
Subject: COVID-19 Emergency Shelter Procurement Approval

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, May 11, 2021

Recommendations

1. That the special circumstance purchase order relating to the rental costs of the COVID-19 Emergency Shelters **BE INCREASED** by \$585,000 (excluding HST) for a total special circumstance purchase order of \$1,583,200 (excluding HST); and
2. That an additional contingency of \$250,000 **BE APPROVED** should system adjustments be necessary up to December 31, 2021.

Key Facts

- The purpose of the report is to seek approval to increase the COVID-19 Emergency Shelter purchase order in accordance to procurement by-law 2019-06 section 17 Special Circumstance and Schedule B where purchases greater than \$1 million require approval by Council.
- Through approval of this report, Niagara Region is able to continue to run the COVID-19 self-isolation and housing focused shelters to December 31, 2021, which have been operating out of the location since late March 2020.
- The increase is to continue to rent 65 rooms (35 rooms specific to self-isolation and 30 rooms for the housing focused pilot).
- A contingency of \$250,000 is being requested as there have been periods where additional rooms are needed temporarily due to outbreaks or rising COVID-19 cases. It is also expected that there will be additional final costs relating to damages on rooms when the self-isolation shelter is no longer required.
- The current purchase order #80132 totals \$998,200 (excluding HST) and was funded through provincial and federal COVID-19 funding to support vulnerable populations.
- Additional provincial funding, announced in March 2021 to cover COVID-19 costs specific to the homelessness division to December 31, 2021, will be the funding source for the recommended increase resulting in no impact to the regional tax levy.

Financial Considerations

The special circumstance purchase order is within the funding available by the provincial and federal governments to stop the spread of the virus within homeless populations in Niagara. When the pandemic was originally declared the province announced funding up to March 31, 2021. In March 2021, the province announced additional funding to cover incremental COVID-19 costs, such as the COVID-19 Emergency Shelters, for the period ending December 31, 2021. Recognizing the benefits of the shelters now in place to protect our most vulnerable residents during this pandemic, it is important that they be extended to the end of the year. Confirmed provincial COVID-19 specific funding from the Social Service Relief Fund (SSRF) 1 and 2, relating to operating dollars for the fiscal year April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021, was \$3,664,729, and SSRF 3 funding for the fiscal period April 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021, is \$4,745,507. Federal Reaching Home funding for the period April 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, is \$2,958,617.

The facility changed legal operating names in July requiring a new purchase order to be set up. The following table shows the total costs of the current special circumstance purchase order #80132.

Description	PO Number	Amount (excluding HST)	
Rent 60 rooms (Aug. to Sept. 2020)	80132	\$168,000	
Rent 65 rooms (Oct 2020 to Jun. 2021)	80132	819,000	
Additional 8 rooms April – Outbreak	80132	11,200	
Sub-Total	80132		\$998,200
Extension - Rent 65 rooms (Jul. to Dec. 2021)	80132	585,000	
Sub-Total	80132		\$1,583,200
Contingency			\$250,000
TOTAL			\$1,833,200

Analysis

The Community Services department operationalizes the Region's responsibilities as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the homelessness system in Niagara, through the Homelessness Services division. Its key responsibility is service system planning and administration for the homelessness system, and it operates under rules established by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Homelessness Services division needed to locate a facility willing to work with Niagara Region in providing a safe place for individuals experiencing homelessness to isolate if presenting with COVID-19 symptoms in order to stop the spread of the virus, particularly within the shelter system. Niagara also needed to obtain this type of site immediately once the province announced the pandemic and the first lockdown. Through the assistance from the Region's Realty division and calls made to a number of potential providers, this provider indicated a willingness to work with Niagara Region, was able to provide a sufficient number of rooms to support the initiative, provided a layout that was essential to the implementation of required infection control measures, was cost effective compared to other sites and the geographical location provided for additional assurances that clients would remain isolated. The facility has been flexible when additional rooms were required due to outbreaks or surges in COVID-19 cases in the homelessness or vulnerable populations. The provincial and federal governments provided funding in order to support this initiative and any additional incremental COVID-19 related costs in relation to the homelessness population in Niagara.

The self-isolation shelter supports the regular shelter system as the only isolation facility in Niagara to support homeless individuals that fail COVID-19 shelter screening and are directed by Public Health to isolate and/or get tested. Partnerships are in place with McMaster family medicine team to support client health monitoring, and with Niagara Region's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to support the swabbing of clients at the facility. In addition to self-isolation, the facility is also being used as part of the Housing Focused shelter pilot. Individuals receive case management and mental health and addiction supports with the goal of individuals moving into stable housing. The housing focused initiative at this facility also achieved the pandemic objective of creating additional shelter spaces to ensure social distancing could be achieved in other shelters and reduce the risks of over crowding.

Alternatives Reviewed

The decision to secure this facility in March 2020 was made with both a great appreciation of urgency and little understanding of the duration and impact of the emerging pandemic. While there is reason to be hopeful that such a facility now may not be needed beyond the end of the year, it is clear that one will remain essential for the present time, to the safety of the homelessness system and the people it services. Council could direct staff to prepare an RFP for an isolation shelter for the homeless for the remainder of the year (as opposed to the recommendation above). However, this would require significant time to go through the procurement process and additional time, and costs to prepare any other site for the same purpose. This could result in Niagara's homelessness populations not having a safe place to isolate if impacted by COVID-19 and no supportive place to live while the two new facilities are being completed placing the vulnerable individuals back on the streets.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Aligns with the goals in Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, including Goal 1: housing individuals who do not have a home and Goal 4: building capacity and improving the effectiveness of the housing system.

Other Pertinent Reports

N/A

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