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**Subject:** Housing and Homelessness Action Plan Update 2020

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, May 11, 2021

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## **Recommendations**

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## **Key Facts**

- The purpose of this report is to update Council and the Ministry on actions completed in 2020 related to Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP).
- Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) are required to report to the public and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) by June 30 each year with respect to efforts of the previous year. This report serves to meet the requirement for 2020.
- The HHAP provides a complete vision for aligning activities to address current and future need in Niagara related to affordable housing and homelessness.
- In 2020, the HHAP focused on activities related to policies and practices that support a shift to better practice and housing-focused homeless services, and increased readiness for developing local affordable and community housing.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic the HHAP continued to guide ongoing homeless services system transformation by informing pandemic responses that were consistent with long term system goals and could be leveraged as part of the ongoing housing and homeless system after the pandemic response has ended.

## **Financial Considerations**

The resources required to facilitate the management of the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) are provided within the approved annual budget.

## **Analysis**

The purpose of this report is to update Council and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) on progress achieved in 2020 related to Niagara's updated HHAP. Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) are required by legislation to report

to the public and MMAH by June 30 each year with respect to efforts of the previous year. This report serves to meet the requirement for 2020.

The HHAP was developed in response to the *Housing Services Act 2011, section 6*, which requires municipalities to establish and implement a 10-year plan to address local housing and homelessness needs. The five-year review and updated HHAP was approved by Regional Council in October 2019, pending ministry approval. In March 2020, MMAH confirmed that they had reviewed Niagara's five-year review and updated Housing and Homelessness Action Plan.

The HHAP provides a complete vision for aligning activities to address current and future need in Niagara related to affordable housing and homelessness. The plan is expected to be responsive to recent changes in the community and the housing market that affect local demand for homelessness services and affordable housing over the long term. In 2020, Region and Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) staff continued to align the recommended housing strategies of the New Official Plan, Community Housing Master Plan and HHAP.

The HHAP incorporates recognized Canadian best practices and emerging practices in the areas of land use planning, affordable housing, and homeless services. This includes Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C), a national initiative to end chronic homelessness in which Niagara has participated since 2019. BFZ-C focuses on decreasing the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness and ensuring the experience of homelessness is brief and non-recurring.

Niagara Region cannot accomplish the goals of the HHAP on its own, and so must partner broadly with housing and homelessness services providers, across the health, corrections and child welfare systems, with municipal, provincial and federal governments, and with Indigenous organizations and communities. The HHAP working groups support collaboration in nine focus areas by providing opportunities for participants to align initiatives and provide input to the CMSM about service and system planning on an ongoing basis. In 2020 the HHAP working groups included:

- Assertive Street Outreach
- Housing-Focused Shelter
- Supported Transitional Housing
- Housing First and Home for Good
- Coordinated Access and By-Name List
- Lived Experience Advisory
- Homelessness Prevention and Diversion
- Housing Provider Advisory
- Housing Affordability and Innovation

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During the COVID-19 pandemic the HHAP continued to guide ongoing homeless services system transformation by informing pandemic responses that were consistent with long-term system goals and could be leveraged as part of the ongoing housing and homeless system after the pandemic response has ended. Mindful of the pandemic, the HHAP work focused on policies and practices that support a shift to housing-focused homeless services and increased readiness for developing local affordable and community housing. Pandemic responses that align with the long-term HHAP strategy include:

- Use of a low-barrier, housing focused approach to support people to exit from homelessness at the isolation shelter and Housing Focused shelter pilot.
- Increased access to appropriate health, mental health trauma, and addictions supports for people experiencing homelessness through a partnership between outreach with EMS and the LHIN.
- The initiation of the Niagara Falls Bridge Housing Project, which includes recuperative beds, which seeks to reduce discharges from hospital to homelessness.

Further to Council direction in October 2019 (COM 40-2019), staff continued to provide regular updates about activities, outcomes and challenges related to the HHAP throughout 2020. Highlights from 2020 related to the four HHAP goals include:

### **Goal 1 – House People Who do not Have a Home**

- Through participation in BFZ-C, Niagara became one of 23 Canadian communities to have implemented a Quality By-Name List (BNL) in November 2020. The BNL provides real time data about people experiencing homelessness in Niagara, and is used to support clients to access appropriate housing and supports and inform system level decision making.
- Increased access to supportive housing through the addition of 20 new Home for Good program spaces. As well, additional spaces became available as a result of the successful discharge of 8 Housing First program participants.
- Expanded and enhanced Niagara's Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) to provide a low-barrier, housing-focused approach to engage those who are living rough (including at encampments) and support them to engage in the broader system of housing and homeless services. In 2020 NASO engaged with 456 unique individuals, 215 of which entered shelter or a more stable housing situation.
- Launched the HHAP Supported Transitional Housing Working Group, to begin transformation of supported transitional housing services.

- There were 905 shelter discharges to a more stable housing situation. The shift continued toward housing-focused shelters that maintain a focus on helping shelter clients move to safe, permanent housing as rapidly as possible, through:
  - The launch of the Housing Focused Shelter pilot, to test coordinated access for entry into the Housing First and Home for Good programs, ensuring consistent prioritization of clients with the longest experiences of homelessness and highest acuity of need for these programs.
  - The introduction of housing focused shelter policies, including use of common assessments across shelter providers, reducing restrictions to shelter access, and increasing continuity of service.

Of the 2,136 unique individuals who accessed emergency shelter in 2020, the largest proportion were single men (30.6%), single women (17.0%), seniors 55+ (11.6%), youth 16-24 without a guardian (10.6%), and Indigenous individuals (9.2%). Seventy-three individuals (3.4% of shelter clients) had 180+ days in shelter.

## **Goal 2 – Help People to Retain a Home**

- Initiated the process to transform homelessness prevention in line with recognized best practices and the BFZ-C model, to reduce inflow into homelessness and the number of homeless individuals who become chronically homeless.
- Expanded youth shelter diversion to the adult shelter system. Shelter diversion supports individuals seeking access to emergency shelter to find and secure safe alternatives to shelter that may be available to them, and maintain their supports in the community while reducing demand for emergency shelter beds. In 2020, there were 98 successful diversions for youth (age 16-24 years), representing 30% of possible shelter intakes and 129 successful diversions for adults (age 25+), representing 9% of possible shelter intakes.
- Expanded the landlord specialist role in the Housing First and Home for Good programs to assist service providers and program participants to have positive relationships with landlords in order to sustain successful tenancies.
- In collaboration with Niagara Region's Mental Health division, a mental health social worker was introduced to enhance service access for those with concurrent disorders who are experiencing homelessness in response to the findings of the concurrent disorders shelter assessment pilot.
- Eviction prevention and supports have been extended to housing providers and the Rent Supplement program on a pilot basis through Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) funding.

- NRH supported affordable home ownership by entering into an agreement with a developer in St. Catharines to provide an opportunity for ten NRH tenants currently paying market rent to purchase a micro condominium with down payment assistance through the Welcome Home Niagara program.
- NRH provided rental assistance to 254 households on the NRH waitlist through the administration of the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB).

### **Goal 3 – Increase Housing Options and Opportunities for Low- and Moderate-Income Households**

- Niagara Region's Planning and Development Services prepared a Joint Report on the new Niagara Official Plan that includes substantial completion of background studies, options and policies on various land use matters, including the Affordable Housing component of the Plan. Substantial public consultation was completed, including the use of virtual engagement methods. Additional public consultation will follow in summer and Fall 2021.
- Planning and Development Services retained the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CANCEA) to update the forecasts of housing need in the Niagara Housing Statement to 2051. The updated statement defines housing affordability and includes data on affordable housing requirements, core and deep core housing need at the regional and local area municipal level, and income levels and job categories for different submarkets.
- Planning and Development Services delivered existing incentive programs while advancing interdepartmental work on the Regional Incentive Review. The review work included the preparation of programs to align with the four priority areas identified by Council (Affordable Housing, Brownfield Remediation, Employment, Public Realm), engagement with local area municipalities and coordination with other key Region projects.
- NRH awarded the contract for the Community 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 community housing stock and outline the future needs for community housing in Niagara.
- NRH and Region staff participated in local area municipality working groups on affordable housing and provided data and support to local area municipalities developing affordable housing plans and implementing housing initiatives.
- NRH hired an additional project manager to support non-profits and agencies that expressed interest in affordable housing development by completing front-end development planning activities. Community projects supported in 2020 represented a potential of 372 units in seven local municipalities.

- NRH partnered with 37 new in situ units/landlords, which will provide rent-geared-to-income subsidy to tenants in their current homes.
- Progress on new affordable and community housing development included:
  - 8 Home for Good units (Gateway Residential and Support Services, Port Colborne), occupied February 2020
  - 30 net new units (Stamford Kiwanis, Niagara Falls), completed January 2020
  - Remediation of units (St David's Road, St Catharines), 3 units in progress
  - 6 net new units (Ormond Street, Thorold), 2 units in progress
  - 20 Bridge Housing units (Niagara Falls), initiated November 2020 and on track for December 2021 occupancy
  - 73 NRH owned units, including 10 Housing First units, at Hawkins Street (Niagara Falls), 40% complete and on track for target completion January 2022
  - 15 Home for Good units (YWCA Oakdale Commons, St. Catharines), nearing completion at end of 2020

#### **Goal 4 – Build Capacity and Improve the Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Housing and Homelessness System**

- Increased alignment of contracted homelessness services with the system 2.0 model by introducing concepts and requirements (Housing First Approach, Coordinated Access) to service providers through contracts executed in April 2020.
- Increased the use of system and program standards for funded homelessness programs (Niagara Assertive Street Outreach, housing focused shelter, Housing First and Home for Good) through contract management and HHAP working groups.
- Supported provider capacity through virtual training for Assertive Street Outreach and Housing First and Home for Good workers in summer 2020.
- Collaborated with Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare (REACH) Niagara to provide access to primary care for shelter and NASO clients with unmet health needs.
- Introduced peer support into the Housing First and Home for Good programs to formalize how those with previous lived experience of homelessness provide support to people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, to help them to leave the street.
- Successfully applied to the Inclusive Community Grants Program, through the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility for \$60,000 for resources to address barriers for persons with a disability in accessing the Regionally funded shelter system.

- Initiated planning for Niagara's homelessness enumeration in March 2021. The count will be used to validate the information in Niagara's By Name List.

A key component of BFZ-C, the Quality By-Name List supports system planning to meet community need. Of the 365 unique (chronically homeless) individuals on Niagara's Quality By-Name List at December 31, 2020, the largest proportion were single men (29.6%), single women (20.0%), seniors 55+ (14.8%), youth 16-24 without a guardian (13.7%), and Indigenous individuals (12.3%).

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable. Reporting is required under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* per its regulations as noted above.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The HHAP describes actions, outcomes, and targets for the priority project of Affordable Housing that supports the Council Priority of a Healthy and Vibrant Community and contributes to Council's direction to develop and implement an affordable housing strategy.

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

- COM 40-2019 Five-Year Review of Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan
- COM-C 2-2020 HHAP Update January 2020
- COM-C 3-2020 HHAP Update February 2020
- COM-C 18-2020 HHAP Update (March, April and May Activities)
- COM-C 25-2020 HHAP Update (June, July, and August Activities)
- COM-C 33-2020 HHAP Update (September, October, November Activities)
- COM-C 9 2021 HHAP Update (December, January, February)
- COM 10-2021 Homelessness Services Report 2020

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#### **Prepared by:**

Jeffrey Sinclair, BBA  
Homelessness Action Plan Advisor  
Community Services

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#### **Recommended by:**

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE  
Commissioner  
Community Services

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**Submitted by:**

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.

Acting Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Wendy Thompson, Community Resource Unit Manager Niagara Regional Housing and Alexandria Tikky, Planner Planning and Development Services, and reviewed by Cathy Cousins, Director Homelessness Services & Community Engagement.