

Region of Waterloo
Community Services
Housing Services

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: October 8, 2024
Report Title: Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter Evaluation and Recommendations

1. Recommendation

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo continue to fund and coordinate the operation of the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter until at least 2030 as a part of the community-led Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, or as long as the service is required, as outlined in report CSD-HOU-24-016, dated October 8, 2024.

And that Regional staff be directed to request a six-month extension related to waste water disposal at the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter from the Chief Building Official (CBO) of the Township of Wilmot to accommodate the construction of the necessary infrastructure to connect with the existing Region-owned property at 1001 Erb's Road as outlined in report CSD-HOU-24-016, dated October 8, 2024.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide an update on the benefits and impacts of the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter one year into its operations and recommend its continued operations as an essential action within the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report addresses Strategic Priority 1: Homes for All, Strategic Priority 3: Equitable Services & Opportunities and Strategic Priority 4: Resilient and Future Ready

4. Report Highlights:

- Housing Services completed an evaluation of the first year of operation of the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter. During this time, the shelter supported 103 unique individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Nineteen of these individuals have moved into housing.
- As part of the evaluation, interviews with 35 past and current participants were

conducted by a Lived Expertise Panel. Feedback received indicates that the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter had a positive impact on participants by providing a place for stability and recovery with specialized supports. 70 per cent of participants indicated they found critical relief from unsheltered homelessness and 64 per cent indicated a preference for staying at the hybrid shelter over other shelter options.

- The Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter has operated as an innovative and critical component of the Region's emergency shelter system, providing 50 spaces of shelter capacity in the system. The site provides a unique low-barrier approach to shelter for those with significant acuity including high levels of mental health and addictions, homelessness entrenchment, trauma, and sheltering people with pets.
- Based on the findings of the evaluation and the crucial role the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter plays within the housing stability system and in the implementation of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, Housing Services recommends the continued operation of the site. Region staff have identified that a sanitary line can be in place by spring 2025 to support the Erb's Road site.

5. Background:

The Hybrid Shelter model was approved by Regional Council on August 18, 2022 as part of the Interim Housing Solutions strategy.

The Interim Housing Solutions strategy was developed in response to feedback received from those experiencing homelessness. Through a survey of about 100 people experiencing homelessness across the region, most indicated they would be willing to relocate to an interim model such as an outdoor shelter. Additional insights from that engagement process included:

- Reluctance to access emergency shelters for a variety of reasons, including violence, theft and lack of privacy, along with restrictions faced by couples and those with pets;
- Being drawn to a sense of community and family that an encampment provides,
- Seeking dignity, respect, washrooms, showers, electricity, food, and water;
- Seeking help to find and keep a home, support for mental health and substance use issues, and connections with people they can trust.

The new Hybrid Emergency Shelter on Erb's Road opened in late April 2023 with an intended operating timeframe of two years (until March 2025) and a commitment to evaluate and bring recommendations back to Regional Council before the end of that timeframe.

Beginning in May 2024, a one-year evaluation was conducted to assess the Erb's Road

Hybrid Emergency Shelter's impact on homelessness.

The findings of the evaluation indicate that Erb's Road has had a positive impact on its participants by providing a supportive environment for recovery (62 per cent positive). Further, participants have come to view the Erb's Road site as critical for their survival with specialized supports and their own personal space. In its summary of 35 participant interviews, the Lived Expertise Panel showed clear support for the continuation of the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter.

Erb's Road has had a strong positive impact on both the Housing Stability System's ability to shelter and support people from encampments and on moving participants into permanent housing. Since opening, 19 individuals (18.4 per cent) have moved into housing from Erb's Road. These outcomes are comparable with the averages across the emergency shelter system for this same period. The site has done well with housing outcomes, considering the limited housing outcomes during the first few months of initial setup and the complexities presented with the low-barrier approach to sheltering people with significant acuity.

Erb's Road provides an innovative emergency housing option within the existing housing stability system. As was evidenced in the research and feedback from those with lived expertise in the creation of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, there is a pressing need for a variety of emergency shelter and supportive housing options to address the complex and diverse needs of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter is another critical building block on the path to ending chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Sanitary servicing at the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter is enabled by a holding tank which is emptied several times a week. The Building Code allows the Chief Building Official (CBO) of the municipality to approve a sanitary tank for this purpose and to allow for extensions of use of the tank. The CBO of Wilmot Township has extended the use of the tank from one year (allowed in the Building Code) to two years.

As the sanitary tank is not a long-term solution, Region staff have explored the opportunity to provide a permanent sanitary line from the Hybrid Shelter into the Waste Management Centre site as part of the redevelopment project, which will then carry those flows to the City of Waterloo's wastewater collection system.

Paramedics building and WRESTRC currently feed into the landfill leachate system. Staff are looking to separate those flows and take them into the Waste Management Center site as part of the redevelopment project, which will then carry those flows to the City of Waterloo's wastewater collection system.

Region of Waterloo staff will work with Township of Wilmot staff to ensure that the

sanitary waste system can come under compliance by connecting the current holding tank system to the existing sanitary line. A consultant has been hired to design the changes required for the sanitary line from the Hybrid Shelter to the Paramedics station to be designed over the winter with construction occurring between March and August 2025. Capital costs of this work are expected to be approximately \$570,000.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: Through the Erb's Road Hybrid Shelter Community Advisory Group, there has been engagement with the Township of Wilmot and the City of Waterloo. There was also engagement with area municipality staff to provide input into the evaluation of the Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter site and model. As well, Region staff remain closely connected to area municipalities in the work of the Hybrid site through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Township of Wilmot and the City of Waterloo and the collective work of addressing housing and homelessness-related issues in the Region.

Public: The public has been involved at regular Erb's Road Hybrid Shelter Community Advisory Group meetings. Neighbouring residents, service partners, and businesses were engaged and provided feedback during the evaluation.

Participants of Erbs Road Shelter: The Erb's Road Shelter Evaluation completed surveys and interviews with participants of the shelter and as well, Lived Expertise partners in the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness work developed a process that engaged in deep interviews with current participants and previous participants as part of a Lived Expertise Panel.

7. Financial Implications:

The 2025 draft Housing Services Operating Budget includes \$2.6M to cover the annual operating costs for Erb's Road Shelter. This investment is funded by the property tax levy and includes \$2M for the operating agreement with The Working Centre and \$0.6M for facilities costs. An extension of the operations at Erb's Road Shelter through 2025 and beyond will not have an incremental impact on the draft operating budget.

Costs associated to bring the sanitary waste system into compliance with the Township's requirements are estimated around \$570,000, including Consulting. Engineering design of the pumping station with force main is expected to start immediately upon approval, with a completion date of March 2025, followed by construction in Spring 2025. Of the \$570k, \$50k is expected to be expended in 2024 with the remainder in 2025. This can be accommodated in the draft 2025-2034 capital program for homelessness. If operations are extended, staff will report back on capital

cost estimates for 2025 and future years.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

The Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter evaluation heard from participants, Lived Expertise, site staff, external service providers, neighbouring businesses, services, and residents. It is clear from the evaluation feedback that the Housing Stability System and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, are getting value from the site as many have found critical relief from the outdoors and have been moving into permanent housing.

A decision to establish Erb's Road Hybrid Emergency Shelter as a permanent fixture in the Waterloo Region, Emergency Shelter system is critically important to current participants and invaluable to a homelessness system that has many more people living in encampments and unsheltered. If approved by Council, staff will begin the work to construct the required infrastructure and complete all necessary permits and requisite studies as appropriate.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Erb's Road Hybrid Shelter 1 Year Evaluation Summary

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