



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Supplementary Report - Homelessness Service Planning for the 2015-2016 Winter Season

Date:	October 27, 2015
To:	City Council
From:	General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

As requested by Community Development and Recreation Committee, this report on homelessness services planning for the 2015-16 winter season is supplementary to CD7.3. The report provides an overview of the additional services and supports provided in the winter by Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) as well as additional initiatives underway for the upcoming winter season given continued high shelter occupancy and last winter's elevated service use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, or his designate, to enter into an agreement to amend the existing 2015 operating agreement with the YMCA of Greater Toronto by \$48,000.00 for the provision of an additional 15 beds at their Vanauley Street site as a temporary winter service; and
2. City Council delegate authority to the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to:
 - a. add beds to the emergency shelter system for temporary winter services;
 - b. approve new locations for emergency shelters for the provision of temporary winter services; and

- c. enter into or amend existing operating agreements with service providers to provide funding for temporary winter services.

Financial Impact

In response to high shelter occupancy rates experienced in 2014, an additional \$2.5 million was allocated to SSHA through the 2015 Budget Process to increase shelter capacity. Work is underway to invest the incremental funding of \$2.5 million which will expand the existing shelter system with an addition of a total of 121 permanent beds.

The costs of the services described and recommended in this report will be accommodated within the 2015 Approved Operating Budget for Shelter, Support and Housing Administration and included in the 2016 and future year budget submissions.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact information.

Equity Impact

Housing and homelessness services, including shelter service, serve a range of equity seeking groups including people experiencing homelessness, the working poor, youth, seniors, Aboriginal people, and other vulnerable groups.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on October 15, 2015, Community Development and Recreation Committee requested the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to report directly to City Council on the winter 2016 homelessness strategy, specifically outlining strategies to achieve 90 percent occupancy in the shelter system and the use of motels as swing space.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD7.3>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Demand for shelter beds has been increasing each year since 2011. The system is currently at capacity as nightly occupancy is over the Council-approved 90% occupancy threshold making it difficult for people to access a bed.

The average shelter occupancy rate in January 2015 was approximately 93%. That month, SSHA entered into agreements with two hotel sites to shelter families and couples to reduce occupancy pressures as a short-term measure during the winter months. Occupancy rates did not drop off over the summer months with warmer weather in part due to the loss of beds in the shelter system through temporary closures such as the Salvation Army Hope Shelter, an emergency shelter for men; the YWCA Beatrice House, a transitional housing program for women-led families; and Second Base Youth Shelter, an emergency shelter for youth.

In response to high shelter occupancy rates, SSHA was allocated an additional \$2.5 million through the 2015 Budget Process to increase shelter capacity. In April 2015, City Council also approved SSHA's shelter infrastructure strategy and service improvement plan which identified the need to open 15 replacement or new shelter sites in the next five years.

Work is underway to invest the incremental funding of \$2.5 million. In February 2015, the division initiated a Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) process to identify community non-profit agencies that can establish new shelter programs or expand their existing programs. A report is currently before City Council detailing the results of the REOI. They include two new shelters, one shelter relocation and expansion, and the expansion of five existing programs. This shelter system expansion will add a total of 121 permanent beds to the system and it is anticipated that 91 of these beds will be in full operation within nine months.

The shelter infrastructure strategy and service improvement plan also described a pilot program to free up emergency shelter beds by providing the case management and supports to house 200 long-term shelter users over a 12 month period. Since Council's adoption of the plan, a client needs assessment tool and staff training have been developed. An RFP for follow up supports was released in late October. The identification and housing of clients will begin in November.

Because the supply and demand measures described above are not fully implemented, their impact on shelter occupancy is not yet evident and nightly occupancy rates remain above target. Given this situation, SSHA is taking the following steps to prepare for the winter season.

COMMENTS

A. SSHA's Winter Weather Services

1. *Services Triggered by Extreme Cold Weather Alerts*

The City's cold weather season runs annually from November 15 to April 15. When an Extreme Cold Weather Alert is called by the Medical Officer of Health, the following additional services are triggered by SSHA:

- Two 24-hour extreme cold weather alert drop-ins are opened by 3 p.m. on the day an alert is called. Services at the drop-ins include warm food and drinks, referrals to shelter and other services. Mats are provided for sleeping. These services were introduced last winter and were well used.
- More than 100 organizations and agencies that work with homeless people are advised to prepare for increased service demands.

- Shelters are directed to relax any service restrictions they may have.
- Increased street outreach and transportation services are activated. Front-line staff focus their work on informing clients about the danger of weather conditions and transporting them to indoor locations.
- Transit tokens are made available at many drop-ins so people can reach shelters.
- 11 additional shelter spaces are opened at Fort York Residence.

2. *Out of the Cold Program*

During the cold weather season, the Out of the Cold (OOTC) program is activated to supplement shelter capacity. OOTC is coordinated by Dixon Hall through a purchase of service agreement with SSHA. It provides meal and overnight bedded programs delivered by volunteers at 16 sites across a network of interdenominational, faith-based organizations. The capacity of each location ranges from 15 to 75 beds with up to four sites operating per night.

3. *24-Hour Women's Drop-in Programs*

Through the 2015 Budget Process, City Council approved base funding in SSHA for two year round low-barrier 24-hour drop-ins for vulnerable and street involved women. The City entered into purchase of service agreements with Fred Victor Centre to operate one of the drop-in programs in the downtown east at the Adelaide Women's Resource Centre, and with Sistering to operate the other program in the downtown west. Both drop-ins were open as of September and both will be providing 24-hour services throughout the winter.

B. Contingency Planning for 2015-16 Winter

In addition to the winter services described above, SSHA is undertaking the following contingency planning measures for the 2015-16 winter season based on last winter's service use and persistently high shelter occupancy rates during the summer months.

1. *Increased Out of the Cold Program Capacity*

SSHA has been actively working with Dixon Hall to identify through the network of interdenominational, faith-based organizations additional congregations and sites that would operate OOTC program this winter. No suitable additional sites have been identified. However, 60 additional spaces will be added within the existing sites when the OOTCs start operating on November 15 and an additional 10 spaces will be added in January 2016 increasing the program's overall capacity by 5 to 15 spaces per night.

2. *Expanded Motel/Hotel Contracts*

The City routinely uses motel rooms to expand capacity in the family shelter sector as needed based on demand. Last winter, in order to temporarily increase capacity in the emergency shelter system, SSHA expanded its use of motel beds by making them available to individuals and couples based on client needs assessments and case plans. The division also contracted with two additional motel providers. Family shelter residents were relocated to the additional motel rooms to free up space for single adults. Given the necessity to provide appropriate case planning and client supports, implementation had to be carefully managed. Drawing on the experience from last winter, in preparation for the upcoming winter season, SSHA has secured an additional 20 rooms, effective mid-November, to supplement current motel contracts. These additional rooms can serve on average 40 people per night.

The division has also drawn up a Request for Proposals (RFP) which will be issued in early November 2015 to identify a roster of hotel/motel operators to provide temporary spaces for families, couples, and individuals during the winter season and ongoing shelter services for the family sector building on SSHA's existing use of motel rooms. The procurement process is expected to be completed by the end of November with additional spaces available in December 2015.

3. *Short-Term Emergency Shelter Space*

SSHA staff have worked with Facilities and Real Estate and engaged with community and intergovernmental partners to identify potential sites for short-term emergency shelter programs to address occupancy pressures in the singles sector this winter. A number of opportunities have been identified.

SSHA is finalizing the details with the YMCA for a 24-hour co-ed winter emergency shelter program for youth at the organization's Vanauley Street site in Ward 20. The program will be open 24-hours a day, seven days a week over a continuous four month period. It will increase the capacity of the youth shelter sector over the winter by providing 15 sleeping spaces as well as provide a youth-specific alternative to the 24-hour extreme cold weather and 24-hour women's drop-ins. The service provider is experienced working with youth. This service can be operational in December 2015.

702 Kennedy Road in Ward 35 housed the 60 bed Second Base Youth Shelter until October of this year. The building was purpose-built as an emergency shelter and the site complies with the Municipal Shelter By-law. The agency and the Church which owns the land are in discussion with a community organization interested in purchasing the building for long-term use as an adult shelter. Staff have had discussions with all of the parties regarding operation of an emergency shelter for adults during the winter, pending resolution of the longer term disposition of the property.

Staff are also exploring the potential of another men's emergency shelter provider to add a temporary 30 bed program at or adjacent to their site during the winter.

It is recommended that City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to amend the existing operating contract with the YMCA to provide an additional 15 beds at their Vanauley Street site as a temporary winter service. It is further recommended that City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to add beds to the emergency shelter system, approve new locations, and enter into or amend operating agreements with service providers for temporary winter services.

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SIGNATURE

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