
MEMORANDUM

COM-C 18-2020

Subject: Activities related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan for March, April and May 2020

Date: June 16, 2020

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Jeffrey Sinclair, Homelessness Action Plan Advisor and Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

Further to council direction in October (COM 40-2019), staff will provide regular updates about activities, local targets, outcomes and challenges related to Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP), as new information is available.

The following, highlights activities related to the HHAP in March, April and May 2020:

- In March 2020, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing confirmed that they had reviewed Niagara's updated housing and homelessness action plan. The five-year review and updated plan was approved by Regional Council in October 2019 and submitted to the Ministry prior to the end of 2019.
- Niagara Region was preparing to conduct a point-in-time count of homelessness at the end of March 2020 to measure the extent of homelessness and enhance data and demographics on this population to support service planning. This is also a requirement of the Region's Reaching Home federal funding. Recognizing risks and resource challenges related to COVID-19, the federal government gave communities the flexibility to postpone their counts. Niagara's count has been postponed and is set to take place in March 2021. This will allow a full year to monitor the local implications of the pandemic and maintain the comparability with previous counts that have all taken place late March/early April.
- In April, Homelessness Services executed its new contracts for the homelessness system with 18 local providers, as a result of a formal procurement process.

- Under the new contracts, the Assertive Street Outreach Team was expanded in size with enhanced coverage for Niagara's 12 local area municipalities, and improved coordination through the introduction of a lead agency model.
- Transitions of Housing First and Home for Good caseloads, to the newly contracted provider, are on track for successful completion by end of June 2020. These programs have moved from 8 providers to a lead agency model (created to support fidelity to best practice and seamless client transitions between programs). Clients are being transferred to caseloads at the newly assigned agency.
- Homelessness Services launched a 6-week Housing-Focused Shelter pilot in May. The pilot supports up to 20 individuals and families facing chronic homelessness, to access a low-barrier emergency shelter and referral to permanent housing and case management supports. The pilot continues Niagara's efforts related to Built for Zero Canada by introducing the use of a By-Name Priority list to coordinate access to Niagara's Housing First program.
- In April, Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) began offering the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) pilot program, which increases the affordability of rental housing by providing an income-tested, portable housing benefit, directly to households that are on or are eligible to be on, the centralized waiting list. A portion of COHB funds has been allocated to the Housing First program to support clients with affordability issues and who are ready to graduate to independent living.
- The development of the new Niagara Official Plan is well underway. As of Q2 2020, the majority of the priority background studies are substantially complete and the development of options and draft policies has commenced. Further public consultations are anticipated in summer and fall 2020, with a greater emphasis on virtual engagement methods due to COVID-19.
- The affordable housing component of the new Niagara Official Plan will be informed by the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan and will include affordable housing targets and strategies to achieve those targets. The cross-departmental background

work relating to affordable housing has advanced substantially to enable policy drafting to begin for the new Official Plan.

- NRH is developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for development of an Affordable Housing Master Plan.
- NRH's project planning for new development and infill on owned land continues, and will be reflected in the anticipated Affordable Housing Master Plan.
- NRH continues to assist housing providers across the Region, by providing formal project management services in a consulting capacity during all phases of new development. NRH is currently working with organizations in Fort Erie, Smithville and Port Colborne to complete front-end planning activities, while also performing on-site inspection / construction review for an ongoing 24-unit build in St. Catharines.
- Working in collaboration with various Regional departments, including Community Services, NRH has also become a primary contact and resource for private developers interested in creating affordable housing across Niagara. From March to May NRH has been in consultation with developers regarding multi-unit projects proposed for St. Catharines, Welland, Niagara Falls, Smithville and Fort Erie representing a potential 600+ new affordable and market units for the Region.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Commissioner