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## MEMORANDUM

**COM-C 33-2020**

**Subject:** Activities related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for September, October, November 2020

**Date:** December 8, 2020

**To:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**From:** Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

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Further to council direction in October (COM 40-2019), staff continue to provide regular updates about activities, local targets, outcomes and challenges related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP), as new information is available. The following highlights activities related to the HHAP in September, October, and November 2020:

- Beginning in October a second landlord engagement specialist position was funded. Landlord engagement specialists recruit landlords to work with programs such as Housing First and assist service providers and program participants to have positive relationships with landlords in order to sustain successful tenancies.
- On November 3, 2020 Niagara became one of 23 Canadian communities in the Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) movement to have quality real-time, person-specific data for everyone experiencing chronic homelessness. Niagara can now coordinate support and services to end homelessness for these individuals and families, and can use the system level data on inflow, outflow, and total active homelessness to inform improvement projects and monitor trends and progress to achieving functional zero chronic homelessness.
- In November, Niagara's Built for Zero Away Team selected three improvement projects to be completed by spring 2021 to support homeless system transformation and achievement of 'functional zero' chronic homelessness. The Housing and

Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) Housing Focused Shelter Working Group is also contributing to these projects. The improvement projects include:

- Expanding diversion to the whole shelter system
  - Increasing shelter discharge to permanent housing
  - Expanding the use of VI-SPDAT assessments across the homelessness system
- In October, Niagara launched a Supported Transitional Housing Working Group as part of the HHAP. This group will support the transformation of transitional housing in Niagara's homeless serving system by increasing use of nationally recognized best practices, developing program and system level policies, and introducing coordinated access for transitional housing. Seven transitional housing providers are participating.
- In November, the shelter diversion pilot expanded to the YWCA shelter. Now four local shelter providers are using a common formal diversion process as part of the pilot. Shelter diversion supports individuals seeking access to emergency shelter to find and secure safe alternatives to emergency shelter that may be available to them (for example, staying with family or friends). Diversion can help people facing homelessness to maintain their supports in the community while reducing demand for emergency shelter beds. It is mainly successful for youth and first time shelter stayers.
- Niagara Region, the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) are collaborating on the development of an innovative Bridge and permanent supportive housing project in Niagara Falls. The project will leverage a surplus building provided by the City of Niagara Falls. The Bridge Housing project will support individuals in Niagara that are living in a state of chronic homelessness, and those who have also demonstrated significant high need in the areas of mental health, addictions, and physical health. The new facility will include up to 21 beds of temporary bridge housing for individuals preparing for permanent housing and permanent supportive housing, as well as three beds dedicated to recuperative care.

The recuperative care beds would ensure that homeless individuals, recently discharged from hospital, have access to necessary care beyond what an emergency shelter can support. A range of services will be offered at the facility, including 24/7 case management support services, mental health and addictions programming, meals, primary care support on site, and adult experiential learning. The facility, estimated at a cost of \$3.7 million, will be developed with: renovation funding provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) through Phase 2 of the Social Services Relief Fund; an in-kind property transfer and building permit fee waivers from the City of Niagara Falls; and a funding contribution from Niagara Region. The MMAH funding program stipulates that the project must be completed and ready for occupancy by December 31, 2021, therefore, a design-build approach will be taken to renovate the building to meet the strict timelines.

- Niagara Regional Housing awarded the contract for the Affordable Housing Master Plan in early November, with work beginning immediately. The Master Plan will provide a long-term road map to ensure the sustainability of existing affordable housing stock and outline the future needs for housing in Niagara.
- Construction began on the units on Ormond Street, which will provide six net new units of affordable housing.
- Construction continues on the Hawkins St. development in Niagara Falls. The two apartment buildings will provide 73 units of community housing for applicants on the NRH waitlist, including 10 Housing First units. The build is 25% complete, on budget and on schedule for occupancy January 1, 2022.
- NRH and Niagara Region staff continue to work with the development community to explore innovative housing solutions that address the costs of affordable housing, such as modular construction, shipping container homes, and smaller homes including micro condominiums.
- NRH is currently developing an application to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rapid Housing Initiative program for community housing funding. This proposed build is crucial to help with the great need for single rent-geared-to-income

units in Niagara. The submission will include a modular build that is shovel-ready and able to meet the tight timelines required for the funding.

- NRH and Niagara Region staff continue to provide data and other support for local area municipalities working on affordable housing plans and policies.
- The Planning and Development Services Department is retaining the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis to update the housing and housing affordability data and analysis previously completed in 2019. The 2019 analysis provided base data for the updated Housing and Homelessness Action Plan and was intended to be used for the housing strategy component of the new Niagara Official Plan. However, due to the recent amendment to the Provincial Growth Plan, updates are needed to conform to new employment and population forecasts to the year 2051. The update will include data on affordable housing requirements, core and deep core housing need at the regional and local area municipal level, and for different submarkets, income levels and job categories. The analysis will also evaluate demographic and economic trends in Niagara that persisted prior to the pandemic and the potential structural shifts in the economy as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE  
Commissioner