

**To: Warden and Members of County Council**

**From: Director of Human Services**

## **24/7 Shelter Model Update and Strategy for Pathways Out of Homelessness**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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- 1. That County Council receive Report No. HS 2023-14, entitled “24/7 Shelter Model Update and Strategy for Pathways out of Homelessness” as information;**
- 2. And further, that County Council authorize up to \$125,000 from the Affordable Housing Reserve to be used for the purposes of retaining a consultant for the development of a Strategy in support of pathways out of homelessness to work alongside the 24/7 Shelter Model;**
- 3. And further, that Council authorize the Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Human Services to sign all necessary documents related thereto.**

### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

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- Due to the rising use of overnight emergency shelter space in the City of Woodstock, additional short-term solutions are necessary to address increasing needs over the coming months.
- Over the past several months, staff have considered several potential sites for the location of a new emergency shelter, however, due to concerns related to zoning, location, cost and environmental requirements, none have been suitable to bring forward to Council for consideration.
- Current emergency shelters in the City of Woodstock are at, or exceeding capacity, with shelter staff identifying increased assertive and violent behavior among those participating in the shelter system.
- The costs associated with operating emergency shelter services continue to rise. Investing in longer term solutions will ensure greater cost efficiency in the efforts to reduce homelessness in the County.
- The development of a Strategy for a Pathway out of Homelessness will allow strategic decision-making and investment of resources with the goal of providing recommendations and solutions to address the current pressures in the homelessness system.

## Implementation Points

Staff will continue to consider appropriate locations for additional emergency shelter space, and bring forward any feasible locations to County Council for consideration.

## Financial Impact







The 2023 Human Services budget included plans for the use of the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), including the allocation of funding to community partners for delivery of homelessness system services. Financial commitments have been made for the full allocation of HPP for the 2023/2024 fiscal year. The current expansion of the overnight shelter in Woodstock was not anticipated, nor was the increased use of hotel rooms. While this will not impact the 2023 budget, additional budget requests may be considered as part of the 2024 budget, depending on the costs to deliver the short-term solutions detailed in this report.

In order to address more immediate homeless needs, staff are seeking Council approval to engage a consultant to assist in developing a Strategy for a Pathway out of Homelessness for an estimated cost of \$125,000. The cost of this plan would be funded by the Affordable Housing Reserve which currently has a projected year-end balance of \$1.4 million.

## Communications

Once the expanded space for the overnight shelter in Woodstock is close to completion, a formal communication will be issued to internal staff, community partners and the public. At this time, communications have been limited to the County, Operation Sharing, Old St. Paul’s Church and community partners who work with the homeless population in a more informal manner.

## Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

 <i>WORKS WELL TOGETHER</i>	 <i>WELL CONNECTED</i>	 <i>SHAPES THE FUTURE</i>	 <i>INFORMS &amp; ENGAGES</i>	 <i>PERFORMS &amp; DELIVERS</i>	 <i>POSITIVE IMPACT</i>
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## DISCUSSION

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### Background

On January 26, 2022, County Council passed a resolution in support of Report No. [HS 2022-01](#), to expand the emergency shelter for those experiencing homelessness to provide 24/7 operations. The overnight shelter (“The Inn”) in Woodstock, was then expanded from 12 to 25 beds, with additional space secured to deliver services during the daytime. The 24/7 model was fully established by October 2022 with a combination of funding support from the SSRF, HPP and Affordable Housing Reserve, as outlined in Report No. [HS 2023-07](#).

A partnership between the County, Operation Sharing, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and Old St. Paul's Church, supported the increased hours associated with the 24-hour, 7 day a week, shelter. The current 24/7 emergency shelter model, as currently delivered by Operation Sharing, consists of three locations:

- i) Old St. Paul's Anglican Church - overnight shelter from 4:00 pm to 8:00 am, 7 days a week;
- ii) College Avenue United Church - daytime space from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday; and,
- iii) Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – weekend day space, on Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

The above multiple location approach provides benefits, such as ensuring guests are up and moving in the morning and at the end of the day, however, it can be more costly from an operational perspective including staffing and equipment perspective.

Following the implementation of the 24/7 shelter model, County Council passed a resolution at the March 8, 2023 Council meeting, providing staff direction to report back to Council on the following:

1. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Oxford County and Operation Sharing defining service delivery roles;
2. The defined operational and capital funding relationships of both parties;
3. The progress and efforts that have been made in exploring a potential permanent location for these services, with support from the City of Woodstock and other applicable community organizations; and,
4. A possible agreement template for similar uses throughout the County, with other similar community groups.

For background purposes, on July 12, 2023, in closed session, staff brought forward a report with respect to #3 of the above noted resolution, relating to the progress and efforts made to find a potential permanent location for the emergency shelter in Woodstock. The purpose of this report is to provide a further update with respect to the efforts made since that time to find a permanent location for such services. For Council's information, staff have continued to explore any opportunities for new shelter locations, including both vacant land and/or an existing buildings. It is important to note that a proposed permanent location is a longer term goal, and would not improve the current situation in the immediate future. The current situation requires a temporary solution immediately while the search continues for a long-term site.

## **Comments**

### **Potential Locations Overview**

Human Services staff continue to work with Facilities staff, to determine a potential alternate location for an emergency shelter in Woodstock. At this time, all options are being explored including one location for both overnight and day space activities, as well as separate locations for the overnight and day space. Both the City of Woodstock and Operation Sharing have been

involved in discussions pertaining to potential sites. While a number of sites have been considered since the last update to Council in July, only one potential site has been identified as being suitable in terms of zoning and location. Staff are continuing discussions around this site and will bring forward a report to Council should a potential purchase be feasible.

Over the past several months the search for a location included consideration for a site that could provide sufficient space to accommodate all shelter operations (day and night). For these purposes, the site would need to be sufficient to accommodate a minimum of 50 shelter beds, with amenities such as showers (male/female), washrooms (staff and guests), laundry, kitchen, outdoor space for guests, parking, offices for Operation Sharing and community partners, and common spaces.

It is anticipated that an 8,000 square foot building may be required to accommodate both overnight and day shelter activities. If the overnight and day space activities were at separate locations, a smaller site would be sufficient to accommodate a building with approximately 3,500 square feet. This information has been used to identify possible sites for consideration.

To support the property search and ensure a thorough review of any available sites, the County retained the services of a Realtor. Through the site search process it has been determined that options are not abundant that meet ideal factors such as proximity to the downtown, services, size of the lot/building, current zoning and suitability for business operations. While the City of Woodstock is supportive of the need for a new 24/7 emergency shelter location, they prefer it be located outside of the downtown core.

It is estimated that the timeline for a new build would be 3 to 5 years, with a potential building renovation being 2 to 3 years to complete. The requirement for a record of site condition, or other building code related items, may influence the timeline for site readiness. Financing of the project would also need to be considered as these costs were not accounted for in the 2023 budget. Costs can be planned for and included in the 2024 budget.

### Short-term Temporary Solutions

While finding a new permanent location for emergency shelter services is still a focus, there is still an immediate need to provide increased emergency shelter capacity in the short-term. In light of this, staff have supported the following temporary solutions to provide a more immediate response:

1. Expanded space at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock ("The Inn")

Work is currently underway to expand the capacity of the overnight shelter, with completion anticipated by the end of October 2023. The expanded space will be able to accommodate up to 25 guests, bringing the total shelter capacity to 50 beds. Hours of operation will mirror the current overnight shelter, being 7 days a week from 4 pm to 8 am. Additional staffing will be required and Operation Sharing will oversee the operation of the expanded space. Costs associated with the expansion will be covered using planned HPP funding.

2. Use of Hotel Rooms

Hotel rooms have historically been used to provide emergency temporary shelter in Oxford County, particularly during the pandemic. The Salvation Army offices in Woodstock and Tillsonburg oversee the use of hotel rooms through an agreement with the County. Staff would like to minimize use of hotel rooms whenever possible, however, they are required in certain situations, such as providing temporary shelter to parents with children or during inclement weather. Referrals come through the Woodstock Police or the OPP to Salvation Army staff who then coordinate hotel room use with one of our motel partners. Salvation Army also provides boxed meals for those accessing hotel rooms.

To reduce pressures on community partners in the City of Woodstock who oversee the motel room program, recent changes have been made to improve how they are managed by our partners. In Woodstock, referrals must now come into the Salvation Army by 9:00 pm each day, and in some instances rooms will be used for double occupancy similar to a shelter model, as appropriate. Staff will monitor the impacts of the recent changes and will make adjustments as required.

3. Increased Outreach and Encampment Response

The County, along with community partners, have increased the hours of the Mobile Health Outreach Bus (MHOB) and the frequency of attending known encampments. Health care services, supplies, food, water and other resources are made available during such encampment visits. Staff continue to engage with people experiencing homelessness in encampments and on the streets, with the intent of connecting to services and supports. The goal is always to work towards permanent housing solutions and connections to supports.

Municipal 511, is an app used to communicate road closures, construction and road conditions and Oxford County implemented use of Municipal 511 in 2020. The app was able to be modified for use by the encampment response team to map and share information about encampment activities as well as record information. The use of Municipal 511 was also recently implemented as a result of discussions at the City of Woodstock Mayor's Task Force. Municipal 511 will be offered County-wide once fully implemented.

4. Out of The Cold Shelter in Tillsonburg

Operation Sharing has partnered with the Avondale Zion United Church in Tillsonburg for the delivery of an Out of the Cold Emergency Shelter for those experiencing homelessness from November 1, 2023 through to April 30, 2024. The homelessness situation in Tillsonburg is evolving and staff continue to work with community partners to support those experiencing homelessness, as well as those in the business community and in the public. The opening of an Out of the Cold Shelter for the winter is one of the initiatives to be implemented over the coming months in Tillsonburg.

The Out of the Cold Shelter is proposed to be temporary at this time, with the intent to allow for additional information gathering to inform recommendations on next steps, beyond winter.

5. Pallet Shelter

Staff are exploring the potential for a tiny shelter community in Oxford County. Pallet or modular shelter communities, are a unique option to provide temporary shelter options. Pallet shelters offer single or double occupancy cabins with access to communal washrooms, shelter and common space that provides food, supports and social spaces for occupants. Pallet or modular shelters are a form of transitional housing that are targeted to individuals who are ready for more independent accommodations and ready to actively search for permanent housing and eventually employment.

Pallet or modular shelters are portable and can be moved to another location as needed. They can be set up and taken down easily. A pallet or modular shelter village can typically be constructed in a short period of time, and the individual cabins have a bed, desk, small fridge, heating and cooling. A village with 20 to 25 cabins would be targeted for Woodstock, with a smaller village of 10 to 12 cabins in a smaller community. It should be noted that the feasibility of such an option is still being considered in relation to costing, servicing, and overall site utilization.

**Estimated Costs for Short-term Temporary Solutions**

Table 1 provides details on the estimated costs and timelines for the implementation of the short-term solutions that are identified above.

Table 1: Costs and Timelines for Short-term Solutions

<b>Option</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Funding Type</b>	<b>Estimated Timeline</b>
<b>1. Expanded space at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock (25 new spaces)</b>	\$150,000 construction \$200,000 operations	HPP	Available October 31, 2023
<b>2. Hotel Space (overnight)</b>	\$60,000	HPP	currently available
<b>3. Out of The Cold Overnight Shelter, Tillsonburg (12 spaces)</b>	\$100,000	HPP	November 1, 2023
<b>4. Outreach and Encampment Response</b>	\$100,000	HPP	Currently being delivered
<b>5. Pallet Homes (25 cabins)</b>	\$1,000,000 (buildings) \$450,000 (site prep)	unknown	Possible 2024 initiative

Option	Estimated Cost	Funding Type	Estimated Timeline
	\$500,000 annually (operations)		

Operational costs indicated in Table 1 would be costs that continue year over year to maintain operations such as staff, utilities or rent.

### Long-Term Planning – Pathway out of Homelessness

In alignment with the Provincial direction of reducing homelessness and chronic homelessness, one of the priorities that will be presented as part of the 2024 budget is allocating funds to create pathways out of homelessness. The development of a Strategy that will lead to more strategic decision-making processes for solutions to reduce homelessness is the first step in this initiative.

When individuals have access to housing that meets their needs, they are better able to afford other basic needs such as food, and are more likely to find a sense of belonging in their community. Overall, they have a better chance at a healthy life, free of stress that is associated with chronic poverty and housing insecurity.

Homelessness and mental illness, and/or problematic substance use, are often co-occurring conditions. Individuals with mental illness are more likely to experience homelessness. The stress of homelessness can worsen symptoms of mental illness including substance use disorders. At the same time, symptoms of mental illness can impact one’s ability to obtain and maintain housing. Strong community-based mental health and addiction treatment services, housing with mental health support, and using a housing first approach are critical supports within communities.

Investing in the development of housing with supports for low to high acuity individuals, will provide a pathway out of homelessness for individuals who are ready to take the step towards housing stability. A New Initiative is being considered for inclusion in the 2024 budget that will request an investment in resources to support the development of additional supportive and transitional housing. A range of supportive housing and transitional housing is currently available throughout the County, however, the wait lists are extensive and with no vacancies, it is difficult to apply a housing first approach when units are not available.

Staff are looking to engage a consultant to review the current state of homelessness shelter services, with the goal of providing recommendations and solutions to address the current pressures in the homelessness system. The plan is to build a framework that provides choice in the housing system, offers appropriate housing with supports and builds a system that provides a pathway out of homelessness.

### Oxford County By-Name List

The County’s By-Name List (BNL) is a real-time list of people experiencing homelessness in Oxford County. It includes a robust set of data points that support coordinated access and prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a



system level. This real-time actionable data supports triage to services, system performance evaluation and advocacy for the policies and resources necessary to end homelessness.

The Oxford County BNL is the County's centralized list to prioritize supports and services for people experiencing long-term or chronic homelessness. It is a living tracking tool, with a single entry point, maintained by the County of Oxford that is used by the community to access supports and services provided by a variety of community stakeholders in order to effectively respond to people experiencing homelessness in Oxford County.

Having a BNL will support the improvement and coordination of intake practices for people experiencing homelessness to be able to access appropriate supports and services more quickly.

Coordinated Access through the BNL allows our team to provide the right services and supports at the right time. A Coordinated Access approach allows staff to actively work to prevent and divert households from an experience of homelessness by assessing their situation and connecting them to financial, social service sector and other supports.

The BNL and Coordinated Access System will be a critical component of the Strategy.

## **Conclusions**

The current homelessness situation in Oxford County requires an immediate response to increase shelter capacity in the immediate future. The proposed temporary solutions will address immediate needs, however, to be able to reduce homelessness an investment in long term solutions that seek to build a system that offers people who are experiencing homelessness options, hope and improved health outcomes, is necessary.

## **SIGNATURES**

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### **Departmental Approval:**

Original signed by

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Kelly Black  
Director of Human Services

### **Approved for submission:**

Original signed by

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Benjamin R. Addley  
Chief Administrative Officer