

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Acting Director of Human Services

Emergency Shelter Proposal

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That County Council direct staff to proceed with implementing a 24-hour, 7 day a week, emergency shelter, at the existing shelter located at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock (Option #1), that addresses the details and needs contained in Report No. HS 2022-01;
2. And further, that Council authorize the allocation of up to \$95,000 from the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and up to \$180,000 from the County Affordable Housing Reserve, to support the implementation of a 24-hour, 7 day a week emergency shelter, at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock, as detailed in Report No. HS 2022-01;
3. And further, that staff report back to Council on the key performance indicators and outcomes associated with the operation of the proposed 24-hour, 7 day a week, shelter, within three months of the start of operations;
4. And further, that the Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Human Services be authorized to execute all documents related thereto.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update regarding the options available for achieving a 24-hour, 7 day a week, emergency shelter in the County.
- As the housing crisis persists and the impacts to those individuals experiencing homelessness continues, there is an increasing need to extend the hours of the County's existing emergency shelter.
- Given the positive considerations associated with the existing shelter located at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock ('The Inn'), staff are recommending that the hours of the existing shelter be expanded to provide assistance to those in need 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

Implementation Points

An existing vacant County staff position (FTE) will be allocated to assist with the daily operational activities associated with the 24-hour shelter. In addition, security services will be retained to provide overnight monitoring 7 days of the week, or in accordance with the required need.

The proposed 24-hour shelter will need to remain nimble to accommodate changes required by the provider, to support community partners and to respond to the ever-changing needs of the individuals who utilize the emergency shelter system. As such, staff will monitor the effectiveness of the shelter program in accordance with a variety of metrics, including, but not limited to, the number of individuals utilizing the provided services, average number of stays, various demographics of participants, referral statistics, and number of new participants, and report back to Council within three months of the start of operations.

Financial Impact







The recommended shelter option contained in this report (Option #1) will initially be funded through the already earmarked Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) in an amount up to \$95,000, and the County Affordable Housing Reserve in an amount up to \$180,000, plus any reasonable adjustments to ensure the appropriate operation of the 24-hour shelter, as outlined in this report. The Affordable Housing Reserve has a projected 2022 year-end balance of \$1.1 million, therefore has sufficient funds to accommodate this initiative.

It is anticipated that ongoing operating costs (staffing, meal support, security, etc.), beyond the first year, will be considered in the 2023 Human Services Business Plan and Budget, which may result in the need to use tax dollars.

Communications

County staff regularly engage with individuals experiencing homelessness, community partners as well as housing and service providers, in the collective work of addressing housing and homelessness related concerns. Considering this, details regarding this report will be shared with our various housing partners, as well as local municipalities.

Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
WORKS WELL TOGETHER	WELL CONNECTED	SHAPES THE FUTURE	INFORMS & ENGAGES	PERFORMS & DELIVERS	POSITIVE IMPACT
1.i. 1.ii.		3.i. 3.iii.	4.i.		

DISCUSSION

Background

On November 24, 2021, County Council passed a resolution directing staff to report back on the cost, funding and length of time needed to begin a 24-hour, 7 day a week, shelter with sufficient space for the various agencies providing services to people experiencing homelessness, addictions and mental health issues. Council also directed staff to report back on the ability to increase Peer Street Outreach services for downtown Woodstock for a minimum of 6 days per week, in order to provide downtown businesses and patrons with an alternative response service to Woodstock Police for incidents not requiring police intervention.

Since that time, staff have explored a number of options to address Council's direction to provide a 24-hour, 7 day a week shelter. These options include an expansion to the existing emergency shelter located at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock ('The Inn'), a new emergency shelter at 22 Wilson Street, Woodstock (College Avenue United Church), and a new shelter located at 92 Light Street, Woodstock (former Children's Aid building).

In addition, a Peer Outreach position was created through the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), to provide downtown businesses and patrons with an alternative response service. This position is under the umbrella of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Thames Valley and Mental Health Services. It should be noted that the SSRF is a temporary funding program that was provided by the Provincial 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 risks for vulnerable people through the term of the pandemic and will not be provided on a yearly ongoing basis. As such, funding for this position will need to be reconsidered in the 2023 budget plan, as SSRF may no longer be available beyond the current contract for the position.

For Council's information, as indicated in Report HS 2021-14, the County receives annualized funding through the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) to provide a myriad of housing services across the continuum. The CHPI fund has provided money for rent supplements, last months rent, financial supports for individuals to avoid eviction or utility disconnection, Housing with Related Supports for those who require assistance with the activities of daily living, emergency housing and financial operating support for Indwell. Current emergency housing is provided by the Salvation Army, through the Family Emergency House, the County, through the hotel program, and Operation Sharing, through the 'The Inn' emergency shelter at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock.

At present, funding is also provided on an annual basis to the Salvation Army's located in Tillsonburg and Ingersoll, in an effort to provide necessary hotel supports to those in need. The County also continues to work with clients to find hotel accommodation to avoid homelessness.

In light of these existing funding commitments and service agreements, it needs to be noted that any additional financial requirements for Operation Sharing, with respect to the proposed shelter, may minimize the amount of financial supports that are already being provided through the CHPI fund.

Notwithstanding the above supports, as a result of the pandemic, many businesses, restaurants, libraries, and other safe day spaces have shuttered, leaving many individuals on the streets. This has not only become a life altering predicament to those experiencing this reality, but it has also become a challenge to retailers trying to sustain their businesses despite the pandemic. In addition, the rental housing stock continues to decline, with many private property owners seizing the opportunity to sell their properties in such a lucrative market.

It is for these reasons that there is an increasing need to implement a 24-hour, 7 day a week, emergency shelter.

Comments

Potential Shelter Locations

In the last few months, staff have explored a number of options to address Council's direction to provide a 24-hour, 7 day a week shelter, with sufficient space to provide support services for both immediate and future needs.

To accommodate both overnight and day shelter capacity, the proposed space needs to include the following services and amenities:

- Overnight shelter space - area for evening meals, space for relaxation and respite (watching television, reading, socializing), laundry facilities, shower and washroom facilities and sleeping space.
- Day shelter space – support services space for community partners, as required, including identification acquisition, referrals to services, mental health supports, addiction services, health services and community paramedicine support.

The below table provides a summary of the three potential shelter options, taking into account the required services and amenities noted above.

Option	Considerations	Potential Bed Capacity	Estimated Cost Implications	Implementation Timeline
#1 – Existing Day Shelter – ‘The Inn’ (723 Dundas Street, Woodstock)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The site has been used as a day shelter for 15 years. - The facility is currently run by Operation Sharing, with 4 fulltime staff funded by the County through the CHPI fund. - Sufficient space is available for support agencies. - The location is in close proximity to 	<p>Approximately 30 beds (without Covid restrictions)</p> <p><i>Note: due to Covid restrictions, the current capacity is 24 beds</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of use permit, if required (approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000). - Security on site (approximately \$60,000 to \$150,000 per year). - Additional staffing (\$95,000). - Additional meal program support (\$5,000 to \$7,500). <p><u>Total Estimated Cost – approximately \$175,000 to \$272,500</u></p>	Approximately 1 to 3 months

	<p>downtown and already hosts programs that are often used by those in need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The church congregation clearly has a community focus with a lens for helping those in need. - There is potential space to accommodate an expansion. - SSRF funding has already been provided to upgrade the existing shelter space (\$100,000). 		<p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>\$12,000 - \$16,000 for 24 beds / \$13,200 - \$16,300 for 30 beds</p>	
<p>#2 – College Avenue United Church (22 Wilson Street, Woodstock)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently utilized as an operational church. - A large separated hall space is available to accommodate a shelter. - Separate rooms are available for support agencies. - The building also houses the Operation Sharing services of the Food for Friends program, Bullwinkle's hot meal program as well as other church programs. - The church is also host to many community initiatives at Christmas time to help those in need. 	<p>Approximately 20 beds (without Covid restrictions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of use permit, if required (approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000). - Various renovations to improve accessibility, and add required washrooms, laundry and shower facilities (approximately \$100,000 to \$150,000). <i>A more accurate cost estimate will need to be completed.</i> - Security on site (approximately \$60,000 to \$150,000 per year). - Rental costs (\$12,000 to \$18,000). - Additional staffing (\$95,000 to \$265,000). <i>Lower range includes existing assistance from Operation Sharing.</i> - Additional meal program support (\$5,000 to \$7,500). 	<p>Approximately 3 to 6 months</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The church congregation clearly has a community focus with a lens for helping those in need in our community. - The location is in close proximity to downtown and already hosts programs that are often used by those in need. - There are some concerns regarding accessibility and the creation of washroom, laundry and shower space. 		<p><u>Total Estimated Cost – approximately \$287,000 to \$610,500.</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>\$19,100 - \$35,650 for 20 beds</p>	
<p>#3 – 92 Light Street</p> <p>(former Children’s Aid building)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Owned by the County. - Currently vacant. - No existing staff or resources at this location. - The space is large and could be converted into a multiple use facility that would include space for multiple support agencies. - The building is already divided appropriately to - The building has an elevator for accessibility purposes - The building is already divided into rooms and could quite easily be renovated to provide 	Approximately 32 beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of use permit, if required (approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000). - Various internal and external renovations, including the addition of washroom and laundry space, new paint and flooring, and potential heating upgrades (approximately \$250,000 to \$600,000). <i>A more accurate cost estimate will need to be completed.</i> - Security on site (approximately \$60,000 to \$150,000 per year). - Additional staffing (\$95,000 to \$265,000). <i>Lower range includes existing assistance from Operation Sharing.</i> - Additional meal program support (\$5,000 to \$7,500). 	Approximately 6 to 12 months

	<p>overnight space with some privacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This space was previously considered for a similar multi purpose space for those in need and several concerns were raised by the community. 		<p>Total Estimated Cost – approximately \$425,000 to \$1,042,500.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>\$18,125 - \$34,300 for 20 beds</p>	
--	---	--	---	--

Option #1 – Expansion to the Existing Day Shelter ('The Inn')

Based on the above considerations, staff are recommending that Option #1, being an expansion to the existing shelter, be chosen as the location for the proposed 24-hour, 7 day a week shelter.

Option #1 is most favourable given that 'The Inn' is already located on the site, and has been in operation for over 15 years. The location is also in close proximity to the services that many of the individuals experiencing homelessness require, and is well known to the individuals that already make use of the shelter's services. Staff also note that the existing day shelter is currently operated by Operation Sharing, to which funding is provided by the County to support four staff positions.

Furthermore, Provincial funds through the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) have already been provided to assist in upgrading the available space in the existing shelter. In particular, these funds were used to facilitate bathroom and shower upgrades, install additional laundry facilities, upgrade the existing security system, install air conditioning, improve the existing heating system, update lighting, and renovate a large open space to increase the existing day shelter capacity.

While the renovations were intended to increase the existing day shelter capacity, considering the current winter climate, it would be most beneficial to use the additional renovated space to provide overnight shelter programming. As around five to six individuals are currently being turned away from 'The Inn' due to overnight space limitations, this expansion will provide the immediate assistance that is required.

Once the above noted renovations are complete, the number of beds will be increased from 12 to 24, with appropriate Covid protocols in place. Once Covid restrictions have lifted, there is potential to add a minimum of six more beds. Furthermore, depending on the relocation of other church tenants, there may be additional space to increase the capacity of the shelter in 2023. Based on current enumeration data and daily use metrics, the proposed increase in beds is expected to support the individuals that require overnight shelter at this time. Staff continue to monitor the needs of those individuals seeking emergency shelter, and will add beds as necessary.

In light of the above, Option #1 is the most favourable as it will ensure an efficient use of the existing SSRF funds that were provided, and make use of the existing partner resources that are dedicated to assist with the operation of the emergency shelter.

Agency Support

In addition to basic health and hygiene requirements such as washrooms, bathing, laundry, kitchen facilities and/or food service programs, the 24-hour shelter also needs to include space for our community partners to provide support services to those in need. These services would be provided in conjunction with the support services that are already provided by the County, with the intention to consolidate efforts and expertise to provide support services throughout the day, as required.

For Council information, staff continue to consult with our various community partners, including, but not limited to, Oxford Community Health Centre (OCHC), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services, and Salvation Army, in an effort to provide joint support services at the existing shelter on a rotating basis, once the additional space is available.

Security

To ensure a safe and secure space is available for all shelter participants, it is essential to provide on-site security services. With respect to Option #1, being an expansion to the existing shelter, staff are recommending that security be provided on a nightly basis, when community partners and day staff are no longer available. Once in operation, staff will monitor the needs of the shelter and determine if additional security is necessary during the day. This approach will ensure the shelter is appropriately staffed at all times.

Peer Street Outreach Services

An agreement has been negotiated with CMHA Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services for Peer Outreach Services, with the goal of providing a minimum of 50 to 55 hours a week of active outreach in Downtown Woodstock. This outreach includes connecting with the target population, educating business owners, and responding to situations in Downtown Woodstock that do not require police attention.

In addition, the Program is intended to ensure Downtown Woodstock is safe, inclusive and welcoming, for all community members. The anticipated outcomes of the Program are summarized as follows:

- Business owners feel supported and have access to the information/training they require;
- The downtown core is safe and inclusive for all community members;
- Business Owners in the downtown core will experience an increase in the number of customers accessing their locations;
- There will be a noticeable reduction in the number of used and discarded needles;
- Vulnerable individuals will feel supported, and are linked with the services they require;
- This program will be available at 'The Inn' to assist those individuals in need.

In addition, the County also provided the Woodstock Police with an allocation of \$9,000 from the SSRF to assist with additional resources to address homelessness and addictions in downtown Woodstock.

For Council's information, Staff will monitor the effectiveness of the Peer Outreach program, in accordance with a variety of metrics, including, but not limited to, the number of resources distributed to businesses and vulnerable individuals, increased business patrons, services available at 'The Inn', and individuals serviced, and report back to Council with an update.

Conclusions

In light of the considerations associated with the existing shelter located at 723 Dundas Street, Woodstock ('The Inn'), staff are recommending that the hours of the existing shelter be expanded to provide assistance to those in need, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

Should Council be favourable of the proposed location, staff will ensure a service agreement is executed, stipulating the ongoing requirements of shelter partners, including continued monthly statistics and appropriate financial reconciliations at each quarter. This agreement will include a funding structure in accordance with the services that are provided by the County and community partner staff.

It is recognized the proposed options and supports are incomplete solutions to end homelessness. They are temporary measures to try and stabilize individuals and hopefully move them through the housing continuum. In light of this, staff will continue to monitor the shelter program and make adjustments when necessary, to ensure appropriate programming is provided to those in need.

SIGNATURES

Report Author:

Original signed by

Rebecca Smith, MCIP, RPP
Manager of Housing Development

Report Author:

Original signed by

Lisa Lanthier, B.A.
Acting Director, Human Services

Approved for Submission:

Original signed by

Michael Duben, B.A., LL.B.
Chief Administrative Officer