



Memorandum

TO: Krista Power, City Clerk **FILE:**

FROM: Cynthia Olsen, Acting Director – Strategic Initiatives & Engagement
City Manager's Office

DATE: 09/22/2023 (mm/dd/yyyy)

SUBJECT: Update on Response to Unsheltered Homelessness

**MEETING &
DATE:** Committee of the Whole - 09/25/2023 (mm/dd/yyyy)

This memo is to provide an update to Council on activities of the Response to Unsheltered Homelessness Task Force and the status of the encampment situation in Thunder Bay.

Approach

City Administration and Community Partners have been implementing a human rights-based approach to encampments and have formalized this through the Response to Unsheltered Homelessness Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force comprises City representatives from Parks & Open Spaces, Thunder Bay Fire & Rescue, Municipal Licensing and Enforcement and Community Strategies. Community Partners are representatives from Elevate NWO (Lead Community Partner), Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Thunder Bay Police, NorWest Community Health Centres, and the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB). The Task Force continues to meet every two weeks to receive updates from all partners relative to encampments across the community and support the coordination of responses as required. This includes understanding the number of individuals that are without an appropriate indoor sheltering option, identifying and responding to abandoned sites or sites that require additional clean up support, including responding to reports from the community, and communication about newly identified individuals/sites.

2023 Update

While the coordinated response in 2022 was quite successful in supporting individuals out of homelessness, it has been much more challenging this year. The number of

people, at the peak, sheltering outdoors this year was three times the number from last year. This is important as emergency shelter systems have been consistently at or near capacity, and there continues to be extremely limited – if any – availability in affordable or supportive housing options to meet the complex needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. At the last update of the Task Force, there remain 115 people without appropriate shelter options.

The significant increase of people this year, while not unique to Thunder Bay, has put substantial strain on the Lead Community Partner as they do not have any additional staffing complement to provide support to three times the amount of people. It has also put strain on City administration responding to increased calls from the community, responding to increased clean-up needs, and more nuanced coordination required with the spread of locations throughout the community.

Despite the challenges, there has been considerable work done to engage with and support the process for individuals to get connected to services and be added to the housing waitlist. In mid-July, several community partners, including Elevate NWO held a series of pop-up events and were able to complete 127 birth certificate applications, 198 housing applications, 91 VI SPDATs - a tool used to assess vulnerability and risk related to being houseless - and offered 133 health services. While the primary target was for individuals living on the street, the number of housing applications clearly demonstrate that there are far more people in housing need. Another event was held at the end of August and resulted in an additional 69 housing applications, and 46 birth certificate applications. A total of 13 people have been housed as part of the 2023 intervention.

Other Municipalities

City Administration continues to reach out to other communities grappling with responding to this issue to learn from them and will use this information as we move forward with exploring feasibility of designated locations. The City of Toronto is using semi-permanent emergency shelters that can house up to 100 people and are using hotel spaces on occasion. However, the City of Toronto provides direct housing supports, unlike the City of Thunder Bay. The Regional Municipality of Halifax does have designated locations and identified that they too experienced a nearly three-fold increase in the numbers of individuals staying unsheltered since last year and will need to designate additional locations within their community to meet the need.

Administration has upcoming meetings with the City of London and are working to coordinate a meeting with the City of Hamilton.

Cold Weather Planning

With the winter months quickly approaching, there is much concern about finding adequate indoor options for those who remain unhoused. The TBDSSAB did issue an

Expression of Interest earlier this year to support increasing transitional and supportive housing. Further the TBDSSAB also pushed out another reminder to Community Partners for grant opportunities through the Homeless Support Program, encouraging organizations to apply with targeted approaches to housing individuals living in encampments. At the time of this memo, there are no further details on any funded projects. Grace Place will open for overnight sheltering beginning October 1. The Task Force members, along with the emergency shelter partners have committed to emergency winter planning, and a first meeting is scheduled for next week to better understand what capacity there is in the system, and what additional needs are required to meet the demand.

The Severe Weather Response Plan continues to support our responses during extreme weather events.

Background

At the April 24, 2023 Committee of the Whole, Council passed the following resolution:

WITH RESPECT to Report 157-2023 (Development & Emergency Services, Community Strategies Division) we recommend the City adopt a human rights-based approach to responding to unsheltered homelessness as outlined in this report and the proposed Encampment Response Protocol (Attachment A), prioritizing needs-based service provision to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness;

AND THAT Administration include \$20,000 as an expansion in the 2024 Proposed Operating Budget for Council consideration to further support a human rights-based approach to unsheltered homelessness;

AND THAT Administration conduct community consultation that includes engagement with people living in encampments; Indigenous leadership, organizations and individuals; community partners; and the general public to better understand the feasibility of designated/supported encampments (including potential locations, service level requirements, partnerships for implementing, and costs);

AND THAT Administration report back to City Council and the Community the results and any recommendations based on this consultation by end of Q1-2024;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

Referral Resolution (February 13, 2023 Committee of the Whole) recommended that:

WITH RESPECT to the deputation relating to Encampments on the McVicar Creek Recreation Trail on February 13, 2023, we recommend that the Superior Court decision concerning encampments in the Region of Waterloo be referred to

Legal Services for an overview and analysis of the ruling to determine how the City can respond to encampments and the use of public space;

AND THAT Administration report back on or before April 24, 2023.

Susan Lester and Jeanne Adams appeared before Committee on February 13, 2023, provided a PowerPoint presentation, relative to encampments on the McVicar Creek Recreational Trail, and responded to questions.

In January 2023, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice issued its decision finding a municipal by-law prohibiting certain activities on municipal lands in Waterloo violated section 7 (right to life, liberty and security of the person) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms due to a lack of available and truly accessible shelter spaces that meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. This ruling is important in that it identified that it wasn't just about the number of spaces that were available, rather it was important to consider if those spaces were truly accessible to those in need.

Memorandum from C. Olsen, Manager – Community Strategies, dated July 19, 2022 was presented at Committee of the Whole on August 8, 2022 and the following Resolution was passed, and ratified at City Council on August 22, 2022:

WITH RESPECT to the Memorandum from C. Olsen, Manager – Community Strategies dated July 19, 2022 relative to Unsheltered Homelessness Pilot Project, we recommend that financial support required, up to a maximum of \$15,000, to maintain peer involvement and to offer appropriate amenities be provided to Elevate NWO from existing Community Strategies budget;

AND THAT the General Manager – Development and Emergency Services and City Clerk be authorized to execute necessary documents;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.