
Subject: St. Catharines Emergency Shelter Operations

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council with regard to the operations of the new full day temporary emergency shelter in the City of St. Catharines, to be delivered using a portable structure solution, while a permanent site is being sourced and renovated. The temporary site will operate for two to three years, subject to the remediation and construction required once a suitable site is located.
- Given the challenges in sourcing a suitable piece of land for the temporary site, a seasonal shelter will operate for a brief period of time while the temporary portable site is established.
- The Region issued a negotiated request for proposal (NRFP) to operate this site and received only 2 bids after closing on September 11, 2023. Upon initial review of what was submitted by the two proponents, it was determined that neither proponent had the necessary extensive experience and capacity to support operations at this new temporary site, which are necessary to mitigate risk of negative community impacts and resistance (and then the potential pressure to relocate the temporary portable solution.) A decision and notice of cancellation of the Procurement process was made on September 25, 2023.
- Community Services is therefore planning to directly operate the new temporary emergency shelter and will look to find a third-party provider once a permanent site is established.

Financial Considerations

The anticipated annualized operating costs for the new temporary full day 60 bed emergency shelter are estimate at \$1,826,942, inclusive of staffing costs, food, supplies, estimated property taxes and utilities as well as contribution to capital reserve

as per capital management policy for owned capital assets. For the year 2023 these pro-rated costs are available in the enhanced HPP funding allocated to shelter operations in the HPP investment plan (CAO-6, 2023).

The overall funding necessary, and impact to the 2024 operating budget to support the homeless system, will be known once the NRFP process for selecting emergency shelter providers for the remainder of the system is completed, which is currently occurring in alignment with the shelter capacity review. The additional one-time funding requirements will be included in the 2024 budget submission, with the goal of mitigating any incremental pressure on the levy through potential use of the Taxpayer Relief Reserve, budget reductions, or future allocations of provincial funding (including HPP) currently allocated to capital that can be used to accommodate the increase in operating costs.

Analysis

Temporary St. Catharines Shelter

In alignment with the recommendations of the shelter capacity review, Niagara Region is moving forward with work to convert the seasonal shelters in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines into full day, all year shelters. As part of this transition, extensive work has been undertaken by Regional and City staff to source a site suitable for an emergency shelter in St. Catharines. Through this work, it has been determined that site selection opportunities are limited in St. Catharines, and with the timeline to bring a suitable permanent site from purchase to operations estimated at two to three years. The process and length of effort is necessary to allow for time to source a site and close the purchase, submit change of use requests to the City and determine associated necessary work, including record of site condition, procure design and contractors for renovations and complete the necessary work to create suitable long term emergency shelter.

As a result of the concerns around these long-term construction timelines, staff at the Region, in partnership with Niagara Regional Housing, has been conducting a review of temporary options available. A modular solution has been implemented in other communities for the similar purpose of temporary emergency shelter. Staff have been reviewing two solutions and looking to source suitable land on which to locate the temporary site.

The Region is committed to having solutions to support the vulnerable homeless clients of St. Catharines prior to the traditional opening of the seasonal shelter in St.

Catharines, which would be November 1. To ensure service is available, staff are finalizing a brief arrangement for space with a third party in St. Catharines, and operations will transfer to the temporary portable solution as soon as available, anticipated to be approximately January 2024.

In addition, to support the operations of the temporary sites, a procurement was initiated commencing in August 2023 and closing on September 11th. This process yielded two bidders, however, upon initial review of what was submitted by the two proponents, it was determined that neither proponent had the necessary extensive experience and capacity to support operations at this new temporary site, which are necessary to mitigate risk of negative community impact and resistance (and the potential pressure to then relocate the temporary portable solution, which has been witnessed in other communities). The anticipated clientele at the temporary site, based on the experience and data of the seasonal shelters, is largely chronically homeless men, with a history of living unsheltered, and experiencing significant mental health and substance use challenges. Many clients did not previously demonstrate a strong commitment to working on a housing goal, a key focus and performance target expected of the work to be performed at the new site.

Human Resource Implications:

Staff are working collaboratively with Human Resources to develop a staffing model to support the operations of the new temporary shelter building on the staffing structure put in place for the Niagara Falls shelter presented in Confidential report COM 29-2023. The new positions will align with the both the Bridge Housing and Niagara Falls shelter positions to allow for additional program staffing stability, as employees can, with this approach, be asked to work at any site to ensure adequate coverage. Staffing is unionized with the exception of the shelter supervisor. The Manager of Operations will now be responsible for all sites, ensuring that funding is maximized at the front line to support clients. All staffing at the new shelter site will be temporary.

Alternatives Reviewed

Staff did go out to market for an emergency shelter provider, with bids closing September 11th, 2023. There were two responses to the NRFP, however, upon initial review of what was submitted by the two proponents, it was determined that neither proponent had the necessary extensive experience and capacity to support operations at this new temporary site. A public procurement for shelter services will be considered again, when the permanent location is ready for operations.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The temporary emergency shelter programs are homelessness system services that supports the Council Priority of an Equitable Region, providing for opportunities for a safe and inclusive Niagara, responding to our current community needs.

Other Pertinent Reports

- COM 20-2021
- CAO 6 – 2023
- Confidential COM 29 - 2023

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