
Subject: Welcoming Streets Initiative – Funding Information Request

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to respond to Council direction to outline funding options to support the continued operation of the Welcoming Streets Initiative pilot in the St. Catharines downtown core beyond April 30 to the end of 2026.
- The Welcoming Streets Initiative pilot program funding ends April 30, 2026, and no approved funding is available beyond that date.
- Four potential funding sources have been assessed: 2026 budget approved levy funding in the homelessness division, grant funding, Homelessness Prevention Plan funding and Reaching Home funding.
- Staff are exploring opportunities for enhanced coordination among downtown street outreach providers in the City of St. Catharines.

Financial Considerations

The Welcoming Streets Initiatives (WSI) was approved by Council as a pilot program in December 2024 with a one-time investment of \$128,000 for program start-up and operations delivered through REACH Niagara and Positive Living Niagara. The pilot program's one-time funding is sufficient to April 30, 2026, with no approved funding available beyond that date. The program costs approximately \$15,000 per month to operate under the current delivery model. Extension of the current WSI pilot program model from May 1 to the end of 2026 requires \$120,000.

The cost increase reflects additional supervisory capacity and program materials required to support implementation and delivery of the pilot, which were not included in the original \$128,000 annual budget estimate.

A source of funding is required to support the program extension. Absent senior government funding, an extension would require levy funding through a future budget

process, or Council direction to offset the in-year cost through reductions/deferrals in other discretionary services.

Analysis

The Welcoming Streets Initiative pilot, funded to operate until April 30, 2026 was implemented in downtown St. Catharines to improve the relationships between businesses and individuals who are street-connected in the downtown core.

The pilot has now been in operation for just under one year and evaluation of the program by Brock University demonstrates that the program has been effective in fostering more positive relationships between businesses and individuals on the streets, offering businesses in the downtown core a valued support service, and in connecting individuals experiencing homelessness to services available to address needs.

Although the program has proven to be effective in addressing needs in the St. Catharines downtown core, there is not a dedicated funding source to support ongoing operation of the program. Review of Welcoming Streets pilot programs across the province reflect similar funding challenges.

There are four outreach service providers currently support in the St. Catharines downtown core. Niagara Assertive Street Outreach focuses on working with individuals experiencing homelessness who are on the street or in encampments to support a return to housing. Community Oriented Response Engagement (CORE) team focuses on community focused policing initiatives such as youth engagement, community outreach and problem-oriented policing. Emergency Medical Services Street Outreach team focuses on providing mobile medical services to individuals who are unhoused, living in the shelter system or vulnerable in the community. Finally, the Welcoming Streets Initiative (WSI) focuses on being a bridge between businesses and street connected individuals in the St. Catharines downtown core, ensuring everyone's needs and concerns are met. Work is currently ongoing to identify opportunities for enhanced coordination and efficiencies in the interconnection, service delivery and service needs of these four programs with an eye to focusing on a shared client – individuals experiencing homelessness.

The four funding options that were reviewed to identify an appropriate source include:

Approved 2026 Levy Funding in the Homelessness Division (One-time Reallocation)

Through the 2026 budget process, Council approved a \$690,000 business case to increase funding to invest in staff training, peer and behavioural supports in homelessness services. The goal of this funding is to reduce the incidence of behaviours that lead to service restrictions by investing in enhanced training and a behavioural and peer support program for the eight housing-focused shelters and outreach services across the region. Due to the timing of 2026 budget approval and the time required to operationalize these initiatives, a portion of the approved 2026 funding is not expected to be fully expended in-year, creating one-time “gapping” dollars. Up to \$120,000 of these one-time “gapping” dollars be reallocated to support the WSI until December 31, 2026. Staff had identified these gapping dollars as a potential mitigation strategy to address in-year pressures within Homelessness Services. Reallocating this funding reduces flexibility to respond to emerging needs in-year and may require alternative mitigation.

Grant funding

Staff have been working in collaboration with Positive Living Niagara and REACH Niagara (the two agencies operating the WSI pilot program) to identify and submit funding proposals to support the ongoing delivery of this program. If successful, grant funding may reduce or eliminate the need to reprioritize approved 2026 levy funding within Homelessness Services to support the WSI extension to December 31, 2026.

Homelessness Prevention Plan Funding

This provincial funding provides emergency financial assistance and service to low-income individuals and families who are at risk of losing housing or are currently experiencing homelessness (e.g. housing assistance, supportive housing, emergency shelter solutions). Through the 2026 budget process and the provincially approved homelessness prevention plan investment plan this funding has been fully allocated until March 31, 2027. There is no funding available through this program to allocate to WSI.

Reaching Home Funding

This federal funding provides revenue to support capital investments, homelessness prevention and diversion, outreach and outreach case management. Through the 2026 budget and the federally approved Reaching Home Funding agreement this funding has

been fully allocated until March 31, 2027. There is no funding available through this program to allocate to WSI.

2027 Budget Consideration

A final evaluation of the WSI pilot program will be completed in the spring. Based on the final evaluation outcomes, staff will draft a business case for consideration by Council in the 2027 budget process.

Alternatives Reviewed

The use of the taxpayer relief reserve as a source of funding is not recommended. Direction to bring a budget amendment opens up the approved 2026 budget and includes a requirement to issue 10 days public notice. The taxpayer relief reserve is currently significantly underfunded.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Enhancing supports for street-connected individuals while strengthening the St. Catharines Downtown business community advances Council Strategic Priority 3.1 - Building an Equitable Region by promoting an inclusive community where everyone feels healthy, safe, and supported.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [COM 5-2026 Welcoming Streets Initiative Pilot Program Evaluation](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=c7ca857e-bcc1-4f36-a162-820e1ff9b52d&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=16&Tab=attachments)
<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=c7ca857e-bcc1-4f36-a162-820e1ff9b52d&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=16&Tab=attachments>
- [COM 34-2025 Welcoming Streets Initiative: Pilot Update](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=3b9f2270-1e8c-4c84-9966-bf1e0af24f86&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=14&Tab=attachments)
<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=3b9f2270-1e8c-4c84-9966-bf1e0af24f86&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=14&Tab=attachments>

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