

## **Interim Housing Assistance Program for Refugee/Asylum Claimants Arriving in Toronto**

**Date:** July 12, 2019

**To:** City Council

**From:** Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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Since 2016, there has been an ongoing and consistent increase in the number of refugee/asylum claimants seeking emergency shelter in Toronto. This trend surged in 2018 and through 2019 continues to add additional pressure to Toronto's already strained shelter system. If the spike in demand witnessed in the summer of 2018 is repeated in the summer of 2019, this will pose an even more significant challenge to Toronto's shelter system.

As part of its ongoing response to this challenge, SSHA staff convened an intergovernmental table on June 20, 2019, with the Federal government (IRCC) and willing local GTHA municipalities in attendance. This meeting was an important step in the development of a local plan, aimed at easing pressure on Toronto's shelter system and providing refugee/asylum claimants with additional opportunities for housing.

The City is proposing to lead a proactive approach with the Federal government and other willing municipalities to increase shelter and housing options to refugee/asylum claimants arriving in Toronto. The details of this plan continue to be developed, and as such, this report seeks authority to implement this plan - at no net cost to the City of Toronto - over the summer as further details are finalized.

Staff continue to work with the Federal government and local municipalities to maximize the opportunities for all shelter users, including refugee/asylum claimant families. While the full amount of available funding from the Federal government for this initiative is still being determined, this report seeks authority for the City to receive all available funding from the Federal government and to administer this funding – up to the amount provided by the Federal government – to all willing municipalities (including Toronto) for the costs associated with and incurred as a direct result of this approach.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the Mayor and the City Manager to enter into an agreement with the Federal government in order for the City to:

a. receive funding to provide services to refugee/asylum claimants as part of the local plan referred to in this report, such agreement to be in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and

b. allocate funding in accordance with the agreement and the local plan.

2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, or her designate to:

a. allocate funds received from the Federal government and enter into agreements with community agencies, hotels or other service providers, in or outside of the City of Toronto, in support of the local plan, such agreements to be on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor;

b. allocate funds received from the Federal government and enter into agreements with other participating municipalities in support of the local plan, such agreements to be on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor; and

c. allocate funds received from the Federal government and enter into other agreements as may be necessary to provide services to refugee/asylum claimants in support of the local plan.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial implications associated with this report. The financial requirements of all parties to carry out the plan will be finalized in the coming weeks, with no net financial impact to the City of Toronto. The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **EQUITY IMPACT**

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Refugees and asylum claimants face barriers that may challenge their ability to access municipal and other services, and to achieve equitable access to housing. Refugee/asylum claimant households are primarily families, and over half of this population seeking service from Toronto's shelter system are children under the age of 16. The recommendations in this report will support improved and more sustainable services to refugee / asylum claimant households over the duration of the proposed agreement.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting of June 26, 2019, Economic and Community Development Committee received EC6.9 "2020 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and System Update Report," which provides updates on a number of key initiatives that support and strengthen the housing and homelessness service system, including the City's response to the needs of refugee/asylum claimants seeking emergency shelter.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC6.9>

At its meeting of April 16 and 17, 2019, City Council adopted EC3.5 "City of Toronto Refugee Capacity Plan," which aims to facilitate seamless and efficient mobilization of City's resources and services during periods of significant and unforeseen increases in refugee populations in Toronto.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC3.5>

At its meeting of June 27, 27, 28, and 29, 2018, City Council adopted CD29.8 "2019 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and System Update Report," which directed staff to engage in discussion with the governments of Ontario and Canada to provide a regional response to the increased flow of refugee claimants/asylum seekers to the Toronto area.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD29.8>

## COMMENTS

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In anticipation of increased asylum claimants arriving in Toronto in the summer of July 2019, and facing a permanent and temporary shelter system at capacity, the City of Toronto, in partnership with willing municipalities across the GTHA, is proposing to lead a proactive plan to providing interim housing to asylum claimants arriving in Toronto, starting in the summer of 2019.

### Background

Since 2016, there has been a steady increase in the number of refugee/asylum claimants seeking emergency shelter in Toronto, a trend that has surged throughout 2017 and 2018, and has remained consistently high for over a year. The increase has resulted in a significant increase in refugee/asylum claimants accessing emergency shelter services, stretching Toronto's shelter system to its limit (details in Appendix 1).

To respond to this increase in demand, the City added over 2,500 beds to its system since December 2016. By early May 2018, the expanded shelter system was also full, and the City activated its Contingency Plan for Emergency Social Services to provide temporary accommodation at select Toronto college dormitories (funded by the Province of Ontario). The City then transferred almost 400 refugee/asylum claimants to municipalities outside Toronto to temporary motel beds (secured by the federal government) to accommodate returning college students in early August. This *ad hoc* regional approach relieved some pressure on the system in fall 2018.

The number of refugee/asylum claimant arrivals continues to match the rate at which people can find housing. The shelter system is full and continues to be at risk of being overwhelmed. Additionally, the City cannot sustain the financial resources required to respond to the surge in demand. Based on experience in past years and early data from 2019, staff expect an influx of refugee/asylum claimants in the summer of 2019.

The goal of this local plan is to move interested families arriving in Toronto to neighbouring municipalities for immediate interim housing, with the goal of accessing interim housing services in those communities. This local plan will be led and coordinated by the City of Toronto.

### Local Plan

Building on the success of the *ad hoc* approach taken in 2018, City of Toronto will take the following approach to implementing a plan of willing local partners to collectively address the increase in the number of refugee/asylum claimants seeking emergency shelter:

1. Refugee/asylum claimants would arrive in Toronto and the City of Toronto would assess their needs and determine their eligibility for shelter.
2. City of Toronto would work with families to determine the most appropriate available interim housing location.
3. City of Toronto would provide transportation to the interim housing location and provide the local government or community organization with all necessary information to facilitate transition.
4. The local government or community organization would then work with individual families to move them into affordable longer-term housing.

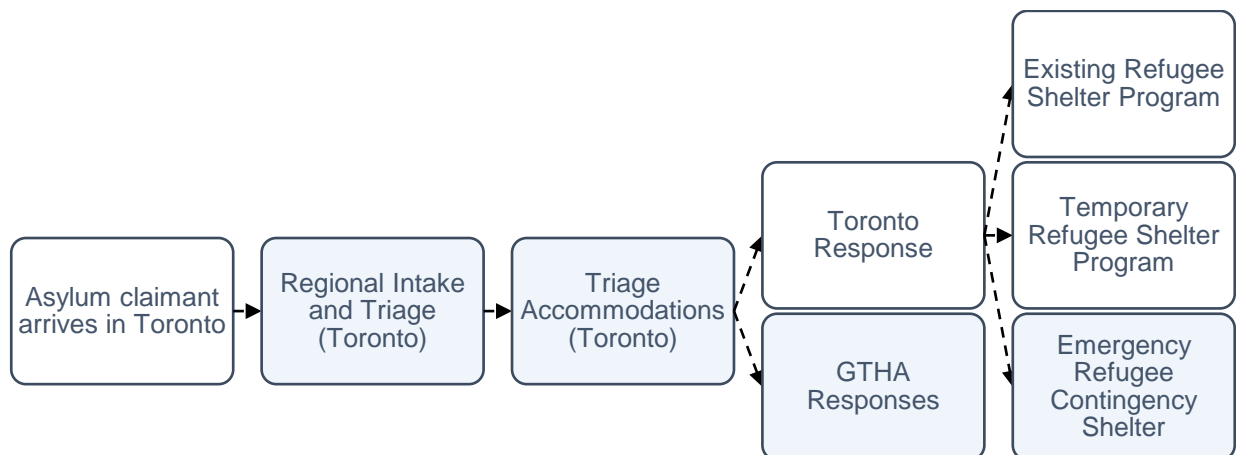


Figure 1: Proposed Interim Housing Assistance Program approach, for July 2019 to March 2020. Blue shading indicates roles for which this proposal seeks funding.

This approach would provide refugee/asylum claimant families, the City of Toronto, and local municipalities with a number of important opportunities; including:

- Alleviating some pressure of Toronto's permanent and temporary shelter system, which is currently at capacity.
- Ensuring municipalities have an organized and proactive approach to housing refugee/asylum claimants arriving in Toronto.
- Providing wider options for families looking for interim housing services in the GTHA, including access to housing markets with average rents lower than Toronto.
- Providing families interim accommodations within travelling distance of many immigration and legal proceedings, often in Toronto.
- Meeting the needs of an increasing number of refugee/asylum claimants looking to settle in Toronto while providing the best possible service.

### **Toronto Response**

The City of Toronto will lead the intake and triaging of refugee/asylum claimants arriving in Toronto. This includes:

- Accepting initial request for service and collecting basic information about needs through Central Intake
- Providing immediate reception centre services and triage to available shelter accommodations
- Providing transportation to new location and transferring case file and other required information to relevant local government/service provider

The cost to Toronto for the regional intake and triage will be covered by the Federal government and will provide:

- Staff to handle increased volume of service requests through Central Intake
- Immediate reception centre service
- Temporary triage and accommodation where available
- Transport costs to move refugee/asylum claimants to interim housing locations
- Staff to manage immediate triage accommodations and transfer logistics
- Staff to perform relationship management functions with participating municipalities
- Vouchers for meal programs

### **Local Municipality Response**

Local municipalities will receive refugee/asylum claimants and will provide:

- Intake and orientation to the host community
- Local accommodation and food
- Connection to local health, income supports, education, employment and settlement services
- Access to permanent housing options and support to enter into leases, move and establish a home
- Ongoing support to families as they transition into the community

The cost for each local municipality response will be paid for by the Federal Government with the Toronto administering these funds in accordance with the plan established by the Federal government and the surrounding municipalities. As part of this work, Toronto will assist willing partner municipalities and provide, where appropriate:

- Staff to provide orientation and housing search services
- Hotel accommodation and food
- Local transportation
- Language interpretation

## **Conclusion**

Despite notable success in assisting more than 5,636 refugee/asylum claimants (in 2018, alone) to find housing and move out of shelter, a steady flow of new arrivals continue to fill any available space and the placement list continues to grow. Indeed, the number of refugee/asylum claimant arrivals continues to outpace the rate at which people are able to secure housing. The shelter system is full and continues to be at risk of being overwhelmed.

Staff continue to work with the Federal government and local municipalities to maximize the opportunities for all shelter users, including refugee/asylum claimant families. While the full amount of available funding from the Federal government for this initiative is still being determined, the recommendations in this report provide the foundation necessary to deliver a robust regional plan, with the support of the Federal government, and to ensure improved outcomes for shelter users in Toronto, including refugee/asylum claimants.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

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