

Update on Sites Considered for Emergency Shelters

(City Council on December 14, 15 and 16, 1999, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Community Services Committee recommends the adoption of the following report (November 22, 1999) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

This report updates the Community Services Committee on the process used to acquire sites for emergency shelter use and specifically identifies issues associated with the suggested use of the Guild Inn, Exhibition Place and the Civic Centres. The report identifies the possible use of vacant City-owned land for the development of a temporary emergency shelter structure and identifies that further reports will come forward regarding specific sites, design and costs. The report also comments on the suggested extension of the use of the Fort York Armoury until January 15, 2000.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

None.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services bring forward a report to the Advisory Committee on New Emergency Shelter Sites identifying vacant City-owned properties available for the erection of a temporary modular structure for use as an emergency shelter;
- (2) the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be directed to bring a report forward to the Community Services Committee and the Budget Advisory Committee providing design and cost details regarding the development of a temporary modular structure;
- (3) this report be forwarded to officials at the Ministry of Community and Social Services and staff be directed to discuss with the Ministry cost-sharing of capital budgets for the development of emergency shelter sites; and
- (4) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of October 26 and 27, 1999, City Council requested that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services review all municipal buildings including those used by

agencies, boards and commissions for possible use for emergency shelter purposes. The Commissioner was specifically directed to look at the possible use of the Guild Inn, buildings in Exhibition Place and the Civic Centres. Council further recommended that the City request the Federal Government to extend the emergency shelter use of the Fort York Armoury until January 15, 2000.

Comments:

Property Search for Emergency Shelter Sites:

Expansion of the Emergency Shelter System – Over the past year the City has supported a relatively rapid expansion of the emergency shelter system. While this expansion has been important in meeting immediate needs, it is only a stopgap measure. Council has made it clear that it does not wish to indefinitely expand the shelter system. It has supported the establishment of more permanent, affordable housing as the solution to homelessness and has advocated with both the Provincial and Federal governments for the restoration of social housing programs. While there will be some further expansion of hostel space over the winter, the intent is that the system will not expand beyond capacity levels set in the 2000 budget.

Review of Municipal Buildings - Since the fall of 1998, staff of Hostel Services have been working closely with the staff of Facilities Management and Real Estate to identify sites, both private and municipal-owned, that have potential for use as emergency shelter sites. The staff approach has been, where possible, to acquire sites that are available on a permanent basis. There is little benefit to the City in finding temporary sites. This type of site is only a stopgap and in six months, staff will once again be forced to search for new sites. Also the City is most interested in establishing full-service programs. These programs provide greater supports to the clients, and have less impact on the local community than overnight programs. Finally, due to the challenges of having a hostel use share a facility with other uses, staff generally look to acquire stand-alone facilities. Experience at both the Armoury and Metro Hall have demonstrated that significant staff time is put into managing the shared-use, as opposed to managing the emergency shelter program.

Staff have visited and reviewed upwards of 100 sites of which the City owned approximately two-thirds. This list of sites does not include properties that may have been considered by non-profit agencies such as the Salvation Army while they were searching for sites.

Given the limited amount of funds available for capital expenditures, to date staff have looked only at existing buildings, and have not considered vacant land that might be available for construction. Further, while there have been some exceptions, staff have not generally considered City sites that are already in use as housing, or are already tenanted by social agencies or City departments. In reviewing sites staff must consider whether the sites provide the amenities needed for shelter service and whether there is adequate access to services, such as transportation. If renovation of a site is considered possible, staff must further assess whether use of the site would be justified in light of the costs and time that would be involved in renovations. Finally, staff must also take into consideration community and political concerns regarding existing concentration of service in certain parts of the City.

Council has specifically requested that staff consider the use of the Guild Inn, vacant properties and buildings at Exhibition Place and the Civic Centres as emergency shelters. The following sections detail issues associated with the use of those sites.

The Guild Inn - The Guild Inn was reviewed as a possible site in the fall of 1998. The Guild is in a location that is not easily accessed by public transportation. There are few appropriate support services in the surrounding neighbourhood. In fact, there are few stores or other amenities within walking distance of the property. Additionally, the site is an operating hotel that generates revenue for the City. Events and rooms at the facility are booked well in to the next year. Staff would not recommend the use of this site for single adults or for youth. Were this site to be used, it would be most appropriate for families with children. However, given the concentration of family shelter services already operating in this area of Scarborough conversion to family shelter purposes would not be feasible at this time.

Exhibition Place - Discussions regarding possible use of properties at Exhibition Place began in late 1998. At that time, staff were still in the process of accommodating staff and offices that had been dislodged due to the demolition of Exhibition Stadium. In fact many of those offices had been relocated to existing empty space in Exhibition Place. In early 1999, staff were provided a list of buildings at Exhibition Place. Many of the buildings that may be considered as having the potential for emergency shelter use, such as the Automotive Building and the Better Living Centre are booked well into the future. Other buildings available at the site cannot be used on a permanent basis due to events such as the CNE and the Royal Winter Fair. Staff did, in fact, visit two sites, the Horticultural Building and the Ontario Government Building. As with many other buildings at Exhibition Place, these facilities do not have central heating systems and are not equipped for occupancy during winter months. The Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services has contacted the Interim General Manager of Exhibition Place who has indicated that there are no appropriate sites currently available within the portfolio of Exhibition Place.

Civic Centres - All Civic Centres are fully operational office buildings used both for the daily transaction of City business and for special events and meetings involving community groups and the public. It is possible that a Civic Centre could be used for emergency shelter purposes as was demonstrated at Metro Hall last spring. However, the experience at Metro Hall indicates that this is not something that can be sustained on an ongoing basis. The shortcomings of these facilities include the lack of adequate shower and washroom facilities and lack of separate common areas/smoking areas. The Chief Administrative Officer will be reporting shortly regarding the future use of the civic centres and the projected space requirements for the Corporation.

Use of Temporary Structures as Emergency Shelter Space:

In a report to Council on July 6, 1999, staff identified the possibility of using vacant City-owned lands to construct a temporary structure for emergency shelter purposes. At the Budget Advisory Committee meeting of November 16, 1999, staff were asked to revisit this issue. A report will be prepared for the Advisory Committee on New Emergency Shelter Sites identifying vacant City sites that have been reviewed for this purpose and making a recommendation as to which site should be developed.

The issue of capital funding and design for this type of facility was also identified at the Budget Advisory Committee and will be the subject of a further report to that Committee, the Advisory Committee and the Community Services Committee.

Extension of the Use of the Fort York Armoury:

As reported to Council earlier this fall, the planned expansion of the emergency shelter system has taken into account the closing of the Fort York Armoury on December 15, 1999. The Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services has spoken with the Lieutenant Colonel currently responsible for the Fort York Armoury. He has confirmed that a request has been made to the Department of National Defence (DND) for the extended use of the Armoury. He noted in these discussions that any extended use of the Armoury would create major operational issues for DND. Staff anticipate that sufficient beds will be in place by December 15, and that the original plan for the closure of Fort York Armoury on that date should go forward.

Capital Budget for Shelter Expansion:

At its meeting of November 16, 1999, the Budget Advisory Committee directed that an additional \$7.0 million be included in the Hostel Services capital budget as a first step in establishing a capital program for shelter development. Staff will develop a plan for the use of these dollars and report back to the Budget Advisory Committee and the Community Services Committee. Budget Committee has directed that the plan should focus on addressing the reduction of motel services on Kingston Road and the increasing demand for emergency shelter space for single adults. Traditionally, the Ministry of Community and Social Services has provided 50 percent of capital costs associated with shelter development and so City staff will initiate discussions with the Ministry staff regarding cost-sharing on this proposed capital program.

Conclusions:

Since December of 1998, five new permanent sites have been put in place with a further four scheduled to open by December 15 of this year. Another three sites are anticipated to open in the first quarter of 2000. While this expansion is essential to respond to current needs, the intention is that the shelter system will not expand beyond levels set in the 2000 budget.

Staff have spent a significant amount of time over the past year reviewing and visiting properties in the City portfolio. This review has included the Guild Inn and the buildings at Exhibition Place. Staff will await the report from the CAO regarding the future use of the Civic Centres prior to beginning any discussions regarding possible emergency shelter space being provided in those facilities. Due to the shortage of buildings in the City portfolio that can be converted to shelter use, it is recommended that staff explore the use of City-owned property for the development of a temporary modular structure that can be used for emergency shelter purposes.

Lack of a capital funding program has been a major impediment in the development of new emergency shelter sites. As per the recommendations of the Budget Advisory Committee, staff

will add \$7.0 million to the Hostel Services capital budget and will develop a plan as to how that money would be used and cost-shared with the Province.

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Ms. Kira Heineck, Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, appeared before the Community Services Committee in connection with the foregoing matter, and submitted a brief in regard thereto.