
MEMORANDUM**COM-C 9-2021**

Subject: Activities related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for December 2020, January and February 2021

Date: March 9, 2021

To: Public Health & Social Services Committee

From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

Further to council direction in October 2019 (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 December 2020, January and February 2021:

- The housing-focused shelter pilot, supporting individuals experiencing chronic homelessness transition to permanent housing while connecting them to wrap around supports and community, has continued to show very positive results. Clients access the system based on the priorities within the By Name List, with the pilot taking those with the longest experiences of homelessness and other measures of acuity. On average clients entering into the pilot have had 318 days of homelessness in the past year, along with significant mental health, addiction and physical health challenges. During the seven months of operation from June to December 2020, the pilot had 39 intakes and 20 placements into permanent housing. Encouraged by the outcomes achieved, this shelter asset has been increased to 25 beds, from 14 beds, creating further capacity in the system for high needs homeless clients. In addition, based on funding opportunities, the pilot has been extended from December 31, 2020 to June 30, 2021, with further extensions possible based on upper tier funding announcements related to COVID-19 for 2021.
- Planning for Niagara's 2021 Point-in-Time Count (homeless enumeration) is ongoing, with the count scheduled for March 23, 2021. The process used in the

2016 and 2018 counts is being modified in consultation with Public Health to ensure the point-in-time count is implemented safely following all protocols. The 2021 count is required under the federal Reaching Home funding program and will also follow the guidance from the federal government provided in January 2021 in the COVID-19 Community Impact document. The count will be completed by community agency staff, including Niagara's Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) team. No community volunteers will be participating this year to mitigate risk associated with the pandemic. The 2021 count will provide an opportunity to ensure the comprehensiveness of the Built for Zero By-Name List of people experiencing homelessness in Niagara and further inform local responses to homelessness during COVID-19.

- In December 2020, Niagara Region Homelessness Services submitted an application to the Inclusive Community Grants program, through the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. If successful, this grant will provide a maximum of \$60,000 to purchase accessibility enhancing items (e.g. wheelchairs, hand railings, stair lifts) for the Regionally funded emergency shelter system.
- The YWCA Oakdale Commons project, located in St. Catharines, was nearing completion in February, with an occupancy permit for 15 units and building handover anticipated the first week of March. The move-in plan will see occupancy begin in early March 2021. YWCA staff, project consultants and the general contractor have successfully mitigated challenges posed by the pandemic. With safety at the forefront, construction has continued uninterrupted and there have been no major COVID-19 related delays or health risks. The project was funded in part through provincial Home for Good capital funding secured in 2017 and supported by project management assistance from Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) throughout the construction and occupancy phases.
- The NRH led Affordable Housing Master Plan is in the early stages of being developed with stakeholder engagements starting to take place as well as the gathering of pertinent data. The Master Plan will provide a long term roadmap to ensure the sustainability of existing stock and outline the future needs for housing in Niagara.
- Two of the five additional units, added to the new buildings acquired by NRH in February of 2019, are now complete with an occupancy date of March 1, 2021. The remaining three units will be complete in the second quarter of 2021.

- Construction continues for 73 community housing units in two apartment buildings on Hawkins Street in Niagara Falls. This project is estimated to be complete in December 2021. At the end of 2020, it was approximately 40% complete.
- NRH and Niagara Region staff continue to work with the development community to explore innovative housing solutions that address the cost of affordable housing. NRH has hired an additional Project Manager due to the overwhelming requests from local non-profits to develop new affordable housing units. There are five projects with approximately 200 units (32 are the POA application). There is also another approximate 230 units in discussion stages.
- NRH's development team submitted an application to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) for the Rapid Housing Initiative. This funding would support the full capital ask for 32 new modular units on the POA lands in Welland purchased by NRH.
- The Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) is a portable rent benefit that helps applicants on the Centralized Waiting List pay their rent to their current landlord in the private market. By year-end in 2020, more than 240 Niagara residents had applied and many have started receiving subsidy. Successful COHB applicants are removed from the waiting list, allowing other applicants to move up on this list more quickly.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Adrienne Jugley
Commissioner