

Proposed New Engagement and Planning Process for Emergency Shelters

Date: March 30, 2017

To: Community Development and Recreation Committee

From: General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report makes recommendations to improve the community engagement process for opening new emergency homeless shelters. *It* also describes the further steps needed to change the model for emergency shelters and change the conversation about homelessness in Toronto.

City Council previously requested that staff engage external experts to conduct a review of best practices to improve community engagement related to emergency shelters, and to increase public awareness about homelessness. Through that process it became clear that, in order to change the conversation about homelessness, we also need to change the model for homeless services.

This report responds to the findings of the review and recommends a new community engagement process for homeless services for approval by Council. This new engagement process will be put into place, to the extent possible, with shelter location processes currently underway, and will be fully implemented with any future locations identified.

The report also outlines the steps required to move forward towards development of a new model for homeless services, including a new name for emergency shelters. This new homeless service model will be piloted in 2017 at four shelter locations that are currently in planning stages. Based on the results of the pilots and further analysis of the review recommendations, staff will report back in the fall with further recommendations for a permanent service model to be implemented in all existing and future homeless services across the City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council adopt the new community engagement process that sets out how the public will be engaged around new or relocated municipal shelter locations, as described in Attachment 1, to replace the current policy adopted as Appendix D of the Planning and Transportation Committee Report No. 3 (February 2003), known as the Community Information Process.
2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to enter into agreements, as required, to develop a roster of professional facilitators for any planned shelter engagement processes.
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to enter into agreements, as required, to develop new best practice shelter design guidelines.
4. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to enter into agreements, as required, to develop and implement a communication and media campaign to build public awareness and understanding of the new homeless service system model.
5. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to enter into agreements, as required, to pilot the new service model in four new shelter programs planned for 2017.
6. City Council request the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to report back to Community Development and Recreation Committee in the fall of 2017 with an update on the pilot projects and an update on further work towards development of the new service model, including anticipated financial impacts, and a new property development approach to shelter infrastructure planning and approvals.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts associated with this report. The funding required for the new design guidelines and public relations campaign has been included in SSHA's Council approved 2017 Operating Budget. The financial impacts of future implementation of the new service model will be considered as part of the annual budget process.

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

EQUITY IMPACT

The emergency shelter system in Toronto serves equity-seeking groups such as seniors, people with disabilities, individuals with mental health issues, the working poor, Aboriginal peoples, people who identify as LGBTQ2S and other vulnerable groups. The effective integration of emergency shelters into neighbourhoods across the city is essential to providing services for a variety of equity seeking groups and is an important component of the City's efforts to address poverty.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of November 29, 2016, Community Development and Recreation Committee deferred consideration of CD16.4 "Review of the City's Obligations and Requirements under the Toronto Municipal Shelter By-law" until the report "on the recommended changes to the City's process for assessing and improving municipal shelters is submitted to the Committee."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD16.4>

At its meeting of October 5, 6 and 7, 2016, City Council adopted CD14.12 "Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's Strategy to Identify New and Replacement Shelter Services in All Parts of Toronto" which provided an update on a review of the Community Information Process. City Council directed staff to report to CDRC on steps taken to solicit best practices to raise awareness on homelessness, on the City's obligations under the Municipal Shelter By-law, on a standard community engagement process for shelters, and, on the feasibility of implementing a process similar to the 'Gold Star' planning initiative to the shelter approval process.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD14.12>

At its meeting of May 3, 4 and 5, 2016, City Council adopted CD11.7 "Update on the Shelter System and Hostels to Homes Pilot" which provided an update on efforts to reduce shelter occupancy. When considering this item at its meeting of April 13, 2016 CDRC requested staff to report back on the current divisional strategy to identify new and replacement sites for shelter services.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD11.7>

At its meeting of April 20, 2015, the Community Development and Recreation Committee received for information, CD3.10, "Strategies to Improve Location and Relocating Emergency Shelters" which set out the challenges of locating properties for use as emergency shelter and community engagement best practices when opening emergency shelters.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD3.10>

At its meeting of March 31, April 1 and 2, 2015, City Council adopted CD2.2 "Infrastructure and Service Improvement Plan for the Emergency Shelter System" which sets out a plan to guide the transformation of the emergency shelter system and requested staff to identify sites for up to 15 emergency shelters over the next five years.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD2.2>

At its meeting of December 16, 17, and 18, 2013 City Council unanimously adopted CD25.10, the 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Plan (HSSP). The HSSP includes strategic directions to maintain a strong emergency shelter system as well as to create housing opportunities for vulnerable households in Toronto.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.10>

COMMENTS

1. Background and Context

Shelter System Overview

Demand for shelter services has been trending up since 2012 and remained high throughout 2016. The system continues to operate at capacity, above the Council-approved 90% occupancy threshold. While there are approximately 4,500 people on average who use the shelter system on any given night, in 2016 more than 16,000 different people accessed the shelter system at some point.

For most people, homelessness is a short-term occurrence, resulting from a housing crisis caused by job loss, family breakdown, or other temporary crisis situations. More than half of people who use the shelter system in Toronto stay less than two months and are able to successfully achieve housing stability. However, for some people, homelessness is a more significant challenge resulting from complex health, mental health and other systemic factors. A smaller group of people, 10% of those using shelters, stay for one year or more and require more supports to exit homelessness successfully.

Current Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Engagement Process

Through Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's (SSHA) Shelter Infrastructure and Service Improvement Plan, Council directed staff to locate up to 15 new and replacement shelters in neighbourhoods throughout Toronto, including those related to the George Street Revitalization project, in order to achieve the shelter occupancy target of 90%.

SSHA responded to Council's direction by seeking opportunities to open new shelters directly and with community-based shelter operators. When proposing to open a new shelter, SSHA and its partners follow a Community Information Process (CIP), approved by Council in 2003, that outlines how staff will engage the community about each shelter project. Recent experiences of applying the CIP highlighted the need to develop an improved engagement process.

The Review Process

On August 24, 2016, Councillors Fletcher and Bailão wrote the General Manager of SSHA to offer their leadership in reviewing the Community Information Process, and in developing a new framework for siting shelters in Toronto. The review was facilitated by

Bruce Davis, President of Public Progress Inc., a leading consulting firm specializing in community outreach and communications. A planning group with representatives from SSHA, the Affordable Housing Office, Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA), and the City Manager's Office provided input to the review.

The review process included focus groups with people experiencing homelessness and community agencies that provide shelter and services, and interviews with more than 20 Councillors and City staff. The process culminated in a full-day charette, co-hosted by Councillors Fletcher and Bailão, which brought community agencies, shelter operators and community members together with experts in public relations, facilitation, architecture, planning and real estate development.

2. Recommendations for Development of a New Service Model

The diverse range of expertise and viewpoints engaged through the review process resulted in a comprehensive set of recommendations from the consultant. The findings from the review reflect a consensus that changing the conversation about homelessness requires transformation of the shelter service model itself, so that it works better both for people experiencing homelessness and for the communities where these services are located. See Attachment 2 for the final report summarizing the findings and recommendations of the review.

The elements of the new service model that will be developed are outlined below. These include:

- A new process to identify site locations based on a property development approach
- A new homeless service model
- Best practice design guidelines
- A public relations campaign, and
- A new community engagement process.

Taken together, the new service model will promote a focus on design excellence, program excellence and operational excellence in the delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness.

A new name

The review also identified that the term "shelter" has become a pejorative term that stigmatizes people experiencing homelessness, and recommended a new name for the service. First Step Housing and Services was suggested as a placeholder, as it is meant to convey the temporary nature of emergency shelter, as well as having a more positive outcome focus on housing and client-centred wrap around services. A new name can be a very powerful signal of the transformative nature of the changes being proposed - similar to the transformation that Toronto Employment and Social Services underwent in moving from a historic focus on delivery of income assistance towards a longer-term focus on employment supports and fostering greater economic self-sufficiency.

A new name will be recommended to Council in the fall based on further input and engagement, but for now this report uses the term 'new homeless service model' to refer to this approach to transforming emergency shelters.

Pilot implementation opportunities

While some of the recommendations for the new homeless service model will require staff to do further work to develop an implementation plan, many of the new approaches can be implemented through pilots in 2017. Four shelter development projects are currently underway that offer opportunities to pilot the new service model with a variety of shelter locations, sizes and populations, with two directly City operated sites and two community agency operated sites. These include: a men's shelter at 731 Runnymede Road, a new seniors shelter at 3306 Kingston Road, the Salvation Army Hope replacement at 29 Leslie Street, and a new women's shelter at 702 Kennedy Road.

New process to identify potential sites

Council currently sets broad policy direction for the homeless service system, for example through approval of the Shelter Infrastructure and Service Improvement Plan and the George Street Revitalization plan. Council also approves each specific new shelter. The review findings highlighted that no other residential form requires this sort of additional site approval if they comply with local zoning.

The review recommended a new infrastructure planning and approval process, in which staff would conduct an annual review to identify opportunities and gaps in the range of services for people who are homeless available across the city. The review would also consider the infrastructure plans of community agency operated shelters, including the status and stability of leased properties. The results of this annual assessment would be presented to Council as part of the City's capital and operating budget process.

Once this broad plan is approved by Council, staff would then conduct a detailed local assessment of assets and needs in the identified neighbourhoods, engaging local Councillors, stakeholders such as Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), faith groups and service providers, residents associations and people with lived experience. Local Councillors would play a key role in identifying stakeholders who should be involved and in identifying potential sites in their wards.

Where possible, two to three potential sites would be identified to conduct feasibility assessments. These sites would not be released to the public until the properties have been assessed for their feasibility and suitability. Responsibility for selecting the most suitable site would then rest with a multi-divisional recommendation to the City Manager or Deputy City Manager, based on the results of the feasibility assessments.

The review also recommended that staff explore opportunities to co-locate services with other City facilities and the use of City-owned properties as potential sites. Offering developers fast-track development approvals or incentives to include homeless services in their development was another idea identified to help secure potential service locations.

Staff are also exploring the feasibility of developing a process similar to the 'Gold Star' planning initiative for the shelter approval process. The Gold Star process allows staff at Economic Development and Culture (EDC) to support strategically important industrial, commercial and some institutional projects through the City's planning and approvals processes. Shelters do not fit EDC's current Gold Star mandate, yet shelter projects would also benefit from the sorts of expedited approvals that the Gold Star initiative provides.

This new approach of identifying potential sites represents a shift away from an opportunistic real estate driven approach towards a more strategic property development driven approach. Staff will review each of these recommendations further and report back to Council in the fall with a proposed implementation plan for the new service planning and approval process.

New model of homeless services

The review recommended that a new model of services be developed to achieve program and operational excellence, with a focus on housing outcomes rather than temporary emergency accommodation (see Attachment 3). The perception of existing shelter services is often that they are focussed only on providing a bed to sleep in, rather than supporting clients with housing options and supports.

Building on the directions already underway through SSHA's updated Shelter Standards, the Housing Stability Service Plan and the George Street Revitalization project, the new model for homeless services will focus on housing stability, using a Housing First approach, and will include:

- Development of individualized service plans based on a standardized assessment of each client's unique needs and goals
- Client-centred, wrap-around case management services and follow-up housing supports to improve housing stability and avoid a return to homelessness
- System navigation support to access needed health, income support and housing services
- Peer support models of services
- Development of key performance indicators to measure success of the new model, including length of stay and successful housing outcomes
- Consideration of programming and spaces that meet the needs of specific groups, like couples, people with pets, LGBTQ2S people, and people with disabilities
- Access to services and indoor space 24/7 with opportunities for programming throughout the day
- Co-location and access to other community services such as affordable housing, health services, harm reduction and addiction treatment, training and employment services, access to computers, recreation and culture, food and community kitchens, etc.
- A community hub model, with services offered within the building that are also available to residents to further encourage community integration

Staff will develop an implementation plan for a new service model that includes these elements in new service locations, as well as transformation of the existing shelter system.

Best Practice Facility Design Guidelines

The review recommended that locations for the new service model should be designed to support improved outcomes for clients, fit well into the surrounding neighbourhood and avoid an 'institutional' appearance. Staff will engage a professional urban design and architecture firm to develop best practice design guidelines for new facilities.

Design elements will include a range of sizes of sleeping spaces and bedrooms, kitchen, program space and other key room configurations, multi-use common areas, the inclusion of outdoor/roof-top smoking areas and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) elements. The design guidelines will consider the needs of key user groups including youth, seniors, couples, people with pets, recent immigrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S residents. The design guidelines will also consider the importance of including multi-purpose community use space within each building to promote homeless services as community assets and support the integration of facilities into the neighbourhoods.

Consultations held through the review also identified that facilities should be smaller, with no more than 90 beds in any one location. Staff will further review this recommendation to identify staffing and financial implications of smaller facilities. The consultant's report also made it clear that this means more locations will be required to meet demand for services, resulting in an increased capital and operating cost to the City.

Public Relations Campaign

The review began with the belief that the City could do a better job of building community support for homeless shelters. The poll conducted by Forum Research as part of the review found that, when people were asked if they would support a homeless shelter in their neighbourhood 36% said 'yes', while 32% said 'no' with the same number either indifferent or don't know (32%). The review recommended that building support among this middle group through better awareness and information is key to changing the conversation about homelessness in Toronto.

Staff will engage a public relations firm to develop a public education campaign to raise awareness about homelessness and the benefits of the new service model. The purpose of the campaign will also be to engage Toronto residents in supporting the success of this new approach to helping vulnerable residents in our community. The public relations campaign will also build a network of champions that includes civic leaders, business leaders, faith leaders, service providers, and stakeholders from all parts of the city.

The public relations firm will also conduct polling and/or focus groups to help identify a preferred new name for the service.

3. New Community Engagement Process

The review was a response to a widely held view that the current Community Information Process (CIP) is not working well for communities, shelter residents, City staff or Councillors. This report recommends a new process for community engagement as set out in Attachment 1.

Challenges with the current Community Information Process

The current CIP requires that City staff undertake four engagement activities as part of every new shelter site assessment process:

- Meet with local Councillor(s)
- Send a written notice to households and businesses within 250 metres of the proposed location
- Hold an evening public information meeting, and
- Form and convene a Community Liaison Committee (CLC)

Review participants stated that the written information notice and the public meeting related to a new shelter project are the CIP's most problematic elements. Noted opportunities for improvement include:

- Communicating project information more effectively
- Focussing on how residents can contribute to the shelter's success
- Being more transparent about what decisions residents have the ability to influence
- Creating safe participation spaces for vulnerable people and people with a diverse perspectives
- Avoiding large public meetings which do not promote solution-focused discussion
- Finding solutions to real project-related issues and concerns

Proposed new engagement process

The proposed new engagement process emphasizes communicating project information in a clear and transparent manner and encouraging solution-focused discussion in smaller meeting formats. The key elements are described below.

A **professional third party facilitator** will be used for all new shelter engagement processes. The facilitator manages conversations among City and community stakeholders who may have very different perspectives, promoting active listening, clear dialogue and a focus on solutions.

An **engagement plan** will be developed for each new shelter engagement process using a consistent approach, but that is tailored to the specific goals and context of that project. The engagement plan will also include a neighbourhood profile that provides a detailed asset and needs assessment of the area.

The **purpose of the engagement** will be clearly communicated, with a focus on constructive, non-threatening dialogue. Communication should be clear that the

purpose of engagement is not about approval of the site but about how participants can support and improve the proposal. The purpose of engagement is to:

- Inform the community about the project and gather feedback on how to successfully integrate the shelter into the neighbourhood
- Identify ways to optimize the shelter's design and operation for residents and neighbours
- Invite the community to join in planning for and welcoming the new service
- Identify people, agencies and businesses wishing to contribute to the shelter's success
- Develop service delivery and coordination plans with service providers
- Develop an issue response protocol that addresses community, City and resident needs

Required engagement activities will include:

- Meeting with key community leaders and stakeholders including community associations and networks, BIAs, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and Community Health Centres, schools, school board trustees and youth-serving organizations.
- A broadened public notice informing residents about the project that will be mailed to addresses within 500 metres of the future shelter location (250 metre radius is the current requirement). Where appropriate, material will be translated into other languages.
- Developing an information website for each project that residents may visit for project information and updates. The website address will be included in the public notice.
- Hold an Open House to showcase the shelter and provide residents the opportunity to speak to a range of City and agency representatives about homelessness, and the services provided to people experiencing homelessness.

Additional engagement activities may also be employed, where appropriate:

- Additional Open Houses and meetings with local groups and organizations, including with small groups of neighbours
- Focus groups to explore perspectives and identify solutions on specific issues
- Establishing a Community Liaison Committee (CLC) with resident participation to work collaboratively with the City, community stakeholders and local Councillors to achieve the best possible outcomes for shelter clients and the neighbourhood
- A design charette with broad-based community agency, business and resident participation to support excellence in shelter design

- Use of additional web-based tools such as social media and other emerging technologies like virtual town halls will continue to be explored

A copy of the engagement plan, a summary of the engagement results, and an analysis of how the engagement results have influenced staff recommendations, will be available for each shelter project as a resource to inform program development.

4. Next Steps

With Council's approval of the new community engagement process set out in Attachment 1, staff will begin implementing the new process with shelter projects currently underway, to the extent possible given their status, as well as any future planned locations.

Staff will also begin implementing aspects of the new service model with the four pilot locations identified (a men's shelter at 731 Runnymede Road, a seniors shelter at 3306 Kingston Road, the Salvation Army Hope replacement at 29 Leslie Street, and a women's shelter at 702 Kennedy Road). Because these sites have already been identified and are at various stages of the planning and approvals process, not all aspects of the new model may be possible to implement, but as many components as possible will be integrated into the pilots. Any additional service locations identified in 2017 will also be included as pilots. The pilots will provide an opportunity to learn about implementation of the new service model and to evaluate the impact on outcomes for clients through measurement of key performance indicators such as length of stay and successful housing outcomes.

Working closely with other City Divisions, stakeholders and community agencies, staff will continue to analyse the recommendations for the new service model and report back to Council in the fall on:

- An annual service planning process, including a recommended approach for selection and approval of specific sites
- Feasibility of implementing a Gold Star planning process
- An update on development of Shelter Design Guidelines
- An implementation plan for the new homeless service model to provide client-centred wrap around housing stability supports and system navigation for people experiencing homelessness
- An update on the public relations campaign
- Recommendation for a new name for the service
- Preliminary findings from the pilots
- Financial impacts of the implementation plan for the new service model, including design enhancements, inclusion of multi-purpose community space in all locations, smaller shelter sizes and additional housing and system navigation supports

It became clear through the review process that changing the conversation about homelessness is not possible without changing our approach to services.

Implementation of the recommendations in this report is critical to ensuring that services are available to people in housing crisis in this city, and in meeting Council's 90% occupancy target for the shelter system.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1:** Community Engagement Process for New Municipal Shelter Projects
- Attachment 2:** Review final report: *Engaging Communities in First Step Housing and Services*
- Attachment 3:** Changing the conversation from shelters to housing

Attachment 1: Community Engagement Process for New Municipal Shelter Projects

1. Pre-Planning

The following work, and a summary of the relevant results, should be completed before the community engagement process begins:

- Area Profile
- City Services Coordination Plan
- Due Diligence Process, including completion of the Shelter Site Assessment Template
- Program Model
- Group(s) to be served
- Program capacity
- Service type
- Staffing model
- Community support model
- Special features

2. Facilitation

A facilitator with expertise in managing complex and potentially contentious community engagement processes will be selected to plan and implement each project's engagement plan. The facilitator will be selected from a pre-qualified list that will be updated on an annual basis.

3. Engagement Plan

Based on the findings of the pre-planning process the project's unique engagement plan will be developed. Every plan will include a set of required activities. The need or value of adding other (optional) activities will be considered for every plan.

To support the engagement plan, a summary of the pre-planning work will be developed and may be used to support engagement discussions.

City Councillors whose Wards either contain or have a boundary located within 250 metres of a proposed municipal shelter location will be briefed on the pre-planning findings, and on the engagement plan before it is finalized.

4. Purpose of Engagement

All engagement activities will be based on respectful dialogue and non-threatening language. People will be supported to articulate their concerns in a constructive manner so solutions can be identified. People with lived experience and other vulnerable people will also have a safe space to express their ideas and needs. The focus of engagement will be on planning for and improving the service to be delivered, not approving it.

5. Required Engagement Activities

Meetings with Key Stakeholders

Engagement meetings will be requested with representatives of the following organizations where their service areas contain or have a boundary located within 250 metres of a proposed municipal shelter location:

- Community associations, groups and tables
- Business Improvement Areas
- Local Health Improvement Network
- Community Health Centres
- Schools
- Youth-serving organizations

These meetings may be organization-specific or bring organizations together in groups.

Information website

A page will be added to the City's website that will contain a project overview, a phone number and email address for information or meeting inquiries, information about planned open house(s) and other community engagement opportunities, and a space for directly submitting project input.

Information notice

A project information notice will be circulated to properties within a 500 metre radius of the proposed municipal shelter location. The notice will include a project summary, a phone number and email address for information or meeting inquiries, the project's webpage address, and planned open house(s) details.

Public open house

A public open house will be held, within the Ward containing the proposed municipal shelter location. Open houses will provide project information and the opportunity for residents to speak to a range of City and agency representatives about homelessness generally, the specific service being proposed, and how the project can be supported by the community.

6. Optional Engagement Activities

The required engagement activities may not provide all stakeholders an opportunity to learn about and provide input into the shelter. The City may also identify information gaps or unexplored partnership opportunities that additional engagement activities will address.

Optional engagement activities may be added to the engagement plan throughout the engagement process. No limits will be placed on the potential variety or number of engagement activities. They will be held where staff determine that they are likely to help the community to be more broadly aware of and better understand the project, or where they are likely to enhance the project.

Optional engagement activities may include:

- Additional open houses
- Additional engagement meetings with local stakeholders
- Service partner meetings
- Community Liaison Committee formation and meetings
- Design charette
- Focus group meetings

Additional web-based tools and technologies may also be used to enhance the engagement process, either independently or in order to enhance one or more of the required or optional engagement activities.

7. Post-Engagement

City Councillors whose Wards either contain or have a boundary located within 250 metres of a proposed municipal shelter location will be briefed on the engagement process and outcomes, and on staff recommendations for the proposed new municipal shelter, prior to project approval. A written summary of the engagement process and outcomes will also be summarized and shared with all organizations and individuals who participated in the engagement process.