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**Region of Waterloo**  
**Community Services**  
**Housing Services**

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**To:** Regional Council

**Meeting Date:** August 18, 2022

**Report Title:** Interim Housing Solutions for Regional Residents Experiencing Homelessness

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**1. Recommendation:**

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo take the following action with respect to Interim Housing Solutions for Regional Residents Experiencing Homelessness as recommended by the Community Services Committee on August 9, 2022 and as further set out in report CSD-HOU-22-19 dated August 18, 2022:

- a) Advocate to the Government of Canada and to the Province of Ontario for incremental, sustainable and predictable funding to support interim and long term solutions to eliminate homelessness in Waterloo Region;
- b) Increase the 2022 Housing Services Operating Budget by \$3,420,000 to be funded from a combination of the 2022 Equity and Inclusion Fund and the Tax Stabilization Reserve as deemed appropriate by the Chief Financial Officer;
- c) Delegate on an as required basis, to the Chief Administrative Officer and the Commissioner of Community Services, the authority to finalize and execute agreements with service providers, landlords, and/or community partners, and any associated ancillary agreements, including agreements to acquire interests in property, and to execute documents and certificates as may be necessary for the expeditious implementation of the Community Services Committee resolutions from August 9, 2022 and to do all things as may be necessary or required to give effect to these resolutions, all to the satisfaction of the Regional Solicitor and the Chief Financial Officer; and
- d) Indicate Regional Council's intent to recover, from future regional development charges, a portion of capital costs incurred in 2022 and future years relating to Housing Solutions for Regional Residents Experiencing Homelessness, subject to approval of future Regional Development Charge By-laws.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

This report provides an overview of actions taken by Regional staff in response to the June 2022 Council Motion to identify Interim Housing Solutions for Regional residents experiencing homelessness. Informed by a community engagement process and as presented to Community Services Committee on August 9, 2022, the recommendations in this report build on the resolutions passed by the Community Services Committee and which are before Council for approval on today's agenda.

### **3. Strategic Plan:**

This report addresses the Region's Corporate Strategic Plan 2019-2023, Focus Area 4: Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities. More specifically, the report addresses Strategic Objective 4.3, 'promote and enhance equity in policies, planning, services, and decision-making in order to positively impact community wellbeing,' and Strategic Objective 4.5, 'enhance community safety and wellbeing in Waterloo Region.'

### **4. Report Highlights:**

- This report provides an overview of the information provided to Community Services Committee through a staff Presentation on August 9, 2022, including the comprehensive evaluation criteria and various interim housing solutions considered, a summary of the community engagement process, and the recommendations for Council's consideration.
- Region staff heard the following interim housing solutions as most preferred through the community engagement process:
  - Expand the Transitional Housing Program;
  - Expand the Home-Based Support Program;
  - Expand the Emergency Shelter Program; and
  - Permit a temporary managed Hybrid Shelter/Outdoor Model.
- The report recommendations facilitate the quick implementation of these interim housing solutions by Regional staff.

### **5. Background:**

On June 22, 2022, Regional Council approved a motion "that staff develop a plan to establish interim housing solutions for the Regional residents experiencing homelessness including those currently residing in encampments." Since that time, staff has identified several housing-focused solutions along with criteria to evaluate the opportunities and challenges of each solution. A community engagement process involving service providers, community partners and lived experience offered invaluable feedback, advice and insights to the resulting response and plan. The process included meetings with various committees, working groups and community groups in addition to a living experience perspective gathered through a survey with people currently residing

in encampments. The results of this process including the recommendations presented to Regional Council on August 9, 2022, are outlined below.

### **Community Engagement Process Results Overview**

The following identifies the criteria considered in evaluating various interim housing solutions, including the enhancements provided through the community consultation process. The criteria also informs the continuous improvement of existing housing focused programs and services aimed to end homelessness in Waterloo Region:

- Quick implementation – by early fall.
- Informed by lived and living experience – will meet identified needs.
- Transitions to longer-term solution – flexibility to evolve as needs change.
- Impact is measureable – collection of data is possible.
- Access to individualized supports – ease of provision of supports to people.
- Staffing – model safeguards staff wellbeing.
- Reduces chronic homelessness – shortest path to permanent housing.
- Meets basic needs – provides food, shelter, and sanitation.
- Trauma-informed – prioritizes healing and safety.
- Rooted in harm reduction – incorporates person-centered strategies to reduce the harms connected to substance use.
- Peer support – enables and incorporates peers.
- Builds community – promoting a sense of belonging, contributing to inclusion and individual wellbeing.
- Access – facilitates 24/7 availability.

Through the lens of the evaluation criteria outlined above, the community engagement process also considered several interim housing solutions that would form a response and plan for immediate implementation. Region staff heard the following interim housing solutions as most preferred through the consultation process, which directly informed the recommendations in the Presentation:

- **Expand the Transitional Housing Program**, which provides a supportive – yet temporary – type of accommodation that is meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing;
- **Expand the Home-Based Support Program**, a Housing First program that helps people find and keep a home through wrap-around support and rent assistance to make housing in the private market more affordable;
- **Expand the Emergency Shelter Program**, which provides a temporary shelter for those experiencing homelessness and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements; and
- **Permit a temporary managed Hybrid Shelter/Outdoor Model**, which would provide a temporary shelter for those experiencing homelessness, and would

include a managed space for outdoor tenting options.

An important part of the community consultation process included connecting with people currently residing in encampments to hear about their experiences living unsheltered and in encampments, and to gather information about their housing and service needs and preferences. The following summarizes the insights gathered from 53 individuals with living experience of unsheltered homelessness:

- 19% of respondents identify as Indigenous.
- Residents are reluctant to access Emergency Shelters for a variety of reasons, including violence, theft, and lack of privacy, along with the restrictions faced by couples and those with pets.
- Residents are drawn to a sense of community and family that an encampment provides.
- Residents are seeking dignity, respect, washrooms, showers, electricity, food, water, and garbage removal at encampments.
- An overwhelming majority of 96% of respondents expressed a preference for permanent supportive housing.
- Respondents are seeking help to find and keep a home (life stabilization, affordability, own space), and are seeking support for mental health issues, substance use difficulties and connection with people they can trust.

These wisdom-filled insights confirm the centrality of home and community in people's lives. The expertise of those with living experience will continue to inform the response and plan moving forward, and will form an integral pillar in developing the Homelessness Master Plan that staff will begin work on in the fall of 2022. Staff are grateful to the community members experiencing homelessness that bravely shared their stories and experiences through this process.

### **Recommendations Approved by Community Services Committee**

The following recommendations were contained in the staff presentation and were approved by the Community Services Committee on August 9, 2022:

- That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo direct staff to develop a Homelessness Master Plan detailing the strategies and resources necessary to end homelessness in the Region of Waterloo.
- That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo authorize staff to prioritize and implement interim housing solutions, to support those experiencing homelessness in the Region of Waterloo, in the following order:
  1. Expansion of the Transitional Housing Program, including an Indigenous-focused and led site;
  2. Expansion of the Home-Based Support Program;
  3. Expansion of the Emergency Shelter Program; and

4. Permit a managed Hybrid Shelter/Outdoor Model.

## **6. Area Municipality Communication and Public/Stakeholder Engagement:**

The community engagement process involving service providers, community partners and community members with lived and living experience was integral to identifying the interim housing solutions most appropriate in providing a supportive response to Regional residents experiencing homelessness. Regional staff incorporated the invaluable advice, expertise and perspectives provided through the engagement process into the resulting response and plan, and will continue to bring these learnings forward in the future development of the Homelessness Master Plan.

## **7. Financial Implications:**

Preliminary cost estimates to support this response for 2022 and 2023 are \$3.4M and \$10.3M respectively, excluding incremental staffing and capital acquisition costs. This expenditure is not included in the Region's 2022 Operating Budget. The recommended 2022 budget amendment would be funded from anticipated unspent Equity and Inclusion funds and the Tax Stabilization Reserve, as required. The Preliminary 2023 Housing Services Operating Budget and 2023-2032 Capital Program will be drafted to reflect the cost of the newly approved service level including associated staffing and capital costs, for consideration by the incoming Council.

There is currently an estimated funding shortfall for homelessness programs in 2023 of \$6.5M as the Province's Social Services Relief Fund expires on December 31, 2022. In the absence of additional senior government funding, this shortfall and the incremental costs for services outlined in this report will be in the range of \$17M in 2023, and this cost will ultimately fall to the regional property tax levy. Any incremental 2023 property tax levy requirement associated with the August 9, 2022 recommendations from the Community Services Committee is not part of the 2023 budget projection provided to Council in June, which outlined an approximate 10% tax increase for Regional services (excluding Police Services).

The Region intends to assess the viability of introducing a development charge for Housing to recover a portion of growth-related capital costs incurred for both Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan projects and for housing solutions for regional residents experiencing homelessness. The extent of recovery will be determined through the Region's next Development Charge Background Study and By-law to be presented for Council's consideration in early 2024.

## **8. 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. Ending homelessness in all its forms for every single person that lives in Waterloo Region is crucial to realizing

this vision.

As the recommendations outlined in this report move forward, staff will begin work to implement the interim housing solutions, starting with the Expressions of Interest processes to solicit potential spaces, properties, services and/or facilities. Additionally, staff will initiate the development of a framework, process and timeline for the Homelessness Master Plan, to be presented to Regional Council later in 2022. Staff will also report on the implementation status of the approved Interim Housing Solutions and details of any exercised delegated authority at the first regular meeting of the incoming Regional Council in December 2022.

**9. Attachments:**

Nil.

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**Approved By:** Peter Sweeney, Commissioner, Community Services