



STATEMENT: CLOSING OF AMPERSEE ENCAMPMENT

The Kalamazoo County Continuum of Care, a partnership of local government and community service agencies coordinating housing and services for houseless families and individuals, supports the decision to close the Ampersee encampment and provide safer shelter for those affected.

The encampment, which has grown to 180 people, has become known in other unhoused communities as a place to go, with a growing number of inhabitants coming from outside of Kalamazoo. Law enforcement and support workers report increased incidences of violence, drug sales and use, human trafficking, forced prostitution, and significant public health risks for those living there and for the surrounding community. Further, the encampment is located in a brownfield site, which by definition is unsafe and unhealthy for human habitation due to hazardous substances in the ground.

Homeless encampments are highly visible reminders of the housing crisis in our community. An encampment should always be a short-term, last-resort option, considered only if the current sheltering system does not have capacity. While that was the case during the earlier phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, when social distancing requirements limited shelter space, that is no longer a factor. There is adequate, safe shelter space to accommodate Kalamazoo residents currently staying at the encampment. Shelter providers include Kalamazoo Gospel Mission (women, men, families), Oakland Houses (women, men), Open Doors Shelter (men), Next Door Shelter (women), YWCA (Domestic Violence), The Ark (youth).

The Continuum of Care partners will actively work with those at the encampment to coordinate supportive and shelter services. Outreach workers will help people find affordable housing, emergency shelter and other services, including helping with any mental health, physical health and substance abuse issues. Caseworkers have been at the encampment daily and have helped many individuals find alternative shelter. We will continue this important work in coordination with the CoC Outreach Coordination Group, Integrated Services of Kalamazoo, and Housing Resources Inc.

Beyond the immediate need, the Continuum of Care continues to advocate for policies that reduce homelessness, seek to end homelessness through long-term solutions, and increase the health and safety for those experiencing homelessness.