



Region of Waterloo

Appendix C: Four-month Assessment Report Summary - Erb's Road Shelter

The region's first outdoor shelter opened at 1001 Erb's Road on April 27, 2023. As part of the collaborative work undertaken with the Township of Wilmot and the City of Waterloo, Housing Services committed to conducting an assessment within the first four months of operation.

The evaluation included surveys and interviews with shelter participants, interviews with ERS/TWC staff, surveys with external partners and a review of industry best practices.

A Positive and Life-Changing Experience

Overall, the data shows that the Erb's Road Shelter (ERS) has been a positive and life-changing experience for the majority of participants.

During the first four months of operation, two participants successfully moved into permanent housing. It is important to consider the significance of this progress in the context of several factors.

- Highest levels of acuity - Participants entering the ERS are individuals with some of the highest levels of acuity. Many have spent extended periods of time living rough. The average length of time of participants experiencing homelessness was three years; the longest was seven years. Some have very limited experience accessing community supports, including the emergency shelter system and working with outreach.
- Time to connect and stabilize - To begin working on housing case plans, participants entering ERS need to develop relationships and a level of trust with outreach workers and peers. After years of living rough, the process of connection and stabilization can take several months.

The assessment data further highlights positive impacts in a number of areas:

- 70 per cent of respondents felt safe at ERS, indicated that ERS has helped them in their recovery and are motivated to find housing. Respondents highly valued having a private lockable cabin.
- 70 per cent preferred ERS over unsanctioned encampments; 50 per cent preferred ERS over emergency shelters, 65 per cent of participants felt well-supported by staff.

Areas for Improvement

As expected in a prototype of this kind, the assessment also found areas for improvement. Some of these findings include:

- 45 per cent responded positively to programs and activities offered including external support services coming on-site and indicated the need for more addictions, medical, mental health, and housing supports.
- Over the initial four months, the shelter provider (The Working Centre) worked to develop relationships with the surrounding community to address concerns. Ongoing discussions to mitigate issues are taking place and could be addressed with the creation of a community advisory group.

Recommendations

- Provide more access to on-site medical and addictions care, employment services, mental health support and counselling. Increase access to group programming such as Alcoholics Anonymous, employment programs, and skill building.
- Prioritize Housing Workers and housing activities as soon as possible.
- Enhance space design of the main complex to improve food service and group programming.
- Create community advisory groups to replace neighbour meetings to support community engagement.
- Involve those with lived expertise in future decision-making.
- Consider a whole of community approach to shelter support as used by City of London to bring partners and sector funders in to create a service hub-like space with shelter, health, social services, and housing.

Additional Background

ERS accommodates up to 50 participants in cabins and a main complex with necessary amenities. The site is operated by The Working Centre (TWC), along with on-site security services.

ERS is an interim solution for people who need a low-barrier option for shelter from encampments, supported through a person-centered, harm-reduction approach with the aim of securing permanent housing. ERS has assisted 65 unique individuals total over the course of 4 months from encampments, 19 of whom came directly from 100 Victoria, 150 Main, or Victoria Park encampments in early May 2023.

Detailed results of this evaluation have been shared with the Township of Wilmot and the City of Waterloo.

Summary based on the detailed Evaluation Report of the Erb's Road Shelter prepared by: Francisco Truong, Social Planning Associate, Region of Waterloo