
Subject: Housing and Homelessness Action Plan Update 2022

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update Council and the Ministry, as legislatively required, on progress completed in 2022 related to Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP).
- Consolidated Municipal Service Managers are required to report to the public and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing by June 30 each year with respect to efforts of the previous year. This report serves to meet the legal requirement for 2022.
- The HHAP provides a complete vision for aligning activities to address current and future need in Niagara related to affordable housing and homelessness.
- By the end of December 2022, 75% progress had been made toward finishing all 75 actions in the updated HHAP.
- Areas of focus for 2023 include ensuring adequate financial resources are available for new affordable housing development and supporting the delivery of Indigenous-led housing and homelessness services for Indigenous people.

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 2022 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 2022.

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 and acknowledged by MMAH in March 2020. The updated plan provides guidance for the five-year period of 2019-2023. December 31, 2022 marks the end of the 9th year of the 10-year Action Plan. Although the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) has not yet provided guidance for next steps staff have begun initial planning to develop an Action Plan that begins when the current plan concludes at the end of 2023.

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 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. The HHAP integrates with other Region strategies and initiatives, including the Niagara Official Plan (NOP), Niagara Housing Database, Consolidated Housing Master Plan (CHMP), Niagara's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWP), Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C), direct investment in housing, the Region's incentive review and development charge bylaw review.

The HHAP incorporates recognized Canadian best practices and emerging practices in housing and homeless services to address the whole continuum of housing and supports from interventions like assertive street outreach and short-term emergency accommodation to permanent community, affordable and market housing options. Best practices include the use of a Quality By Name List (QBNL) of all people experiencing homelessness in the community, a common assessment of need and coordinated access (CA) to connect people to the housing and supports that best meet their needs. As a Built for Zero community, Niagara is committed to 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, with private developers and with Indigenous organizations and communities. The HHAP working groups support collaboration on service and system improvements in ten focus areas. Working group participants align initiatives, work together on improvement projects, and provide input to the CMSM about service and system planning on an ongoing basis. In 2022 a new HHAP working group was created

to address exits from the Justice System into homelessness. In 2022 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 Expert Advisory
- Homelessness Prevention
- Housing Provider Advisory
- Housing Affordability Innovation
- Exits from Justice

The HHAP continued to guide ongoing pandemic responses in 2022 that aligned with long-term system goals, including the strategic investment of the capital share of the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) which concluded in December 2022. By the end of December 2022 75% progress had been made toward finishing all 75 actions in the updated HHAP. At that time, 50 actions were completed, 13 had seen progress and were on track for completion by end of 2023, and 12 required significant work to be completed within the five-year period covered by the updated HHAP. Two key areas of focus for 2023 include ensuring adequate financial resources are available for new affordable housing development and supporting the delivery of Indigenous-led housing and homelessness services for Indigenous people.

Considering the work of Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan in 2022 to address Indigenous housing and homelessness, the Niagara Indigenous Community Advisory Board (NICAB) provided the following comments to staff:

While the Region recognizes that it is situated on treaty land, the Region must come to understand how this territory is governed by pre-existing Treaties that are layered in deep meaning. The Indigenous Wampum of the Dish with One Spoon predates settlers living in this territory and was created to establish peace in the region by developing relationships of trust and respect. The Dish is all of creation that we respect and take of it only what we need. A spoon is used so as to not cause harm and we are taught to take only what we need and to leave enough for others, both human and non-human, now and for future generations.

However, the Niagara Region remains actively engaged in and supporting private development and other activities that continue to further disrupt the relationship of Indigenous people with the land and increase barriers Indigenous people face in accessing the land and its medicines. NICAB requests that the Region reflect

on its own values and requests that all areas of the Niagara Region actively hear Indigenous voices.

Specific to Housing and Homelessness, NICAB members expressed disappointed in the lack of progress the Region has made on the activities in the HHAP that address Indigenous Housing and Homelessness. After nearly ten years of the HHAP the Region has not followed through to achieve results for Indigenous housing and homelessness. NICAB requests that the Region immediately take action to fund and support Indigenous access to land, Indigenous-led housing development, affordable home ownership and homelessness services by Indigenous organizations for Indigenous people.

In response to this feedback, working with NICAB to achieve results on the nine (9) HHAP actions specific to Indigenous housing and homelessness will be a priority in 2023.

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 2022. Highlights related to the four (4) HHAP goals include:

Goal 1 – House People Who do not Have a Home

By the end of December 2022, 82% progress had been made toward finishing the 11 actions related to Goal 1. Eight (8) of these actions were completed, two (2) had seen progress and were on track for completion by end of 2023, and one (1) required significant work to be completed within the five-year period covered by the updated HHAP. Key accomplishments since 2019 include the alignment of efforts toward achieving functional zero chronic homelessness, a shift to assertive street outreach and low-barrier housing-focused shelters, introduction of a Quality By-Name List (QBNL) and Coordinated Access (CA), and identification of opportunities to better support high acuity clients experiencing chronic homelessness. Progress and accomplishments in 2022 include:

- In October Niagara was recognized as the 7th community in Canada to achieve a Veteran QBNL, which is used to identify and connect veterans experiencing homelessness to available housing and supports. Niagara also piloted a veteran case worker to support progress toward achieving functional Zero for veteran homelessness.

- In November, Niagara Region was recognized by Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) as the 28th community in Canada to achieve a Reaching Home Coordinated Access System. Coordinated Access is an essential element of efforts to end homelessness. It includes standardized intake and assessment, real-time information, uniform service prioritization policies and coordinated referral processes, so that people experiencing homelessness are connected to the right housing and supports based on their preferences and level of need.
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) was able to support 203 unique individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness to access emergency shelter and 184 unique individuals to access housing in 2022.
- In response to increased rents for private market units additional funding to enhance housing allowances was provided to the Housing First and Home for Good Supportive Housing programs.
- Niagara introduced new low barrier resources to support persons experiencing chronic homelessness including a 15-bed Bridge Housing facility and a 25-unit Permanent Supportive Housing facility on Buchanan Street in Niagara Falls. Bridge Housing is an intensive short-term accommodation that helps bridge the gap between homelessness and permanent housing. The Permanent Supportive Housing provides long-term housing with community programming for persons exiting chronic homelessness, with support staff available on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- In late 2022, Niagara received Ministry of Health funding to operate a 10-bed Recuperative Care Bed program for individuals experiencing homelessness who are being discharged from hospital. The program will be located in the Bridge Housing Facility and launch in Q1 2023.

In 2022, an average of 24 chronically homeless people per month were supported to exit to housing. At the end of December, there were 1,099 clients active on Niagara's By-Name List, with 550 (or 50%) experiencing chronic homelessness. This compares to 1,042 clients with 422 (or 40%) experiencing chronic homelessness at the same time in the previous year. The significant increase in those experiencing chronic homelessness (homeless for six (6) months or more in the last year, or 18 months in the past three (3) years) during the past 12 months is attributed in part to the increased cost and limited vacancy rates for affordable rental units and a lack of permanent supportive housing, making it progressively more difficult for individuals to exit homelessness.

Of the 2,150 unique individuals who accessed emergency shelter in 2022, the largest proportion were single men (24.5%), single women (13.5%), refugees (12.7%), seniors

55+ (10.0%), and Indigenous individuals (9.6%). 125 individuals (5.8% of shelter clients) had 180+ days in shelter.

Areas for focus for 2023 include the launch of a rapid rehousing program to support lower acuity clients access housing and time-limited supports in Q2 and the introduction of Indigenous-focused Street Outreach.

Goal 2 – Help People to Retain a Home

By the end of December 2023, 63% progress had been made toward finishing the 16 actions related to Goal 2. Eight (8) of these actions were completed, four (4) had seen progress and were on track for completion by end of 2023, and four (4) required significant work to be completed within the five-year period covered by the updated HHAP. Key accomplishments since 2019 include providing enhanced services for persons with concurrent disorders and working in partnership with the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare (REACH) Niagara to provide health, mental health and addictions support for persons experiencing homelessness. Progress and accomplishments in 2022 include:

- In 2022 the pilot Housing Provider Community Programs Coordinators received a total of 98 referrals for eviction prevention and tenant support, including 66 referrals from Housing Providers and 32 from Rent Supplement landlords.
- 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. In 2022, 406 new recipients received COHB. As of Dec 31, 2022 there were 576 households receiving COHB.
- The Welcome Home Niagara home ownership program had six (6) successful closes in 2022. This program makes home ownership a reality for low to moderate income households in Niagara through down payment assistance of a 5% forgivable loan.
- By the end of 2022, the Niagara Renovates program funded 29 homeowners to complete housing repairs or modifications for persons with disabilities, including 28 homeowners with five (5) accessibility modifications. One (1) was multi-unit with accessibility modifications.
- To support ongoing system review and a shift of focus toward prevention and housing with supports, analyses of Diversion and Prevention services were completed. The updated Prevention framework is grounded in BFZ-C and Housing First principles and will leverage the strengths of current providers to meet the needs of those at risk of homelessness.

- The Collaborative Homeless Addiction & Mental Health Pilot (CHAMP) was supporting 75 clients through December. In collaboration with Niagara Region Mental Health, this program intends to increase support for homeless clients with serious mental illness and complex needs, in order to reduce calls to emergency services from shelter due to mental health concerns. A review of the CHAMP pilot program to better understand need (to be completed in 2023) was initiated.

Returns to chronic homelessness from housing remained low, at eight (8) per month on average in 2022.

Areas for focus for 2023 include improved homelessness prevention for Indigenous persons by supporting exits from provincial systems, addressing discrimination as a barrier to housing, and supporting the right to housing.

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

By the end of December 2022, 81% progress had been made toward finishing the 24 actions related to Goal 3. 18 of these actions were completed, three (3) had seen progress and were on track for completion by end of 2023, and three (3) required significant work to be completed within the five-year period covered by the updated HHAP. Key accomplishments since 2019 include development of an affordable housing strategy, supporting local municipal affordable housing plans, financing for capital repair needs, addressing End of Operating/Mortgage agreements and supporting not for profit housing provider capacity to develop new units. Progress and accomplishments in 2022 include:

- A total of \$2,946,166 was used for housing provider capital repairs in 2022. The amount included Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) funding of \$1,644,106 and Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI) funding in the amount of \$1,302,060. This funding ensures the sustainability of Housing Provider assets.
- A Consolidated Housing Master Plan (CHMP) has been created and will serve as a guide for the development of new community housing units (the units provided by NRH, non-profit or co-operative providers) between 2022 and 2045. The Master Plan will provide a long-term roadmap to 2041 to ensure the sustainability of existing community housing stock and outline the future needs for affordable housing stock in Niagara.

- Following its adoption by Regional Council on June 23, 2022, the Niagara Official Plan (NOP) was approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in November with modifications. The NOP is a comprehensive land use policy framework to guide growth and development within the region to the year 2051. The plan includes new policies regarding the provision of a range of housing types, including affordable, attainable and community housing, and directs land use planning in Niagara Region to co-ordinate with the goals and targets of the HHAP.
- The in-situ Rent Supplement program engaged new landlords and offered applicants on the centralized housing waitlist an opportunity to receive Rent-Geared-to-Income assistance where they currently live. In 2022, new agreements were initiated with 26 new landlords.
- New Housing Development Highlights, as of the end of December 2022:
 - Buchanan Avenue Niagara Falls, 25 permanent supportive housing units for high acuity chronically homeless clients achieved full occupancy in February 2022.
 - Hawkins Avenue Niagara Falls, 73 affordable units (NRH) achieved full occupancy in March.
 - Victoria Avenue, Niagara Falls – 15 Bridge Housing units and 10 recuperative care beds. 100% complete.
 - Ormond Street North / St. David's Road East, Thorold – 11 NRH units; eight (8) were occupied and three (3) were 90% complete.
 - York Street, Welland – 43 units. 80% complete and on track for completion May 2023.
 - Crescent Road, Fort Erie – 18 units. 10% complete with a target completion date of May 2024.
- Housing Services is also providing project management support to 10 new community-led developments with more than 650 new affordable housing units at various stages of development

In November 2022, Bill 23 (*More Homes, Built Faster Act, 2022*) received Royal Assent, with the stated intent to create conditions that will result in the construction of more homes to address Ontario's housing supply crisis. The Regional Chair and Planning staff provided comments and identified concerns over anticipated negative fiscal and coordinated growth management impacts due to the bill's impact on the *Planning Act, 1990* and the *Development Charges Act, 1997*. An update on Bill 23 can be found in [CWCD 2022-268 Update on Status of Bill 23 More Homes, Built Faster Act, 2022](#)

(<https://www.niagararegion.ca/council/Council%20Documents/2022/council-correspondence-dec-09-2022.pdf>). Changes impacting affordable housing development include:

- Exemptions for affordable housing, attainable housing, and inclusionary zoning units from Development Charges, Community Benefits Charges, and parkland dedication fees.
- Removal of “housing services” as an eligible service from the Development Charges Act.
- Decrease in the maximum number of units required to be affordable as part of inclusionary zoning.
- Phased reduction of Development Charge rates for all new Development Charge By-laws passed since June 2022.
- As-of-right zoning permissions to be implemented for up to three residential units per lot.
- Exemptions from site plan approval for developments of up to 10 residential units.

Staff continue to review and revise the affordable housing incentive programs as part of the ongoing assessment of Bill 23’s impact on affordable housing projects, funding and incentives.

In 2022, Niagara’s low-to moderate income renters continued to experience a more challenging market¹. Rental supply increased faster than demand, with new purpose-built rental units built at rates not seen since the nineties. As a result, the vacancy rate for all rental units increased from 1.9% in 2021 to 2.8% in 2022. Despite this supply increase, the average rents rose by 5.9%, the strongest rate of growth in over 30 years. In 2022, the gap between the average asking price for vacant units and the rent paid for occupied units widened to 17.8% and the number of affordable rental options declined. The disparities in rents faced by prospective tenants were particularly large for 1- and 3-bedroom units, which reached 26% and 33%, respectively. From January 2022 to January 2023 the average asking rents for a two-bedroom unit in St. Catharines increased 21.8% to \$2,031 per month, while average asking prices for a one-bedroom

¹ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report 2022 (2023, January)

unit increased to \$1,586 per month². A more challenging rental market increases demand for community housing options.

From December 31, 2021 to December 31, 2022, the centralized housing waitlist grew by 11% from 9,171 to 10,225 households. This represents an additional 2,167 individuals waiting for community housing, an increase of 13% (from 16,757 to 18,924 individuals over the previous year).

At the end of 2022, there were 8,611 community housing units in Niagara, including more than 3,008 NRH-owned, 3,224 provider, 1,779 rent supplement/housing allowance/COHB units and 600 new affordable units.

Areas for focus for 2022 and 2023 include ensuring adequate resources are available to support local need for affordable housing and supporting Indigenous access to land and incentives for new development.

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

By the end of December 2022, 75% progress had been made toward finishing the 24 actions related to Goal 4. 16 of these actions were completed, four (4) had seen progress and were on track for completion by end of 2023, and four (4) required significant work to be completed within the five-year period covered by the updated HHAP. Key accomplishments since 2019 include developing a common system vision to end homelessness, improving the accuracy and completeness of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) data, increasing the use of systems standards, increasing frequency and quality of communications and participating in the BFZ-C cohorts working to end chronic and veteran homelessness. Progress and accomplishments in 2022 include:

- Staff continued to enhance the revised data strategy work initiated in 2021 to support improved outcome measurement and system planning. In 2022, the data was used to support the design of improvement projects undertaken by eight (8) of the 10 HHAP working groups.

² Rentals.ca January 2023 National Rent rankings

- Participants in the Lived Expert Advisory received peer support training to support the goal of enhancing the use of the peer support model within the homelessness system.

A key component of BFZ-C, the QBNL supports system planning to meet community need. Of the 550 unique (chronically homeless) individuals on Niagara's QBNL on December 31, 2022, the largest proportion were single men (33.6%), single women (20%), Indigenous Individuals (14.7%), seniors 55+ (10%), and youth 16-24 without a guardian (6%). Six (6) veterans were experiencing chronic homelessness.

There were also 81 Indigenous persons experiencing chronic homelessness and 17 Indigenous persons were approaching chronic homelessness (experiencing 90 to 179 days homeless) on December 31. Indigenous people remain significantly overrepresented within the homeless population of Niagara, representing 2.8% of the population of Niagara, but 9.6% of those accessing emergency shelter and 14.7% of those experiencing chronic homelessness in 2022.

Areas for focus for 2023 include improving service manager engagement with Indigenous organizations, and working with NICAB to fund Indigenous organizations for Indigenous-led housing and homelessness solutions.

Alternatives Reviewed

There are no applicable alternatives as reporting on the HHAP is required under the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, per its regulations as noted in the Analysis on page 1.

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 4-2022 Activities Related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for December 2021, and January, February 2022

- COM-C 9-2022 Activities Related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for March April May 2022
- COM-C 12-2022 Activities Related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for June July August 2022
- COM-C 4-2023 HHAP Update on Activity from September to December 2022
- CWCD 2022-268 Update on Status of Bill 23 More Homes, Built Faster Act, 2022
- COM 8-2023 Homelessness Services Report 2022

Prepared by:

Jeffrey Sinclair, BBA
Homelessness Action Plan Advisor
Community Services

Recommended by:

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Wendy Thompson, Community Resource Program Manager, Housing Services; Marian Bannerman, Grant and Incentive Program Manager, Planning and Development Services; Alexandria Tikky, Senior Project Policy Manager, Planning and Development Services; Kristina Nickel and Mark Gutelius, Program Evaluation and Data Advisors, Homelessness Services; and reviewed by Cathy Cousins, Director Homelessness Services & Community Engagement.