

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

**From:** Acting Director of Human Services

## Homelessness in Oxford County

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. That County Council receive Report No. HS 2021-09, with respect to the current support that is being provided to individuals experiencing homelessness;
2. And further, that Council support the creation of a subcommittee of the Oxford Housing Action Collaborative, with representation from County Council, the Human Services Department, members of other community support agencies and urban municipal Downtown Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), for the purpose of focusing on the impacts that homelessness may have on businesses in Downtown areas.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

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- The purpose of this report is to provide details with respect to the financial and in kind services provided to individuals experiencing homelessness in Oxford County.
- The community needs to work together to combat the challenges of individuals facing homelessness.
- In light of the complexities of homelessness, it is recommended that a committee or subcommittee of an existing committee be formed to focus on the impacts that homelessness may have on businesses in Downtown areas.

### Implementation Points

Following Council's consideration of this report, a committee or a sub-committee of the Oxford Action Housing Collaborative will be formed for the purpose of focusing on the impacts that homelessness may have on businesses in the Downtown Cores of urban municipalities.

The Committee will consist of three members from County Council, including the warden, and a representative from both a large and small urban municipality, the Human Services Department, and urban municipal BIAs.

Further, staff from the Human Services Department will attend Woodstock City Council on June 3, 2021 to provide more details with respect to the services and supports provided by Oxford County.







## Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with the approval of the recommendations in this report.

## Communications

This report is meant to inform the community about the work that is being done both internally as well as in coordination with other community agencies with individuals experiencing homelessness in Oxford County. The collaboration is essential to seek support and find solutions.

## Strategic Plan (2015-2018)

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

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### Background

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, homelessness describes the situation of someone who is without stable, permanent and appropriate housing. Along the continuum, there are four main categories of homelessness, including unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated and at risk of homeless.

Since the start of the pandemic, the County has successfully housed many individuals in temporary accommodations to reduce their chances of contracting or spreading COVID-19. As a result, it has become more evident that community support and collaboration is required to assist those experiencing homelessness.

The Human Services Department has been working with the community to try to assist those experiencing homelessness throughout Oxford County with both in kind staffing as well as through financial support. The financial support has been provided to various agencies in the community who work with individuals to offer pathways to being supported and housed. The pathway looks different for each individual but time and again, the supports are imperative to assisting each

person. There has been a new Oxford County Street Outreach Team created in conjunction with the local police. The mandate of this group is to bring all the community supports together to work with people on the streets. This group will meet regularly to outline community supports and schedules to ensure there is not a duplication of service throughout the County.

Federal and provincial funding in the amount of \$1,157,563.00, was provided in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 to support those experiencing homelessness. This funding is provided through both the Social Service Relief Fund and the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).

For Council's information, the Province released the SSRF in March 2020 for the purpose of supporting the communities most vulnerable, including people who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless as a result of COVID-19. This funding is intended to mitigate the ongoing risk for vulnerable people through the implementation of long-term housing solutions and enhanced rental assistance. The provincially funded program guidelines for SSFR funding are available through the following link: [SSRF Funding Information](#)

The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) is a 100 per cent provincially funded outcomes-based program that aims to prevent and end homelessness by improving access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing and homelessness services for people experiencing homelessness and for people at-risk of homelessness. This program has been in existence since January 2013. This program has assisted between 800 to 1000 people per year and has assisted with last month's rent, prevention of evictions, prevention of utility disconnections, funding to the emergency housing at The Inn, Salvation Army Emergency House as well as many motels and hotel stays as necessary. It also supports the Housing with Related Supports program and other agencies involved with housing throughout Oxford County. The program guidelines for CHPI fund are available through the following link: [CHPI Program Guidelines](#)

In addition, to the approximately 900 people supported by Human Services yearly, the following agencies also receive a portion of the SSRF and CHPI Funds to specifically assist those experiencing homelessness.

- The Inn- Operation Sharing
- Salvation Army Woodstock, Tillsonburg, Ingersoll
- Salvation Army Emergency House
- Food Banks- County
- Rotary Breakfast Program
- Oxford County Community Health Centre- Huron House and Mobile Bus
- Indwell
- The Refuge
- Oxford Canadian Mental Health Association- peer outreach worker
- Domestic Assault Services of Oxford
- Hotels/Motels County wide

Human Services staff are active members on a variety of committees meant to collaborate to seek solutions and improve circumstances for those experiencing homelessness. These committees include the following.

- Oxford Housing Action Collaborative
- Community Safety and Well Being Planning Group
- Oxford County Situation Table
- Oxford Drug and Alcohol Task Force
- Oxford Mental Health and Addictions Network
- Justice and Community Safety Committee
- Downtown Homelessness Task Force
- Oxford County Community Health Centre Bus
- Reducing Poverty Together
- Oxford/Ontario Health Team

The Human Services Department has membership in many committees which all often relate to the challenges and barriers experienced by some of those facing homelessness, one of said committees is the Oxford Housing Action Collaborative. The intended outcome of the collaborative work is to increase knowledge about the plight of homelessness and to find means to end the homelessness in Oxford County. There will soon be an education campaign to alert and educate the general public as well as an opportunity for each community to be involved in a “Call to Action”. The Committee has also completed the By Name List which is a count of people experiencing homelessness in Oxford County and can be used as a tool to ensure no one gets left behind. The Oxford County [Registry Week Community Debrief](#) Report provides detailed information with regard to the By Name count led by the Social Planning Council of Oxford County. Human Services has been provided the list and continues to work with the individuals on such, as most are in receipt of Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program. Each Human Services Case Worker is matched with each individual and together they work to remove barriers and find suitable accommodations for those involved. There have already been early successes with several individuals having secured housing since the By Name list was created. Additionally, some of the other work of the Oxford Housing Action Collaborative include the shelter system reflection/evaluation that is occurring, which may help to shine the light on how to best provide service and housing options for those experiencing homelessness.

The issue of homelessness is complex and multi-faceted as evident through the variety of supports noted above. This issue has to be solved by many agencies working together to combat the issues being faced in the community.

The Human Services Department is in the process of developing a Coordinated Access System with the support of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), as well as Built for Zero Canada. A Coordinated Access System supports an integrated systems-based approach where service providers, local communities and orders of government work together to achieve common goals. With Coordinated Access, communities will gather comprehensive data on their local homeless population. The Coordinated Access system will allow multiple channels for access and supports through a variety of community partners to obtain and retain individual information to

allow individuals to be supported by many, but only tell their story once. This system ensures each individual experiencing homelessness is counted and supported with the end goal to find secure and stable housing. The common assessment tool and community release of information has been developed and is currently being tested by a small group of community housing providers to ensure the process will work in a seamless manner.

## **Comments**

The Human Services Department will continue to support individuals experiencing homelessness. The Department works in conjunction with many agencies to try to find creative solutions to obtain housing that is safe and secure. An example of this creativity is moving people through the housing continuum with supports. In the past year, fifteen people have moved from homelessness to permanent housing via stays at The Inn and Huron House, the transitional house located in the City of Woodstock. The collaborative approach between Human Services staff, The Oxford County Community Health Centre staff who operate Huron House and The Inn staff has led to this success. This is just one example which illustrates the importance of collaboration and hard work necessary to keep people safe and risk averse while experiencing homelessness. This work will eventually assist in securing permanent housing. The Department has a dedicated staff member who works directly with people experiencing homelessness and meets them “where they are at”. This staff member works with other agencies and Human Services staff to use all available tools to try to remove barriers, assist with challenges and eventually house as many people as possible.

It also needs to be noted that not every individual is at a place in their lives where they can be successfully and independently housed. It is for that reason that supports need to be organized and continued to assist until that time is right. It would also be negligent not to mention the ongoing supports required to help some individuals sustain the housing once secured. Quite often this becomes just as challenging to be sure someone is supported and has the appropriate life skills and partner agencies to help them keep the housing they need to have an improved quality of life.

Municipal Service Managers are also required to develop a 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan to identify objectives and targets related to housing and homelessness, as well as actions proposed to meet those objectives. This Plan sets a long-term vision, targets and strategies to promote housing stability across the shelter continuum. In February 2021, staff provided a progress update to Council with respect to the objectives of the 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. The key accomplishments of 2020 included a total of 75 new rent supplements for low income household, 4 down payment assistance loans for households purchasing their first home, the completion of a 24-unit affordable housing project, and the approval of 128 new affordable housing units. While the 2020 annual target was met, the County still continues to face a housing crisis, where the housing demand greatly outweighs supply. In light of this, staff continue to support and facilitate the creation of new housing options along the entire housing continuum.

Staff are recommending that the committee be created as a sub committee under the Oxford Action Housing Collaborative to ensure efficiency and collaboration with the existing community groups throughout the County.

## **Conclusions**

Homelessness has become a significant issue in the County and across the Country. With the combination of extremely low vacancy rates, high rental rates and social determinant of health challenges, the community needs to work harder than ever to support the individuals experiencing homelessness and the business and community members impacted by such.

It is only with creative approaches and collaboration with social agencies, community and business that homelessness is decreased and potentially eradicated.

## **SIGNATURES**

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### **Report Author:**

Original signed by

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### **Departmental Approval:**

Original signed by

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### **Approved for submission:**

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