

Region of Waterloo
Community Services
Housing Services

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: January 10, 2023
Report Title: Interim Housing Solutions Implementation Update

1. Recommendation

For Information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide an update on actions taken by Regional staff to implement Interim Housing Solutions for Regional residents experiencing homelessness, including work to initiate the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

3. Strategic Plan:

Efforts to ensure a safe place to call home for everyone in Waterloo Region aligns with the Region's Corporate Strategic Plan 2019-2023, Focus Area 4: Healthy, Safe, and Inclusive Communities. This includes supporting and improving equity in policies, planning, services, and decision-making to positively impact community wellbeing and by enhancing community safety in Waterloo Region.

4. Report Highlights:

- In response to the approval of recommendations by Regional Council to implement Interim Housing Solutions and to develop a Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Waterloo Region, staff has:
 - Initiated the selection of Service Providers to operate the various Programs through Expressions of Interest processes;
 - Actioned Expressions of Interest processes to solicit potential spaces, properties, and facilities from which to operate the various Programs;
 - Identified a process to select a vendor to supply housing options for the Hybrid Shelter/Outdoor Model ('Outdoor Shelter'); and
 - Initiated the development of a framework, process and timeline for

the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in the region.

- Through delegated authority from Regional Council on August 18, 2022, Regional staff has executed agreements to expedite the implementation of the Interim Housing Solutions, including securing the King Street Shelter in Kitchener operated by The Working Centre, and the Emergency Shelter in Kitchener operated by Services and Housing in the Province (SHIP).

5. Background:

On August 18, 2022, Regional Council approved recommendations to implement Interim Housing Solutions for Regional residents experiencing homelessness as identified through a community engagement process (see CSD-HOU-22-19). The Interim Housing Solutions include the expansion of existing Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, and Home-Based Support Programs while adding a new Outdoor Shelter option. The addition of these housing-focused programs and services acknowledges that the growing number of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is unprecedented.

Solutions to this crisis require additional funding options from the Federal and Provincial governments, including specific and sustained health funding for mental health and addictions supports and primary care, as well as funding to develop and operate more affordable and supportive housing. This crisis also requires an all of community response and approach, including additional upstream solutions that address the root causes of homelessness. This includes the focus and priority of Regional Council and staff along with community partners, area municipalities, housing providers, developers, philanthropic and private sector working together. The Region continues to act as a leader by convening partners from various systems to work on this very complex issue.

Through CSD-HOU-22-19, Regional Council also directed staff to develop a plan detailing the strategies and resources necessary to end chronic homelessness in the region. The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness will be community led and focused, with backbone support provided by Regional staff and an external consultant. Central to the development of this plan will be an inclusive and extensive community engagement process to inform the way forward. The work to develop a framework, process and timeline will continue through early 2023, enriched by the perspectives provided through community engagement. This work will include engaging lived experience working groups and the many voices of lived and living experience in our community today.

6. Area Municipality Communication and Public/Stakeholder Engagement:

Area Municipality Communication:

Through a Municipal Housing and Homelessness Leads Committee, Region staff remain closely connected with area municipalities in the collective work of addressing

housing and homelessness related issues in the region. Staff meet and communicate regularly on housing and homelessness issues, including progress on the implementation of the Interim Housing Solutions, taking into consideration the valuable insights, considerations and resources of area municipal partners. Through collaborative problem-solving, data sharing, and leveraging shared resources, area municipalities are a vital partner in building a healthy and inclusive community for all.

Public/Stakeholder Engagement:

Through the Region's role as Service Manager and Community Entity, Region staff regularly engage with and convene community partners, service providers, area municipalities, housing providers, developers, philanthropic and private sector to focus on implementing plans to increase housing affordability and end homelessness.

Several working groups convene regularly and collaboratively to focus on plans and actions related to distinct groups of community members experiencing homelessness, including adult women, adult men, youth, and those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Service providers in the Housing Stability System regularly engage with those experiencing homelessness, providing Regional staff with valuable insights into service improvements and gaps. The People's Action Group also brings the voices and wisdom of those with lived experiences of homelessness to inform program and system changes and improvements. Additional and continued engagement with those living unsheltered will bolster ongoing efforts to support these residents, including two new encampment working groups focused on serving youth and adults.

A community engagement process was vital to identifying the Interim Housing Solutions that would be most appropriate in providing a rapid, supportive response to Regional residents experiencing homelessness. Regional staff incorporated the invaluable advice, expertise, and perspectives provided through the engagement process in the summer of 2022 into the resulting response and plan, including the development and evaluation of the Expressions of Interest to identify Service Providers and sites for the operations of the various Programs. The various groups consulted during this process include the City of Kitchener's Lived Expertise Working Group, the People's Action Group, the Housing and Homelessness Advisory Group, and several working groups focused on serving youth, adult men, adult women, and those living unsheltered. Regional staff also engaged in surveys with those experiencing unsheltered homelessness and residing in three large encampments on their needs and preferences to inform the location and operations of the Outdoor Shelter. As the Outdoor Shelter is a new option for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Waterloo Region, implementing the program will be a learning process for everyone involved.

Regional staff continues to engage with community members through EngageWR Interim Housing Solutions project pages along with email and phone communication through dedicated channels.

7. Financial Implications:

The preliminary 2023 Homelessness Operating Budget includes the Interim Housing Solution program with estimated non-staffing costs of \$7.4M plus staffing costs of \$0.8M for a total of \$8.2M. Other homelessness program costs, excluding costs associated with the Interim Housing Solution program, have increased by \$1M for 2023.

In addition, \$6.4M in provincial and federal revenues for Homelessness programs are expiring at the end of 2022 which, if no other funding source is provided, will require additional property tax levy funding to deliver service at these levels. The combined ongoing 2023 budget impact for Homelessness programs is approximately \$15.6M. For the preliminary 2023 budget, staff recommend using uncommitted Provincial COVID funding of \$7.6M in 2023 to phase in this property tax levy impact over two years.

The preliminary 2023-2032 Housing Capital Program includes \$2.6M in 2023 for one-time capital costs associated with the Outdoor Shelter located at 1001 Erb's Road, Waterloo [Waterloo Region Emergency Services Training and Research Centre (WRESTRC)]. These capital expenditures are proposed to be funded from the Housing Capital Reserve.

Conclusion / Next Steps:

Communities thrive when everyone has a place to call home; a place that is their own, where they feel comfortable, safe, and part of the community. This is what we are working towards in Waterloo Region. As a social determinant of health, housing is foundational to promoting a healthy community for all. As Service Manager and Community Entity for housing and homelessness, the Region of Waterloo will continue to provide strong leadership in investing in programs and services aimed at ending the experience of homelessness for everyone in Waterloo Region.

8. Attachments:

Nil.

Prepared By: Ashley Coleman, Social Planning Associate

Reviewed By: Kelly-Anne Salerno, Assistant Director, Housing Services

Approved By: Peter Sweeney, Commissioner, Community Services