

## **Update and Options to Enhance Homeless Services**

**Date:** January 29, 2018

**To:** City Council

**From:** General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report is in response to Planning and Housing Committee's request on January 22 to report, in consultation with the Office of Emergency Management, on immediate steps to augment services for homeless individuals and activate the assistance of community organizations such as the Red Cross.

Implementation of significant service improvements over the past number of months have ensured that the City is prepared with a responsive homelessness service system this winter. There continues to be ongoing demand for services, however with the current level of demand, there is sufficient contingency capacity available to provide a safe overnight space for those who request services.

In recent years, City Council has invested significantly in expanding available shelter and 24-hour respite site capacity. Since 2016, shelter system capacity has increased by almost 3,000 beds. Over the past two months, 24-hour respite site space capacity has been increased to 800 spaces available each night to respond to increased service demand. In addition, staff working in collaboration across a number of Divisions have made significant progress in implementation of the 3 year, 1,000-bed shelter plan, with two new shelters already opened and a total of 400 new shelter beds available in 2019.

SSHA staff and community partners are working to support people to move from shelter to housing. In 2018, more than 8,000 people moved from shelters to housing.

However, significant investments are required in prevention services and permanent supportive housing to provide people with health and mental health challenges additional pathways out of the shelter system.

Recently, some new supportive housing opportunities were created through the provincial Home for Good program to support 1,500 people, with another 500 units planned in 2019. However, there is significant additional demand for supportive housing in order to make a meaningful impact in reducing homelessness. Immediate increases in housing with supports for people with complex health and mental health needs is the best and most effective solution to address homelessness.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, and the Director, Affordable Housing Office, to convene an urgent meeting with key supportive housing providers to identify short and medium-term actions to increase supportive housing options to immediately assist people to exit homelessness.
2. City Council request the federal and provincial governments, as part of their 2019 Budgets, to commit to capital and operating funding to support the creation of 1,800 new units of supportive housing annually, in order to reduce homelessness in Toronto.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial impacts associated with this report. The financial impacts associated with planned shelter and 24-hour respite site capacity will be considered and approved as part of the City's 2019 budget process.

City staff will report on future City financial implications should the federal and provincial governments provide new supportive housing program funding.

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

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting of January 22, Planning and Housing Committee requested that the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, in consultation with the Office of Emergency Management to report directly to the January 30, 2019 City Council meeting on immediate steps to augment services for homeless individuals and activate the assistance of community organizations such as the Red Cross.

## **COMMENTS**

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### **1. Service improvements and winter planning**

Over the summer and fall of 2018, a comprehensive 2018/19 Winter Services Plan was developed to ensure ongoing availability of 24-hour respite sites to meet demand. The plan also included a focus on improving service, facilities, and communications.

Service improvements included:

- Modernization of the Central Intake service that focused on improving the client experience through enhanced technology, revitalized training, development of key performance indicators, and an expanded staff team. These enhancements will

ensure that people who request emergency accommodation over the phone have access to timely, accurate information about available services.

- Launch of an enhanced Homeless Help app to provide up-to-date centralized information about available City-funded homelessness services.
- New 24-hour respite site standards created to ensure consistent quality of services.
- Implementation of all 18 recommendations following the Ombudsman Toronto Enquiry into Winter Respite Services (including improved communications, improved operational reliability, improved system oversight, and improved results)
- A new System Oversight function was implemented that provides daily operational reports and acts as a first-point of contact for service partners.

## **2. Expanded shelter and 24-hour respite site capacity**

### *Expanded shelter capacity*

City Council has invested significantly in expanding available shelter capacity. Since December 2016, almost 3000 beds have been added, primarily to manage the increase and flow of refugee/asylum claimants seeking shelter services in Toronto. In response to unprecedented non-refugee/asylum claimant demand for shelter services, Council approved (through the 2018 operating budget) the capital and operational funds required to open 1,000 new shelter beds over the next three years.

SSHA is working closely with the City Planning and Real Estate Services (RES) divisions to identify and secure appropriate locations for new shelter services. In 2018, SSHA and RES assessed 379 properties as potential shelter sites. While a number of sites have been identified that are being considered for potential shelter development, there continue to be ongoing challenges identifying sites that meet all requirements. The lack of available sites is compounded by low vacancy rates and rising property values across the city. Despite these challenges, two new shelters have opened since December, increasing system capacity by 101 beds. In 2019, a total of 400 new beds will be available as part of the ongoing 1,000 bed plan.

In 2018, Council directed City Planning to conduct city-wide public consultations on proposed options to increase the as-of-right zoning permissions for municipal shelters. Based on the results of those consultations, staff will be reporting back to Council in early 2019 with recommendations for zoning by-law amendments that will provide more opportunities for locating municipal shelters across the city and will increase success and expedite securing locations for shelter expansion

### *Expanded 24-hour respite site capacity*

In addition to shelter system capacity, the City also provides 24-hour respite sites that provide essential services to individuals experiencing homelessness in an environment that prioritizes ease of access to safe indoor space. The 2018/19 Winter Plan included commitment for a minimum of 600 24-hour respite site spaces throughout the winter. Over the past two months, 24-hour respite site space capacity has been increased to 800 spaces available at nine sites each night to respond to increased service demand. This includes one temporary Sprung structure opened on December 22 with 100 spaces.

During an Extreme Cold Weather Alert (ECWA) additional services are available that focus on getting and keeping vulnerable residents inside. A warming centre is open at Metro Hall by 7 p.m. the day an alert is called, and remains open continuously until noon on the day an alert is terminated. Other services provided during an ECWA include notification to community agencies to relax service restrictions, availability of transit tokens in some drop-ins, and the deployment of additional street outreach.

### *Options for Immediate Response*

One option for an immediate response is that the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) could activate the City's Contingency Plan for Emergency Social Services - and where appropriate, engage the services of the Canadian Red Cross. Generally speaking, this is intended to provide emergency services for up to 72 hours. In cases where the contingency plan is activated, OEM has identified sites in City facilities, such as community centres, where Emergency Reception Centres can be opened.

Operating a longer term Emergency Reception Centre in a community center, like occurred last winter at Regent Park Community Centre, brings with it significant challenges for the local community as a result of cancellation of existing recreation programming and displacing neighbourhood use of the community space.

The OEM Contingency Plan for Emergency Social Services is intended to provide emergency shelter provisions, supported by the Canadian Red Cross, for up to 72 hours.

In late January, the capacity of the warming centre at Metro Hall was expanded to 50 spaces as an immediate response to increased demand for services.

### **3. Additional temporary structures and expedited timelines**

SSHA purchased temporary Sprung structures for delivery of 24-hour respite sites in three locations. These temporary Sprung structures meet all relevant codes and standards for accessibility, and are relatively quick to construct. One structure opened in December and is currently operational, providing 100 spaces. Two additional Sprung structures have been purchased and are planned to open in March/April.

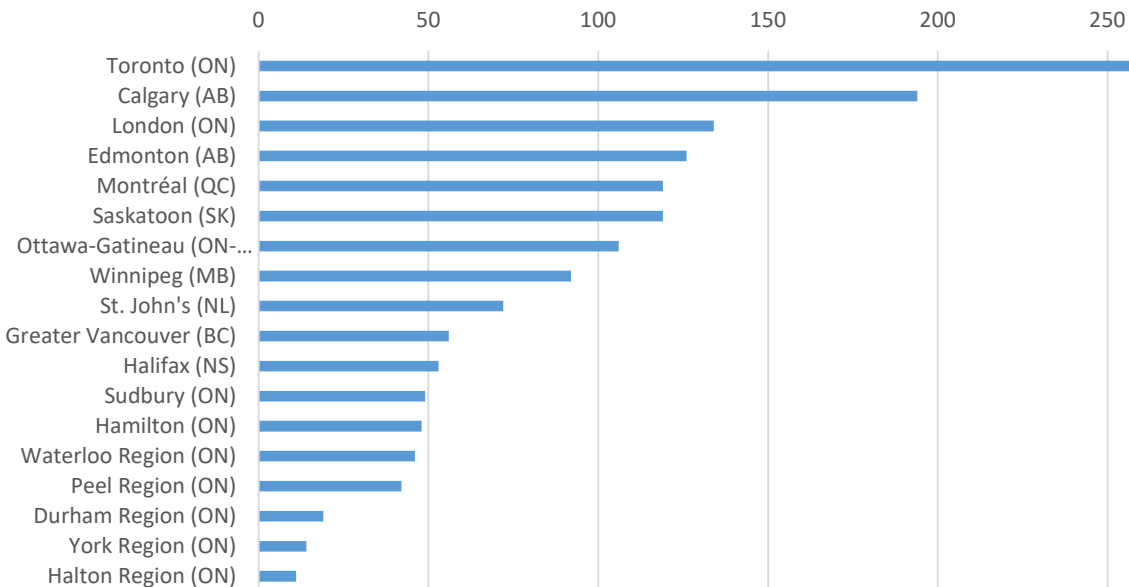
SSHA staff are working closely with other City divisions to expedite the delivery of the temporary structures. Delays as a result of lease negotiation, site planning related to utilities and construction have been challenging. However, staff are working as quickly as possible to ensure sites are operational. Typically the structures take 16 weeks to build after permits have been approved, and the first one was put up in just 9 weeks.

Knowing that these two structures would not be delivered until the 2nd quarter of 2019, SSHA opened two contingency 24-hour respite sites to ensure the availability of 800 respite spaces. The construction timelines of the two structures have not resulted in any lower service level than planned. The existing 24-hour respite sites will remain open as needed until the end of the winter season.

#### 4. Need to augment services with solutions aimed at reducing homelessness

Increasing homelessness is an issue in most large urban centres in Canada and North America. For example, in New York City, the number of people staying in municipal homeless shelters each night is more than 63,000 people, 72% higher than ten years ago. Vancouver's recent point in time count found a 60% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness over the past 10 years. Ottawa has seen a 15% increase in the number of people using shelter between 2014 and 2017.

Figure 1: Shelter Beds Per Capita (100,000 Population)



Note: Other jurisdiction shelter data obtained from the 2016 Shelter Capacity Report, Employment and Social Development Canada; Toronto data from SSHA 2018

Jurisdictions that have seen a reduction in homelessness have done so through investment to increase the availability of supportive housing for people who have complex mental health issues. A recent study from the University of Chicago using longitudinal data collected by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) demonstrated that increased investment in permanent supportive housing was associated with reduced rates of chronic homelessness over time. In Canada, municipalities like Calgary and Edmonton that have seen a reduction in rates of homelessness in recent years have had significant provincial and municipal investment in Housing First programs and permanent supportive housing.

#### *Both emergency shelter and housing solutions are needed*

The City is committed to ensuring that all residents have a safe place to stay on a temporary basis for those who experience a loss of housing. This is why we have expanded emergency shelter and 24-hour respite site capacity significantly, and why Council has invested \$178.6M to build 1,000 new shelter beds

However, many people who remain sleeping outdoors, particularly during cold weather, will choose not to access shelter or 24-hour respite site services. For these individuals,

providing supportive housing opportunities directly from the street is the best, and possibly only, service solution that will help them to exit homelessness.

Emergency shelter is just one component of an effective and integrated housing system continuum that provides a range of housing responses to meet the needs of Toronto residents. Without creating additional pathways out of homelessness through investments in support and prevention services, homelessness will continue to increase.

### *Existing prevention and supportive housing initiatives*

There are a number of current initiatives underway in Toronto to prevent people from becoming homeless, support people to exit homelessness and increase housing with support opportunities.

Shelter staff work tirelessly every day to support people to move from shelter to housing, and in 2018 more than 8,000 people moved from shelter to housing. This includes over 1,100 people referred to housing allowances and follow-up supports through a Coordinated Access system pilot. SSHA has also created innovative new services that focus on diverting people from entering the shelter system by helping them to avoid eviction and remain in their homes. In 2018, 223 households were assisted to avoid becoming homeless through a new eviction prevention program delivered through SSHA and community partners.

Recently, some new supportive housing opportunities have been created through the provincially funded Home for Good (HFG) program. Through implementation of this program, SSHA has provided supports to 1,500 people in 2018, with another 500 new units planned in 2019. The capital component of the HFG program is being delivered by the Affordable Housing Office (AHO). With up to \$36.8M in capital funding AHO is working on three projects aiming to create up to 235 new units. Home for Good funding is also being used to support tenants in 204 TCH rooming house units as part of the Tenants First initiative, to leverage existing housing stock to provide better outcomes for existing tenants and create new housing with support opportunities.

Through the George Street Revitalization project, the City has allocated funding to create 150 new units of supportive housing in rooming houses through a partnership with a community agency. Locating suitable properties for these units has proved challenging and one site with 20 units has been confirmed to date.

### *Supportive housing demand*

Despite these promising initiatives, the number of supportive housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto is not enough to meet demand. Based on estimates from a recent Ontario-wide Wellesley Institute Report, the amount of mental health supportive housing that is estimated as needed in Toronto is approximately 18,000 units, or 1,800 new units per year over the next ten years. For reference, there are currently more than 15,000 households on the Province's Access Point waiting list for mental health supportive housing in Toronto.

## *Opportunities to increase prevention and supportive housing solutions*

In 2018 City Council requested that the federal and provincial governments provide increased capital and operating funding to create 1,800 new supportive housing units annually. Staff estimated that the creation of 1,800 units would require an annual investment of about \$283.5M in one-time capital costs and increases of \$41.7M in additional operating costs each year over ten years. The total capital investments required over 10 years for 18,000 units then, is \$2.835 billion and the ongoing annual operating cost, including inflation, to maintain 18,000 units after 10 years is \$543.7M.

At the present time, and recognizing the acute need for supportive housing, there are a number of measures the City can take to address the short and medium term need:

- Continue to work with Habitat Services and identify ways to fast-track location of available properties and secure approvals for rooming house supportive housing planned through George Street Revitalization
- Engage with key supportive housing providers to identify short and medium-term actions to increase supportive housing options to immediately assist people to exit homelessness
- Continue to work with the LHINs and the Access Point to increase available mental health supportive housing for people who are homeless
- Request the provincial government to increase funding through the Home for Good program to create additional housing with support opportunities
- Re-iterate City Council's request that the federal and provincial governments work in partnership with the City and supportive housing providers through providing the necessary capital and operating funding to create 1,800 new supportive housing units annually

City staff are currently conducting public consultations on the development of a new 10-year Housing Plan for the period 2020-2030. A component of the new plan will address the urgent need for new measures to increase prevention and supportive housing responses. Staff will be reporting to Council later in 2019 with recommendations for a new Housing Plan, proposed actions, targets and necessary resources.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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