

Council Motion – Winter Plan

February 10, 2026

Cathy Cousins, Director, Homelessness Services

Homelessness Winter Weather Response

- Three-tiered winter plan
- Scales up outreach, shelter capacity and transportation as temperatures drop
- Ensures supports are available and coordinated across the system

Homelessness Winter Plan Evolution

- Winter plan is not static
- Has evolved over time
- Responding to needs and review of practices with municipalities across southern Ontario
- Initial plan (2025/26) was 40 beds at -15 °C
- Updated to 80 beds at -15 °C
- Modified again to 98 beds at -10 °C

Tier One Response

- Initiated when temperatures reach 0 °C
- Homeless System agencies and partners share information on the health risks of colder weather
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach offers winter supplies to unhoused individuals
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach encourages unhoused individuals to access shelters
- Year-round shelters are open with capacity to shelter 300 people

Tier Two Response

- Initiated when temperatures reach -5 °C
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach enhances outreach
- Visits encampments and places known to be frequented by unhoused persons
- Encourages access to shelters and providing safety checks
- Restricted persons are provided winter weather supplies

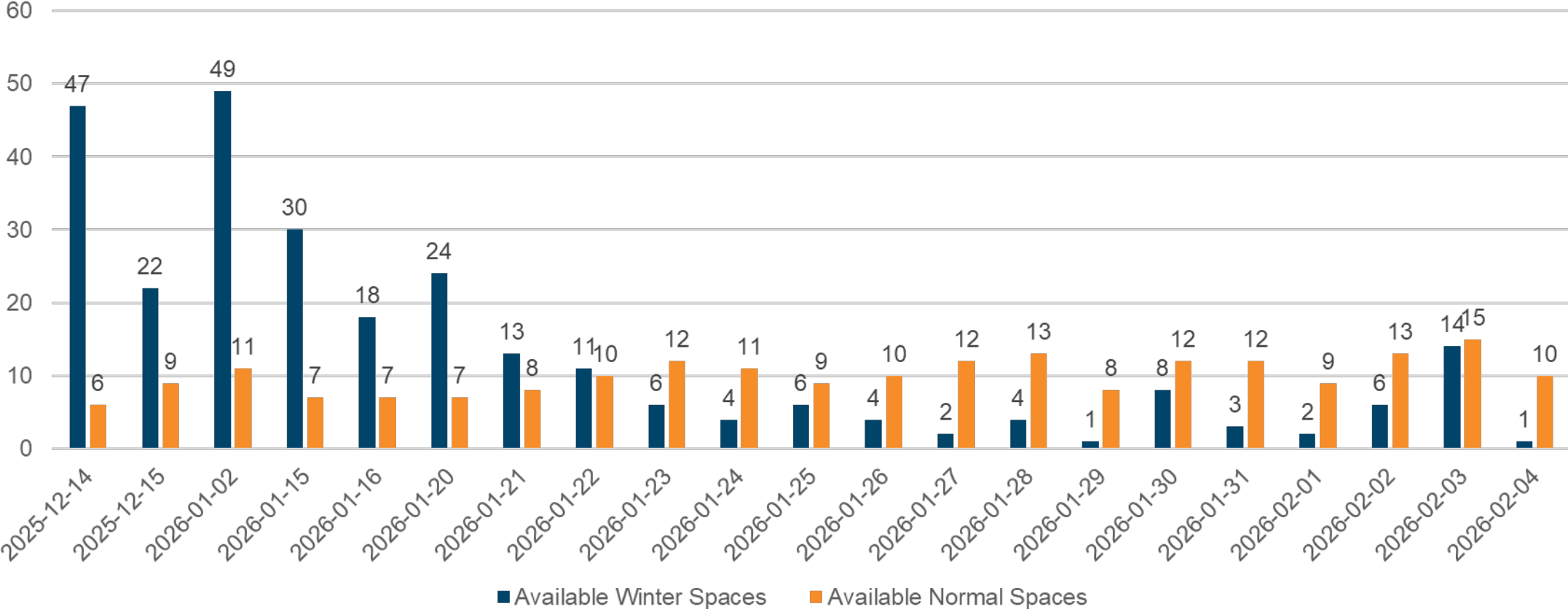
Tier Three Response

- Initiated when temperatures reach -10 °C
- Homelessness Services declares Winter Weather Advisory
- Overflow shelter spaces open; 98 spaces at five sites
- Shelter system lifts all restrictions that do not pose a safety risk
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach increases hours of service
- Niagara transit offers free bus rides to warming centres and shelters.

How the System is Meeting Need

- If a shelter is at capacity staff find another available space
- Transportation is arranged to and from that shelter
- Shelter system has not yet reached capacity when a winter advisory has been in effect
- Shelter uptake tends to decline as temperatures moderate
- Our staff care about the people they serve and don't want to see anyone left out in the cold.
- Work to find flexibility in the current system to help as many people as possible

Available Shelter Spaces (Winter Alerts)



QUESTIONS