplish, to get to things, that's the difficulty…"* she says. Their remote location hinders Nora's ability to access services and panhandle downtown. "*I go to the ShopMax or Metro Lannion. Sometimes, it's going to be in town, Place de l'Innovation... Depends how I feel. That's a lot of walk."* These distances are difficult for Nora, who must wear loose pants with legs wide enough to stretch around her swollen ankles. "*But you have to do what you have to do to survive, that's the way it is when homeless,"* she adds. All things considered, Nora would rather live in the woods than in shelters. "*It's hard but it's better,*" she says. "*The best thing is that we're quiet, we have no fight with the system, you know, with the rules,*" she explains, speaking to their autonomy. "*I have nothing bugging me, except my husband,*" she laughs.

Before she met Quinton, Nora lived alone. "*I'm kind of not afraid of nothing, but there's a lot of girls who don't have my strength and they're going to be attacked,"* she says. "*One girl went with a guy by the viaduct and not long after she came to me without pants, without panty, half-naked in the snow,*" she recalls. Nora brought the woman to a shelter but does not know what happened to her afterwards. This horrific night is a glimpse into the added challenges faced by women living on the street, notably a higher vulnerability to violence and exploitation. "*Women are attacked and they don't want to sleep at night, mostly going to walk all night long because there's not a lot of places for them… and woman shelters are always full… it's more underground worlds,"* she says, explaining how a lack of dedicated shelter space or safe alternatives forces unhoused women to keep a low profile. The underground worlds that Nora alludes to, such as couch-surfing or sleeping in cars, hotels, crackhouses, abandoned buildings, and in her case, encampments, offer no guarantee of safety or stability. "*You're going to walk on the street…. 20 girls*

you're going to cross, maybe seven, eight of them, gonna be homeless. You don't know" she adds, emphasizing the invisibility of women's homelessness. To avoid the risks of living outside, especially alone, many unhoused women live in groups or with a partner, which can offer physical safety, emotional support, and shared resources. However, domestic violence often drives women into homelessness, and the dangers of violence and exploitation at the hands of a partner remain a threat on the streets. "*We have to do something to ensure everyone has a safe place at night. It's disgusting,*" she says. "*The government have to wake up, open their eyes, especially for women, most for women.*"

In recent years, Vieux Tessier has grown in popularity as a place to visit and live. Housing costs have surged across the working-class neighbourhood, reciprocally influenced by new and improved public spaces and amenities, raising concerns among long-time residents. These changes have made the Marceau Waterfront an increasingly popular destination for swimming, picnicking, and other outdoor activities, which has spilled into the Lower Mott. Although there is debris remaining from past encampments along the Lower Mott, there were no long-term encampments there over the summer. It appears that increased recreational use, especially during the warmer months, has pushed encampments deeper into the woods. While no one is camping in the Lower Mott these days, some street-involved individuals do frequent it. Gaston is a middle-aged, white, Québécois man who regularly sits on one of the concrete slabs, drinking beer, and watching the ducklings grow up. He has been unhoused and incarcerated in recent years but currently works in construction and holds down an apartment in the area. Unlike Nora and Quinton, he has a network of acquaintances who regularly use this transitional space between the untamed woods and manicured waterfront. From his favorite spot, Gaston can see a nearly identical stretch of woods on the opposite shore of Lac Clair. He senses that encampments would not be tolerated for long in Sainte-Margaux, the affluent neighborhood on the other side. At the same time, understanding the links between gentrification, new norms, and the policing of public space, Gaston foresees the impact that revalorizing Vieux Tessier might have on the encampments on his side.

The police have been a non-issue for Nora. "*Me, I never had a problem with them…*" she says. However, despite limited and civil interactions, she does not like the SPVM and sees them as a threat. "*I'm doing what I have to do and I try to escape when they're around... I don't like them because they're not really there to help… They come and put more oil on the fire… They start the fire and they keep it going,*" she adds. Nora attributes the tolerance of their camp and the resulting lack of police involvement to the land ownership. "*Here, it's Queen territories I heard… that's why we're not bothered… by the police,*" she says, explaining why they have not been evicted. "*Yeah, Hydro-Québec, those kinds of places, we're not bothered because that belongs to the private sector,*" she adds. Her thoughts on land ownership reflect the survival strategies of residents who often camped on land where they believed certain property owners were less likely to evict them, or when uncertain of who owned the land, attributed their ability to remain to the concept of a tolerant private, provincial, or federal property owner. Nora and Quinton represent the latter case, as the Mott Woods and surrounding Parc Garnier are City-owned. This does not align with the broad patterns observed over the summer in the dialectic between land ownership and encampment stability, indicating that encampments were typically cleared more swiftly on City property than private or crown land. Although land ownership was observed as the most consistent factor in encampment longevity, this case of tolerance

might result from a confluence of factors, including size, visibility, orderliness, and location. All of the camps in Mott Woods are small, hidden, and clean, and therefore unlikely to generate complaints. Above all, like Steven and Brian in Gosselin Woods, they are situated in a marginal, low-traffic area, far removed from the prime spaces that the City wants to protect through more immediate clearance of encampments and undesirable people. However, increased investment and activity along the waterfront threatens the balance.

Nora wants to see designated places where people can camp safely without fear of eviction or violence. However, she imagines encampments as a short-term response rather than a fix to the changes she sees in her neighbourhood and the lack of new affordable housing being built in Montréal. "*Move your ass… give us something, give us housing. Stop saying that you build houses for homeless people. And do!... How many times you say ah this building is going to be for homeless people or poor people and at the end… they sell it as a fucking condominium… that's fucking awful,"* she says. Nora has witnessed the development of condos in several of the neighbourhoods she has lived in, now towering over encampments where residents told us they have spent years on waitlists for low-income housing. "*They laugh at homeless people, stop laughing at poor people, and start doing something concrete. That's what I have to say. Stop shitty words, put the action now, it's time, because all our peoples going down, mostly the Québecers, the real Québecers,"* she says, reflecting widespread frustration. Nora is one of several people we spoke with who feel immigrants are being prioritized for low-income housing, which adds to her anger. "*Stop giving everything to [immigrants] and start thinking to your real people, the ones who are born here, who built the fucking town, country, do something concrete for them, because we're losing our people now…"* she says. Nora is particularly concerned with the number of seniors she sees on the street. "*When you see people at 60, 65 years old, sleeping at Metro Lannion because there's a hot place in the winter, that's awful, they deserve better than that!"* she says. *"Some of them have been in the army… and they're fucking on the street now without nothing… those guys have been traumatized…"* she says, speaking to the disproportionate rate of veterans experiencing homelessness, many of whom struggle with PTSD, physical disabilities, and substance use. Nora concludes with indignation, calling this situation, "*Unacceptable*." She urges the government to shift its focus away from financial interests and toward genuine support for the most vulnerable. "S*top thinking of your pocket… Start thinking about your people.*"

Quinton finished the summer alone. He was drinking more than usual and his radiant outlook had dimmed. Nora had left the encampment a few weeks earlier and it felt empty in her absence. Their split underscores the difficulty of navigating interpersonal relationships while enduring pain, battling addiction, and living in harsh conditions. Quinton was vague about where she had gone, but mentioned an apartment, this time to make her safety feel certain.

Chantière

Every morning, I get up and go to my appointments. Because as strange as it may seem, I have appointments… There's something to do every day - Arthur

We met Arthur outside of his tent in downtown Montréal and he wanted to talk. "*You have to, you have to talk. Talk a lot. You have to talk. You have to say everything,"* he said. Arthur is a middle-aged, white, Québécois man with short dark hair. He was sitting cross-legged on his mattress between a stack of Tupperware containers with leftovers and a bucket he uses as a toilet. Like always, we let Arthur steer the conversation, giving him space to share what felt most important to him, without us digging into his past. It was an emotional conversation as he was recounting traumatic moments from his life, but he did not want to stop. "*It's good for me. It does me good to talk about it."*

Arthur has had a hard life. As a kid, he was raped repeatedly by a family member for two years (who later defrauded him out of a large sum of money). He describes his relationship with his parents as good but difficult. His father was a hard, old-fashioned man. *"My father always told me… Everything you want in life. You'll work for it… He said if you get up in the morning, take a shower, get dressed, go to work, earn your money like that… He said he'd never give me 100 bucks. It's true, it's true."* In 1998, Arthur's father died during an operation. *"From then on, it started quietly. Mental problems. Depression… not normal depression,"* he says. At the time, Arthur was running a construction company outside of Montréal, but often worked in the city, where he hoped to retire someday. In 2014, one of his employees came into his office and found him in a bad state. *"I was sitting in my office chair… My eyes were upside down. I was foaming at the mouth… he said he was talking to me, but I didn't answer. I couldn't answer."* His employee called the ambulance and he was taken to the hospital. After 23 years, he was forced to close the business. They held an on-site auction to recover some value but he stayed in his truck, devastated, unable to watch as two decades of hard work was liquidated in just a few hours. He remembers his friends and out-of-work employees visiting him in the hospital, "*I'm lying on the bed. I'm not there anymore. I'm not there anymore. I'm vegetables,"* he says. Arthur spent the next few months in and out of psychiatric care. He was assigned a family doctor, social worker, and psychiatrist. He now takes medication and has experienced what he describes as a 50% improvement since 2014. On top of his challenges with mental health, Arthur suffers from fibromyalgia, a chronic disorder that causes musculoskeletal pain and tenderness throughout the body, debilitating fatigue, and sleep, memory, and mood issues. When not hospitalized or staying in shelters, Arthur lives outside. *"My father today, if he'd been alive, then he'd see me here… he'd bawl and cry,'* he says. Despite countless tough breaks, lifelong trauma, and the challenges of living outside with physical and mental disabilities, Arthur keeps his head up. "*I wake up in the morning. 7 o'clock. Everything is beautiful, everything is right. Life is good. Life is good."*

When we met Arthur, he was living on the edge of a large dusty lot in Chantière, an industrial area near the city centre. The property is fenced, gated, and locked on some sides but wide open and easily accessed on others. "*I've been wandering around a bit, but I've been here a year and a half. I started by bringing my equipment. Plywood,*

wheelbarrows, shovels. I've got everything, everything, everything, everything back here," he says proudly, motioning into the bushes. Arthur had returned to the space four months earlier, after spending the winter in a homeless shelter. "*I spent the whole winter there... But my equipment was here, all ready, under the snow… everything was here. So, when the warm weather arrived, I pitched my tent,"* he adds, illustrating the preparation that went into his current home. Arthur would rather live outside than in a shelter. "*This is much better, [the shelter] is no good… There's a lot of violence. There's drugs. I don't smoke. I don't even smoke cigarettes…. I can't do it. It's bad. Those over there, it's their business. Me, I'm not capable,"* he explains. Arthur's dislike of shelters is consistent with what we heard from encampment residents across Montréal who, often citing violence, drugs, and theft, have chosen to live outside for the summer as their only, safer, or preferred alternative to emergency accommodations.

In contrast to his descriptions of the chaotic shelter experience, Arthur evokes the calmness of his current home. *"The peace, the tranquillity… It's wonderful,"* he says. Arthur's tent is in a strip of trees and bushes that runs below a busy waterfront bike path. His camp is almost entirely hidden and for Arthur, the constant presence of people using the path at all hours, without compromising his privacy, contributes to a sense of comfort and safety in this space. "*There are trees, there are leaves. It's quiet... Yes, there are people who come here on bicycles, sometimes… But I like it. I like it here… There are people jogging at 4 or 5 a.m. in the morning…. It's not dangerous. They're not dangerous people, they're citizens, workers. There's no danger,"* he explains. There are other environmental conditions that impact Arthur's perception of safety. For instance, he appreciates the lights along the bike path that illuminate his camp. *"Even at night, it's clear here."* Moreover, after spending most of the summer alone, Arthur invited his friend Léo to camp in the same space. Léo is a friendly but timid middle-aged Québécois man who has been living outside for several years. *"I brought him in and he's been here for two weeks. Two weeks… But it's been a long time. It's been 5 years since I've known Léo. Yes, go and see him! Yes, Léo! Léo! Léo! Yes. Léo! Go see him!"* he says excitedly. Léo had set up a tent a few trees over in a slightly more visible spot. The two have known each other for a long time and had previously camped together at a lot nearby, but it was slated to become luxury condominiums and they were both kicked out. There was a small concrete slab between their two tents where someone would occasionally sleep in their car. Otherwise, Arthur and Léo had this space to themselves.

"I'm never here during the day. I'm just here to sleep," says Arthur, alluding to his busy schedule. *"Every morning, I get up and go to my appointments. Because as strange as it may seem, I have appointments. Doctor, social worker, hospital, for my eyes, my body, and then there's my fibromyalgia too. So, I have to go to the hospital often… There's something to do every day,"* he says. Arthur is exemplary of the organization and resourcefulness needed to survive outside, especially when living with disabilities and other obstacles. At this point, much of Arthur's busy schedule is routinized based on his understanding of the hours, locations, and offerings of different services. "*I wake up, it's 7 o'clock. I'm going to take a shower. I'm going to have breakfast. I go to my appointments... It's 12 o'clock. Oh, we're going to lunch. I've got a place to go to lunch,"* he says. It is clear that Arthur has established an extensive network of services to meet his needs. *"In time... You get informed… You go and look for information here. 'I want to take my shower, I go where to take my shower' But you can go here, you can go there…"* he says, illustrating the legwork

required to establish these networks. The location of Arthur's camp, in a quiet corner of the centrally located Chantière district, removes him from the hustle and bustle of downtown Montréal but keeps him within walking distance of several essential services and amenities. This strategic location paired with his organizational skills and determination to access the resources available to him creates the opportunity for choice and preference in his decisions of when, where, and which services to use. "*You can go eat here, you can go eat there. Thursday evening, from 7 o'clock, you'll eat there at 9 o'clock, you'll eat at such and such a place. In the morning for lunch from 7:30 you go to such and such a place… But right now, I've got it all in my head. I've got all the spots,"* he says. *"I have eleven places to take a shower,"* he adds, speaking to this element of choice and self-determination.

Arthur's understanding of what is available to him allows him to make strategic decisions about how he spends his time and money. *"At some point, you know, it's good to eat something else… So, I'm gonna go grocery shopping,"* he says, explaining how he shops the sales at several local stores for items that the shelters are less likely to have. *"It's rare that there are bananas, apples, kiwis, watermelons, avocados… All the things I like… There aren't many of these in the missions, so I'm forced to buy. It's ok… It feels good… Change,"* he says. Given his health conditions and lack of transportation options, the level of physical activity required to maintain his busy schedules take a considerable toll on his well-being and morale. *"I don't have a bike. I don't have anything. I walk, but with my illness… I wake up at 7 in the morning. Not so bad. At 11 a.m. I have to come to bed,"* says Arthur. However, returning to his camp is not convenient and sometimes he is forced to sleep in other public spaces. "*I'm going to sit down, I'm going to sleep a little. 1 hour, 2 hours, 3 hours… Then I keep going. 2 hours later, same thing. Tired. No strength left. Sad. It's no fun, it's really no fun,"* he says, explaining the relentlessness of his medical condition.

Arthur's strategies extend from those he has to meet his basic needs to more adaptive strategies he employs to remain in the space. *"I'm cleaning, I'm maintaining… I leave nothing. I pick up everything, everything, everything, everything, everything,"* he says, with an understanding that orderly camps receive fewer complaints from neighbours and unwanted attention from property owners, the SPVM, and the City. The police have not bothered him in his current spot, which he credits to these adaptive strategies. *"Yes, they know I'm here, but there's no malice... I don't do anything dirty. I pick up, I don't make any noise. I don't even have a cat. I don't even have a dog. Nothing, Nothing…"* says Arthur. *"But anyway, I have permission from the City of Montréal,"* he adds. The City had previously visited Arthur and while he was afraid at first, thinking that they would remove him, a representative irresponsibly and erroneously informed him that he had nothing to worry about. "*I was afraid, they're going to say va t'en, va t'en, vas t'en! You're not allowed in here. That's not what he said, he said 'You're staying here.' And he said 'You're safe, you're hidden, you don't make trouble, you collect all your things, no garbage,'"* he recounts. The reassurance he felt from the City prompted Arthur to dream of what the space could become. "*Yes, yes, yes, yes… The City of Montréal came here, the superintendent... He says no problem. You can stay here twelve months a year, but right now, I want to build a shed… it's safer."* he says excitedly. Arthur feels as though the City tolerates him now, but he is concerned that building a shed might jeopardize his fragile tenure. *"I'm waiting for the City's opinion. Because, yes, the City of Montréal tolerates me here, but if I build a shed…That's a bit of an exaggeration"* he says.

Arthur was under the impression that the City owned the property but although they were visiting the space and telling him how to use it, the property was and remains privately owned. The fact that Arthur was not on City property after all helps us understand what he interpreted as 'tolerance' and the lack of police harassment.

On the opposite side of the bike path, Roland, a grizzled, middle-aged Québécois man with short hair and hands covered in bike grease, was taking an entirely different approach. He had recently set up his camp in a wide-open greenspace on a popular stretch of the waterfront. There were unobstructed views of his large tent, bikes, and other belongings from all sides and the bridge above. His camp was underneath an extra-large double-sided billboard strategically placed for maximum attention and he was using the surrounding space to repair high-end bikes. In short, Roland was not following the unwritten rules for the tolerance of encampments that the City had instructed to Arthur and which Roland would have known well. In our conversation, he expressed no concern for the risks of this location or his activities. He had claimed the space and was going to use it how he saw fit. In this sense, his choices signified a resistance to conform to City policy and a rejection of the notion that unhoused people and their work do not belong in the city. Arthur was one of the thousands of people who saw Roland during that stretch. He feared that Roland was too visible and would be evicted. A few days later, all that was left of Roland's camp was matted grass and a pair of shoes. *"The other side of the bike path… we can't go there,"* Arthur responded, learning of Roland's disappearance. He was under the impression that the property Roland had camped on was owned by the federal agency that programs it.[4] In fact, it is owned by the same crown corporation that would evict him and Léo a few weeks later. The considerably longer time that Arthur and Léo were able to camp on these properties speaks to their low profile. Despite being misinformed on who exactly owns these properties, Arthur's understanding of how land ownership, visibility, and cleanliness affect his chances to remain in a space illustrates the adaptive strategies and attention to detail needed to navigate complex landscapes of public and private property.

Over the past decade, the crown corporation that owns the land that Arthur, Léo, and Roland lived on has amassed a large portfolio of contiguous land. They are in the consultation phase of a brand new neighbourhood that will include a beach, artisan's district, and innovation hub. This would continue the ongoing redevelopment of Chantière which has already seen much of the formerly industrial land transformed into luxury housing. These changes prompt a scenario that Arthur and Léo have lived through twice in recent years, whereby encampments are replaced by luxury housing. This is the product of a larger pattern whereby encampments, especially in working-class areas, are commonly on or next to land slated for the development of new housing and master-planned neighbourhoods. After all, unhoused people and the consortium of land speculators, developers, and financiers invested in these projects are attracted to the same vacant underutilized lots, albeit for different reasons and with diverging perspectives on the purpose of housing. In all of these cases, the rapid and sprawling development of predominantly market housing

[4] The space was regularly used for learn-to-camp programming, offering an expensive overnight camping experience in an area where encampments continue to be dismantled. The educational program includes fire workshops where people learn the same life sustaining activity that has become one of the most relied upon justifications for the dismantling of encampments in the relentless co-optation of safety, where rather than promote it within camps, it has been weaponized and redirected towards them.

continues to shrink the stock of public and private spaces in which people who can no longer afford or access housing have claimed a space, pitched tents, and created their best semblance of home.

Arthur was in the hospital when Léo was informed that their camps would be dismantled. They were given a few days' notice, but in the meantime, workers came to clear out the small trees and bushes around their camps. After being disccharged from the hospital, Arthur returned to what was left of his camp. His home had been reduced to a pile, exposed to the joggers and cyclists that were once comfortably out of sight. Exhausted from the past week, Arthur slowly gathered as much as he could carry on foot and quietly placed the rest of his belongings in a nearby dumpster. The setting sun was glistening on the condo towers as he walked back to the shelter downtown.

5. Synthesis: Complex Sites of Survival and the Impacts of Government Policcy on the Ground

Our esearch sought to understand how unhoused individuals experience and shape encampments as complex sites of survival, the impact of government policy on the ground, and the potential for housing justice, as informed by those with lived experience. This section addresses the first, providing a synthesis of encampments in Montréal with an emphasis on their spatial characteristics, organization, nuanced dimensions, and meaning to their residents.

There is a widespread presence of visible and hidden encampments in Montréal, typically located in marginal spaces and home to a few residents. These encampments are most often found on the edge or squeezed between working-class neighbourhoods and industrial zones, particularly in areas undergoing rapid gentrification and post-industrial redevelopment, which increased the threat of eviction. With respect to land ownership, encampments are established on a range of properties, including those owned by the City, such as public parks; provincial and federal crown corporations like Hydro-Québec and Canada Lands Company; government agencies such as the Ministry of Transportation in Quebec and Transport Canada; and private property ranging from that owned by large corporations like CN Rail to small businesses and individuals. Relatively large, long-term, and organized encampments are generally found further from the city centre, and although some central camps do exist on a rolling basis, they are typically simple, small, and short-term. Regarding their immediate surroundings, encampments are often found in woods, parks, and other fragments of greenspace; on industrial or formerly industrial lots; in or around vacant buildings; alongside major transportation infrastructure such as autoroutes, ramps, railroads, and bridges; and in other leftover, liminal, and interstitial spaces. These environments are sometimes harsh, dark, dusty, or noisy, such as under autoroutes or near industrial activities, while at other times calming, natural settings where residents spoke highly of the tranquility and their connection to nature. When entering these spaces across Montréal, it feels almost certain that there will be either an active encampment or the remnants of one. In terms of who lives in encampments, residents generally represent a highly organized and incredibly resourceful subset of the unhoused population who is able to live autonomously in harsh conditions. Living outdoors, establishing and maintaining an encampment, and navigating government policy demand considerable effort, ability, and perseverance, especially when living alone. To manage these challenging circumstances, encampments residents have developed complex systems, schedules, and survival strategies. These include establishing and leveraging networks of services across the city, forming relationships with local businesses and neighbours, and routinizing informal work, such as following specific routes when collecting recyclables or panhandling at specific corners and times, among others.

In terms of their size, organization, and conditions, which largely determines residents' experience, encampments in Montréal generally fall into two loose groups. The first group comprises of small encampments, with one or two tents or shelters, that are home to either one individual, partners, or a couple of friends. This include encmapments like Wren Reed, Gosselin Woods, Chantière, Hospital, and the Mott. The residents of these encampments typically prefer independence and the safety of living alone, thus avoiding the complications of living in large groups and encampments which they associate with drugs, theft, violence, and chaos. Mental illness and substance use was present accross encampments of all sizes, but tended to be relatively stable and have less of an impact on the quality

of life of those able to establish and maintain an encampment, often independently. A subset of these encampments are visible, central, and more likely to be on City land, typically lasting from a few days to weeks before facing eviction. These encampments are usually simple and offer little comfort or stability, with residents having fewer belongings, typically those which they can carry on foot or by bike. Alternatively, many small encampments are hidden, remote, more likely to be situated on private, provincial, or federal property and tolerated for a few weeks, months, or years. Given their relative stability, some residents are able to create a more complete and dignified living environment and retain more personal items and survival tools, equipment, and materials. However, due to the scarcity of hiding places in Montréal that provide this level of stability, there are often several small encampments clustered in these spaces, where residents maintain neighbourly relations rather than fostering a sense of community.

The second group comprises larger encampments, typically home to between three and ten residents. This includes the Factory, Bridge, Mile-End, Autoroute 90, and Otherside. These encampments are closer in size and structure to the large encampments discussed in the literature from American cities and those that emerged in Montréal during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are often hidden, located outside of the city center, and not on City-owned land. Residents tend to prefer the mutual support, shared resources, sense of community, and collective safety and security that can come with communal living, rather than the vulnerability they associate with living alone. Residents of these encampments have strong connections to their communities, sometimes using words like friends and family to describe their neighbours, and in some cases, expressing that they would not know what to do without them. These encampments are often organized around a combination of shared experiences, circumstances, and struggles, such as doing the same informal work, using the same substances, having relatable physical and mental health symptoms, or having ties to the same neighborhood. They often leverage existing relationships and grow through invites from current residents. In other cases, the size of encampments and the number of them within an area have grown despite the interests and cautionary efforts of those who live there, increasing the risk of attention, complaints, government intervention, and ultimately, eviction. Their size tends to fluctuate considerably as residents come and go, maintain multiple homespaces, or access shelters and other accommodations. Finally, these encampments are not solely used by residents; many serve as high-traffic spaces where both unhoused and housed individuals visit and socialize, particularly within underground contexts related to the bicycle economy, sex work, and the sale and use of drugs.

These larger encampments serve as important sites of mutual support, providing shared resources, collective security, and harm reduction. In many cases, these spaces can offer protection and safety, particularly for women, those engaging in dangerous work, and those who consume. Residents at an encampment organized around selling drugs noted that there were always enough people to ensure that someone was security duty. In another, a resident spoke about the passive supervision that groups provide for those consuming substanes, with neighbours ready to administer naloxone or call emergency responders in case of an overdose or toxic supply. One resicdent, who had recently intervened to save her friend's life, urged the government to stop dispersing organized communities, asserting that these actions isolate unhoused individuals and put them in greater danger. In this case and several others, those living in groups viewed their arrangements as safe, secure, and supportive, in contrast to solitary living, which they percieve as vulnerable and unsafe. However, some indvididuals living alone feel safer in isolation. Large

encampments can be chaotic environments, where theft and violence are commonplace, and residents experience intense hardship and suffering as they navigate addiction, mental illness, trauma, interpersonal conflicts, and the challenges of living in groups. At the same time, these group environments offer stability and safety for those who might not be able to establish and maintain an encampment independently but might not want or be able to access shelters. This creates a complex notion of safety, with perceptions differing among unhoused individuals and the State. The City of Montréal frames encampments as unsafe for their residents and other users of the space, co-opting safety to push visibly unhoused individuals into shelters. In response, residents across Montréal maintained that shelters are not safe for them, among their other issues, and that their encampments are safer, among their other advantages. To put this in perspective, residents described shelters as nightmares, as worse than prison, and at times expressed a preference to be incarcerated again for the winter rather than use the current State response.

In both their individual and collective typoligies, encampments are places where unhoused individuals can exercise autonomy and self determination, making decisions for themselves about how best to meet their needs, outside of the strict rules and expectations of the shelter system. First, in addition to providing makeshift shelter, they are spaces where residents can store personal belongings, materials, and equipment, which in size and volume often exceed what one can carry on foot or bike, but which often hold sentimental value and are central to survival. Second, the location of an encampment, particularly in favorable areas, and the ability to remain there over time are crucial to residents' quality of life and their ability to meet their needs. For instance, it determines residents' access to sources of informal income like panhandling and collecting recyclables as well as their proximity to essential services and resources. Many residents have established systems and relationships in their current neighbourhoods that are central to their survival, including networks of services; arrangements with local businesses; solidarity with neighbours; connections with outreach workers, although inconsistent; and a general familiarity with an area that supports living in public space, among others. Similarly to the importance of community, given residents' understanding that eviction(s) would likely push them to more remote areas, further from the routines, resources, and relationships, residents expressed serious concerns about what would happen if these vital ties were severed. Finally, residents often have specific, meaningful, and not at all random connections to their shelters, encampments, and the spaces around them. These spaces often hold spiritual and emotional significance for residents, whether as places of peace, tranquility, and connection to nature; as locations that were important to them before experiencing homelessness; as places that need care and to be protected; or as sites that have provided dignity and a sense of pride in their resilience, among other profound connections. Some residents we spoke to were drawn to the location of their encampments because they were reclaiming spaces where they had experienced past trauma or had a sense of unfinished business. These connections extend to the shelters and other infrastructure in which residents have invested considerable time, effort, and resources. This investment often reflects their vision for the potential of these spaces and the possibilities of what they could do with them and accomplish if given the opportunity.

6. Rights-Based and Resident-Informed Recommendations for Housing Justice

The objective of our research was to produce a series of recommendations for planners and policymakers that will protect encampments, improve living conditions for residents, and support their claim of the right to adequate housing. We approached this through meaningful engagement and collaboration with encampment residents, valuing their knowledge and perspective as experts on their own lives and needs. The resulting recommendations, presented in this section, include those directly mentioned by the residents we interviewed, those carefully interpreted from our conversations, and those distilled from our observations of the realities of encampments. They are directed toward decision-makers at all levels of government, with an emphasis on planning policy and processes at the municipal level. They are also intended to validate and inform the advocacy and care work of housing rights activists, practitioners, and frontline workers who are actively working to end and prevent homelessness.

The following recommendations must be interpreted with three key considerations. First, these recommendations were developed in an integral but singular scope and do not provide an exhaustive or comprehensive formula for what is needed on the ground or to end homelessness. Second, while many recommendations do advance and pertain to the ultimate goal of preventing and ending homelessness, the focus of this research was to identify policy change and supports that address the needs of folks who are presently experiencing homelessness. Lastly, while it is important to support the efforts and recognize the resilience of residents who are maintaining encampments and addressing government shortfalls themselves, it is crucial to reiterate that makeshift shelters in public space do not replace the need for adequate housing (Farha & Schwan, 2020; Flynn et al., 2022; Leblanc et al., 2023; OFHA, 2024). As such, the proposed policies are intended to support encampments as a temporary solution while residents wait for housing that meets their needs and systemic issues are addressed, while being careful not to position them as an acceptable long-term substitute for adequate housing or a permanent fixture in the emergency response to homelessness Ultimately, considerable changes to the current government policies and practices are imperative to support the human rights of encampment residents and those changes must centre their voice. Our recommendations are presented in five sections, designed to (1) address systemic issues at the root of homelessness, (2) reconceive the shelter system for those in immediate need of temporary accommodation, (3) end punitive policies, (4) support encampments, and (5) realize residents' needs and visions for their spaces as self-determined planning projects.

6.1. Address Systemic Issues

The encampment residents we spoke to contextualize their experiences with a strong understanding of the systemic issues that underpin homelessness. Their comments and experiences underscore the urgent need to reassess the housing, healthcare, foster care, justice, and shelter systems, and address the structural factors of homelessness, with an emphasis on particular shortcomings in healthcare and a severe lack of affordable and adequate housing. According to Mitchell (2016), the crux of the issue is the failure of the capitalist city to provide for its residents and the need to address these root causes of homelessness. He urges us to support encampments, but more crucially, to dismantle the systemic conditions that make them a regular feature of our urban landscapes. This calls for new policies that not only support encampments but also promote non-commodified solutions to the housing crisis, ultimately aiming to eliminate the need for them altogether. Addressing the housing crisis is arguably the primary challenge for planners today at all levels of government, as Canadians slide deeper into the housing crisis. Public and private sector planners directly or indirectly influence how governments prioritize and distribute resources for housing. Their plans, policies, and projects impact housing outcomes, be that the appreciation of property values for homeowners, the displacement of folks who can no longer afford the rising costs of housing in their neighbourhoods, or the development of social housing. This, planners play a role in both exacerbating and addressing the systemic issues that make encampments a necessary fixture in Canadian cities, but as advocates, they must ensure that their efforts align with broader goals that prioritize the needs of marginalized communities.

The following recommendations outline broad goals to address systemic issues that planners should consider:

- Advocate for increased minimum wage and social assistance to bring adequate housing within reach.
- Advise government control over housing prices and prioritize the construction of affordable housing.
- Invest in building and maintaining low-income and supportive housing for vulnerable populations.
- Create opportunities for residents to be involved as stakeholders in housing options and programs.
- Halt permits for luxury housing in areas critically lacking low-income housing to prevent gentrification.
- Establish more designated spaces for the safe use of a wider range of substances.
- Ultimately, thoroughly reassess the housing, shelter, healthcare, foster care, and justice systems to address how systemic failures contribute to homelessness and the necessity of encampments.

6.2. Reconceive the Shelter System

As a first response to homelessness, the abysmal conditions and systemic failures of the shelter system violate the government's obligation to provide adequate housing. Encampment residents across Montréal cited various reasons, including strict rules, bad treatment, and a lack of available or appropriate space, for not wanting or being able to access shelters. Universally, residents expressed that encampments were a safer and preferred option. This reveals a clear link between the inadequacies of government support and the growing number of encampments, where residents assert their right to housing. However, not everyone wants or is able to maintain an encampment. Thus, in the absence of adequate housing for all, shelters need to be reimagined to better support those who rely on them. While shelters are not traditionally within the purview of planners, they increasingly impact and must therefore inform the work of planners. More specifically, the shortcomings of shelters are pushing people into public space, well within the scope of planners. As such, in order to provide better housing solutions coupled with their role in designing and fostering inclusive public spaces, planners must consider the flaws of shelters and not re-create them outside. As the literature warns, there is a slippery slope from legalizing encampments to the re-creation of their abysmal conditions or carceral measures in an outdoor setting.

The following recommendations express residents' concerns with shelters and their ideas to improve them:

- End shelter bans and reduce barriers to access.
- Reduce and revise rules to create less restrictive and punitive environments.
- Increase available space, particularly that dedicated to women, trans, and gender-diverse folks.
- Establish regulation and oversight to prevent mismanagement and uphold ethical, rights-based standards.
- Ensure a trauma-informed approach that acknowledges individual needs and experiences.
- Improve training and hiring practices for shelter staff to ensure genuine and appropriate care.
- Ensure transparency of funding, allocation, salaries, and operational expenses to enhance accountability.

6.3. End Punitive Policies

The predominant policy response to encampments in Montreal - evictions, clearance, and warehousing - is upheld by punitive by-laws that criminalize unhoused individuals for using and existing in public space. As our research demonstrates, in so many words, the status quo constitutes violence and a violation of residents' human rights. The two sections that follow this one return to the planner's role in supporting encampments and the inclusive use of public space, however, those ideas are contingent upon an immediate end to the City's current approach. As researchers in the field of urban planning making recommendations to policy and decision-makers, we urge City officials to amend the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of their public space and transportation by-laws and to halt the overwhelmingly disproportionate enforcement of these regulations against unhoused folks. The following recommendations are informed by the experiences of residents for whom it is nearly impossible to survive outside while navigating the legal and regulatory landscape without facing harassment, fines, and legal repercussions.

This stipulates an immediate end to…

…the forced and violent eviction of unhoused individuals from public space.

…the fines and legal repercussions for unhoused folks meeting their basic needs in public space.

…the dismantling of encampments on City property in violation of residents' human rights.

…the dispersal of encampment communities as it undermines residents' safety and mutual support.

…the practice of directing displaced residents to existing encampments without permission.

…the dispossession of residents' personal belongings, shelters, and survival equipment.

…the role of police as the de facto intermediaries between governments and encampment residents.

…the co-optation of safety as a pretext for evictions and the warehousing of folks in unsafe shelters.

6.4. Support Encampments

As the safest, preferred, or only housing solution for many individuals experiencing homelessness, we must support encampments until adequate housing is made available. This section presents a truly multi-disciplinary approach, recommending and requiring interventions from a wide range of actors. Some of these recommendations are within the scope of planning, while most others are well outside of it. However, from a planning perspective, this section is imperative for learning from what is not working (the previous three sections) and imagining new processes based on what folks are telling us. Returning to the notion of advocacy planning, these are processes of meaningful engagement that value the lived experience of marginalized groups whose needs and interests planners have both the responsibility and ability to support through the plans they make. This section asks planners to think holistically about the planning practice, considering how they can plan for changes outside of their discipline, and make plans that support these necessary changes. In other words, planners can act as facilitators to advance these urgent recommendations and support the actors involved in implementing them. Ultimately, from how it is zoned, designed, and programmed, plans for public space must consider all users, particularly those whose survival depends on it.

- Decriminalize encampments and the use of public space by unhoused individuals meeting their basic needs.
    - Current public space and transportation by-laws in Montréal criminalize homelessness by making it illegal for unhoused individuals to sleep, build shelter, meet their needs, or exist in the only spaces available to them. Amendments must be drafted by policymakers and passed by the council to promote inclusivity.
- Provide resources and support for the construction of safe and dignified shelters and encampments.
    - Encampment residents are skilled and resourceful. Many have built shelters, offering them safety, comfort, and dignity. However, not everyone is able to, not all shelters are safe, and by suggesting permanence, they are often dismantled. As long as encampments are necessary, so are supports to build and maintain them safely. This includes access to materials, fire safety equipment, pre-fab options, and information.
- Develop secure storage options for residents' belongings and support for maintaining encampment cleanliness.
    - Encampments can accumulate a large volume of stuff. Some items have survival and sentimental value for residents and are vulnerable to theft in these settings. Other items are garbage and require disposal. Acknowledging that some residents have had their encampment(s) dismantled and personal belongings dispossessed in the past, storage and waste management supports must be accessible and trauma-informed.

- Improve trauma-informed and de-escalation training for City staff who interact with unhoused individuals.
  - Residents voiced concerns about police officers' qualifications and ability to de-escalate conflicts. This underscores the need for enhanced trauma-informed and de-escalation training for all City workers to promote safe, non-threatening, and non-traumatizing interactions with unhoused individuals.
- Reduce the role of the police in the City's approach to homelessness and response to encampments.
  - It is unsafe and inappropriate for police officers to serve as the primary liaison between unhoused individuals and governments. Although City social workers increasingly accompany police, with the mutual goal of eviction, officers often engage with encampments alone. Residents expressed doubts that the police were able to help, rather, they made things worse and City social workers had little to offer.
- Decriminalize and promote the safety of informal work while creating formal employment opportunities.
  - Current public space by-laws and provincial codes criminalize the informal work that residents do to sustain themselves. Amendments are needed to decriminalize this work, alongside the implementation of safe, supportive measures. Residents also expressed their capacity to work and need for job opportunities.
- Promote harm reduction in encampments through funding, equipment, and information.
  - Encampments often provide a safer environment for consumption than other public spaces. Many residents already practice harm reduction and supervised consumption. Funding is needed for new and existing initiatives that supply equipment and information to support safe consumption practices.
- Ensure consistent outreach, follow-up, and access to information to utilize available services.
  - Residents expressed that outreach was limited and inconsistent: social workers visit encampments, collect information, and mention housing programs, but might not return, follow up, or answer the phone, leaving residents uncertain and unsupported. Residents also expressed that many resources and organizations are serving the unhoused, but indicated a lack of information as a barrier to accessing them.
- Provide transportation support for residents who often travel long distances to access services and work.
  - Encampments residents often travel long distances on foot or bike to access services and places of informal work. For some, physical disabilities and illness make these distances and modes challenging,

and at times, excruciating. Access to safe bicycles, free metro passes, and adequate footwear are needed.

- Promote programs and partnerships that ensure encampment residents have access to surplus food.
    - Residents expressed frustration with the amount of food discarded by restaurants and shops. Food safety regulations, liabilities, and waste management policies must be reconsidered to ensure dignified access to surplus food. This could be facilitated by programs that connect food businesses with encampments.
- Ensure environmental activism and conservation efforts consider the needs and rights of unhoused residents.
    - Many encampments are located in rare natural spaces, making them the foci of environmental activism and sites of lopsided power relations. Conservation goals and initiatives must consider and align with the interests and rights of unhoused residents and must not lead to discrimination or displacement.
- Mandate that City officials stay in an encampment with permission to understand the realities on the ground.
    - Residents expressed that decision-makers need a better understanding of their experiences and the realities on the ground. While police and municipal workers regularly check encampments, residents suggested that the mayor and other City officials spend a week in an encampment to see if their policies are working.

6.5. Realize Residents' Self-Determined Planning Projects

As experts in their own lives, residents saw potential in their encampments to better meet their needs and had clear visions of how to bring these ideas to life if given the opportunity, often stemming from their specific connections to their homespaces. Over the summer, residents shared their ideas with us on how to improve the conditions of encampments, how to reinvigorate the areas around them, and how to promote the inclusive use of public space.

Several residents envisioned transforming the underutilized spaces around their encampments into developments where unhoused individuals would have small plots of land where they could construct their own insulated shelters, bringing them a sense of comfort, autonomy, and dignity. These would be shelters with walls and doors, offering real protection and privacy, unlike tents, tarps, and planks of wood and these encampments would have entrances and exits rather than holes in fences. Other residents saw the conversion of parking lots into spaces where folks could park and sleep in their cars, with access to services and utilities without harassment. Some residents envisioned encampments as safe, inclusive areas for LGBTQS+ individuals, with pathways carved through the woods allowing for movement and connection. Naturally, fields were suggested as designated spaces for tents, while unsafe buildings would be torn down and vacant ones repurposed as shelter for unhoused individuals. However, these spaces would not only serve as places to sleep, they would be full of life. Residents imagined converting a dormant building into an atelier and law library where folks could develop skills, learn their rights, and practice the arts such, as cooking, metalworking, and jewelry-making. Residents appreciated the design and architecture of the buildings, noting how light interacts with the space throughout the day and how certain features could be restored. In these scenarios, encampments would be legal. They would develop through arrangements with landowners and the State but would be managed internally by the residents. There would be basic ground rules formulated through dialogue with residents and conflicts would be handled as a community. At the core of these ideas, in the absence of adequate housing, is the creation of safe environments that provide opportunities for autonomy and community.

In their designs, residents amended public space by-laws to decriminalize their use of the space, reimagined zoning to allow for the development of shelters, interacted with building codes to create safer, more suitable structures, issued permits to establish their homes, redeveloped underutilized buildings and lots into community centers and supportive housing, and redesigned public spaces to enhance accessibility, safety, and inclusivity for all users. In so many words, these are self-determined planning projects that assert their claim of the right to adequate housing. In line with advocacy planning, our research was designed to meaningfully engage with folks who are excluded from the decision-making and planning processes, but are most impacted by the top-down policies that govern public space and their right to use it. As experts in their own needs, unhoused folks shared with us alternatives to the punitive status quo. What emerged were resident-informed and rights-based planning projects. As illustrated, planners have the tools to support these plans, and in their role as advocates, they have the responsibility to do so.

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