

Challenges with Operating Warming Centres 24 / 7 Until April 15, 2023

Date: February 7, 2023

To: City Council

From: General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing Administration Division

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide supplementary information to Council as item HL1.6 Cold weather and the effects on those experiencing homelessness is considered, specifically as it relates to challenges associated with the Board of Health's recommendation that City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing Administration to provide 24/7 indoor warming locations until April 15, 2023.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Staff have not had an opportunity to fully confirm financial impacts associated with the Board of Health recommendation. Preliminary estimates of \$400,000 per month plus other health and harm reduction supports needed for people using the service would be required to activate a warming centre in a city owned building. If appropriate space is found to lease in the community, these costs would need to be included in the estimate.

This cost would need to be multiplied by the number of centres activated and months operated; and as noted above the estimate would need to be further refined to include other health and harm reduction supports needed for people using the service; and would further increase with lease costs if a non-City building was required for this service.

The 2023 Proposed Operating Budget does not include funding to support operationalizing one or more warming centres 24 / 7 until April 15, 2023, and the recommendation from the Board of Health to Council would require a funding offset.

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

DECISION HISTORY

Board of Health on January 16, 2023 considered HL1.6 Cold weather and the effects on those experiencing homelessness and recommended that:

1. City Council declare a public health crisis in the City of Toronto based on systemic failure of all three levels of government to provide adequate 24-hour, drop-in and respite indoor spaces, and call for the immediate provision of safe, accessible 24-hour respite spaces that are accessible through walk-in access.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing Administration to provide 24/7 indoor warming locations until April 15, 2023, possibly including City of Toronto Warming Centres, and locations provided by community organizations, including faith-based groups, that would provide low-barrier, walk-in access to people in need of a safe place to spend the night.

HL1.6 Cold weather and the effects on those experiencing homelessness
<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-231057.pdf>

COMMENTS

The emergency shelter system in Toronto has been faced with significant pressure over the past several years. This includes introducing 27 new temporary shelters sites to support implementing COVID-19 physical distancing requirements and responding to pre-pandemic numbers of refugee claimants arriving in Toronto since international borders have re-opened. The number of staff required to support these enhanced operations has increased the strain both on City staffing resources within Shelter Support and Housing Administration but also on many community run shelter programs.

In the summer of 2022 shelter sector leaders approached the City to highlight the serious challenges they are facing in filling vacant staffing positions and retaining trained staff to maintain safe shelter operations. They reported that service providers have reached a breaking point. To help address these concerns, SSHA has included \$7 million in new funding to maintain current shelter operations as part of a multi-year funding approach to stabilize the community shelter sector and focus on improving performance and outcomes.

In the fall of 2022 SSHA released a call out to community shelter partners to identify organizations that could assist with 2022/23 winter operations. Staffing was required to operate four warming centres which would be activated during extreme cold weather alerts and other times of inclement winter weather. Three organizations responded to the call and all have been deployed to operate warming centres at Mitchell Field Community Centre, Metro Hall and Cecil Community Centre. City staff have been

deployed to operate services at Scarborough Civic Centre and assist at Metro Hall as needed. This redeployment is not sustainable and is for emergencies only.

In the lead up to the winter season SSHA worked closely with CREM to identify potential sites for warming centres. Multiple locations were investigated for their suitable use. Unfortunately as the winter season started on November 15, 2022 just three sites had been identified. A fourth was identified and activated on January 30, 2023. These locations are not suitable for ongoing 24 / 7 operations. Either because they have other programming commitments which makes them available on occasion or because they lack showers, kitchen facilities and other amenities in the case of the Civic Centres. More suitable locations would need to be identified to operate on a 24 / 7 basis.

Furthermore, SSHA does not currently have funding in its proposed 2023 budget to support operationalizing one or more warming centres 24 / 7 until April 15, 2023, and the recommendation to Council does not include an available funding offset. The estimated monthly operating costs to activate a warming centre in a City building to support 50 people with no lease costs is \$400,000. This estimate does not include other health and harm reduction supports needed for people using the service. If appropriate space is found to lease in the community these costs would need to be included in the estimate.

CONTACT

SIGNATURE

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