

March 2, 2017

Attn: Community Development and Recreation Committee

Re: Access to Shelter Beds

Summary:

Since the 2016-2017 Winter season began, the Daily Shelter Census that records the occupancy of the City's shelter system across all shelter sectors has been consistently over the 90% standard set by City Council. It is clear that City Council is not meeting its obligations under this policy.

Representatives from the religious organizations that provide the Out of the Cold program, which provides additional shelter for the city's homeless during the winter months, have reported that they are seeing a marked increase in the number of users and are being forced to turn people away – something they have not previously had to do. We have also heard loudly from many non-profit shelter operators that they are also seeing a sustained increase in the demand on our shelter system.

The 90% occupancy standard was established to address concerns relating to overcrowding and barriers that arise to accessing beds when there is a higher need for shelter beds. When shelters are overcrowded it can create unsafe conditions for residents and staff, and can put individuals who do not feel safe in the shelters, to choose to risk sleeping "rough" on our streets, putting themselves at even greater risk.

Recommendation:

1) The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, report back to Community Development and Recreation Committee to the April 13th, 2017 meeting, as part of the pending report on shelter staff capacity requested through the 2017 Budget process, to advise on the actions that are being taken to adhere to the 90% occupancy standard, including the current efforts underway to address emergency capacity due to sustained levels of over-occupancy in the system.

Respectfully submitted,

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