

June 18, 2018

To: Members
Mayor's Housing Commission

Re: City of Regina's Role in Homelessness

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the City of Regina continue providing in-kind and financial support towards confronting homelessness as discussed in this report.
2. That this report be forwarded to the June 25, 2018 City Council meeting for approval.
3. That item MHC18-4 be removed from the list of outstanding items from the Mayor's Housing Commission.

CONCLUSION

Through the federal government Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), the Regina community receives funds annually from 2014 to 2019 to address homelessness under the direction of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) and leadership of the Community Entity (YMCA).

The CAB has retained consultants to prepare a Plan to End Homelessness (Plan) in Regina that identifies local issues and requirements and establishes system-wide goals and outcomes to address homelessness over the long-term. The Plan will be released in the fall of 2018.

Responding to homelessness is the responsibility of the Federal and Provincial governments. The City will continue to complement and support the policies and programs of the Federal and Provincial governments.

BACKGROUND

The Regina community receives federal funding as part of the HPS. In 2014, the YMCA was contracted as the community entity for the HPS in Regina. The YMCA oversees the assignment of federal funds and program delivery to address homelessness in Regina under the HPS. The YMCA is also responsible for measuring the progress of funded projects and reporting the results to the federal government. The work of the YMCA is governed by the CAB, which is made up of public, private and non-profit sector individuals.

Through federal funds committed since 2014, the HPS accomplishments for Regina have included:

- Regina’s first ever Point-In-Time count (2015) to identify individuals experiencing homelessness who are sleeping out of doors, in the shelter system, or in another emergency accommodation such as a detoxification centre. A total of 232 individuals were enumerated on the night of the count. A second Point-In-Time count occurred on April 18, 2018. Results from the second count have not been analyzed but 286 people were enumerated.
- A community consultation and a consultant-led plan for Regina’s first Housing First Program (2015).
- A launch of Regina’s first Housing First Program (2016).
- The initial results of an external evaluation of Regina’s Housing First program (2017).

DISCUSSION

Plan to End Homelessness

The YMCA and the CAB have advanced the creation of the Plan for Regina by committing \$60,000 in federal HPS funding (half the funds) and issued a call for proposals to hire a consultant to lead the creation of the Plan for Regina. On September 25, 2017, City Council adopted CM17-12 to fund the remaining half of the study:

“\$60,000 from the 2017 General Operating Surplus be allotted to the YMCA of Regina, acting as the community entity for the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy, to fund The Plan to End Homelessness in Regina”.

The Plan will define “functional zero” for homelessness in Regina, which means that any episodes of homelessness are reduced to being rare, brief or non-recurring. Once complete, the Plan will guide community action and direction on homelessness over the short and long-term to achieve functional zero.

On Friday, February 16, 2018, the YMCA, along with the CAB and their partners, hosted a press conference to kick-off of the Plan. The consultant team of Turner Strategies ‘The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada’ are currently consulting with the community and applying their expertise to establish the Plan for Regina. The initial findings of the Plan are expected to be released to the CAB in June of 2018 and the final Plan is expected to be released in the fall of 2018.

At the April 11, 2018 Mayor’s Housing Commission meeting a motion was passed that:

“Administration bring back a report on the role of the City to participate in the Homelessness program”.

City’s Role in Responding to Homelessness

Responding to homelessness is the responsibility of the Federal and Provincial governments. While many of the federal government’s former responsibilities in housing were turned over to provincial governments, the federal government has maintained a lead role in homelessness. The

HPS is an initiative of Service Canada and is the cornerstone of the federal government's commitment to homelessness. There is no expectation or legislative requirement from the federal or provincial government for the City to provide cost-sharing funding for the HPS.

The role of the municipal government is to complement and support the policies and programs of the provincial and federal governments. It is not the role of the municipalities to accept primary or lead responsibility for the issue of homelessness. Municipalities play an important role in homelessness because they are uniquely positioned to provide local knowledge and expertise on the housing condition and the specific requirements of their respective communities.

City of Regina's Current Contributions in Addressing Homelessness

As discussed below, the City currently contributes to addressing homelessness through its participation in and support of several programs and initiatives as indicated below:

Member of the CAB - There is a City representative on the CAB. The role of the CAB is to develop the community Plan on homelessness and set its strategic direction, including setting the annual budget and distributing the federal funding received as part of the HPS and Housing First Program in the city.

Participation in Regina's Cold Weather Strategy (CWS) - The City is a representative on a committee being led by the Ministry of Social Services to implement the CWS. In 2013, the Ministry of Social Services gathered several service providers of Regina's homeless population, including shelter, health, emergency service and housing providers, to develop a CWS for the community. The purpose of the CWS is to ensure service providers work together to provide those in need with a safe place to sleep on Regina's coldest nights. The program aims at providing adequate and dignified shelter and if required, transportation to that shelter.

Funds the Community Investment Grants Program (CIGP) - The City established the Community Investment Grants Program (CIGP) to partner with and fund community non-profit organizations to deliver programs, projects and services that align with the City's priorities, have clear community impacts and respond to community needs. Many of these organizations provide services that directly serve homeless individuals or those individuals who are at-risk-of homelessness. These include organizations that provide medical, mental and resource supports or organizations that offer housing security programs to prevent homelessness. Some of these organizations include the Mobile Crisis Services Inc., the Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger Inc., and Carmichael Outreach Inc., among many others.

In 2017, the City contributed \$708,602 through the CIGP to organizations that are involved in homelessness. It is important to note that although funds were directed at organizations involved in homelessness, those funds may not have been targeted directly at the homeless community. As an example, funds from the CIGP may have been used to pay core operating expenses of an organization that provides programs that support the homeless community.

Comprehensive Housing Strategy - In 2013, City Council approved the Comprehensive Housing Strategy (CHS), which establishes a series of strategies and guiding principles to

support the full continuum of housing, from homelessness to homeownership. Several of the strategies included encourage the creation and retention of diverse, innovative and affordable housing types that support all Regina residents. The CHS recognizes that expanding the supply and affordability of housing is key to addressing homelessness for most individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Since its adoption, City Administration have worked to incorporate these strategies into several plans and projects, including new Neighbourhood Plans, the Zone Forward project and the Laneway and Garden Suite Pilot Project. City Administration reports annually on its progress in implementing strategies.

Housing Incentives Policy - The issue of the supply of rental housing and affordable housing has direct implications related to homelessness. The City provides capital grant and tax exemption incentives through the *Housing Incentives Policy* (HIP) to stimulate new rental and ownership units where there are gaps in the private market's ability to address housing needs. As recommended in the CHS, up to \$2.5 million in capital grants can be committed to non-profit and private sector housing providers that create new affordable units.

Since 2013, the City has committed over \$10.5 million in capital grants towards the creation of 230 new affordable rental and 554 ownership units. In addition, the City approved five-year tax exemptions to support the creation of 2,799 new rental units, a municipal contribution valued at approximately \$15.6 million over the full-term of the exemptions. These incentives have contributed towards an increase in the City's vacancy rate from one per cent or lower between 2008 to 2012 to seven per cent in 2017 and a leveling off in annual home price and rental rate increases.

In response to a softening real estate market and rising vacancy rates, the HIP was amended in 2015 and 2017 to shift available funds towards the creation of new affordable rental units and away from affordable home ownership units and market rental construction in greenfield areas to direct funds towards the greatest needs.

As directed in the CHS, City Administration is undertaking a comprehensive review and update of the HIP in 2019 to evaluate current incentive programs and amounts to ensure that they are effectively addressing the goals of the CHS. Through this review, City Administration will consider amendments to its current incentive programs to support homelessness initiatives.

Regina Police Service (RPS) - In addition to an agency partner for the CWS, the RPS liaises with several organizations that support the homeless population. These organizations include the YMCA, Street Culture, White Pony Lodge, Phoenix Housing First and Carmichael Outreach. In 2015 and 2018, RPS participated on the advisory board for the Point-In-Time Count for Homelessness. The RPS provided suggestions to the committee regarding safety procedures for the night of the count and delivered training for volunteers. Members from the Community

Engagement Unit¹ support White Pony Lodge in their weekly patrols and liaise with the board monthly. RPS participates in initiatives with Street Culture and attends their soup truck nights in Victoria Park.

The RPS Community Engagement Unit provides support to the Phoenix Housing First Program, working with program staff when requested to encourage clients to work to maintain their places. They also assist in removing unwanted guests from their properties in relation to home take overs². Carmichael Outreach recently hosted a life skills program. Community Engagement officers attended some of these sessions throughout the program to provide support and encouragement. RPS was invited to attend the life skills graduation. RPS also worked closely with the Carmichael Outreach housing staff to come up with initiatives to reduce home take overs.

The RPS also sits on the Hub Committee, which is a multiagency group of service providers who gather twice a week to address needs based on housing, addictions, employment, etc.

Update Land-Use Policies and Regulations - The CHS includes several recommendations related to updating existing development regulations to increase the supply of affordable housing units which are being considered as part of the Zone Forward project.

RECOMMENDATION IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

There are no financial implementations associated with the recommendations of this report.

The City's current financial and in-kind contributions towards programs and services that support Regina's homeless population is discussed under the discussion section of this report. In addition, as directed by City Council through CM17-12, the City provided the YMCA with \$60,000 in December of 2017 from the General Operating Surplus to the YMCA to fund the Plan.

Environmental Implications

None with respect to this report.

¹ The RPS Community Engagement Unit is a new section of the RPS created in 2017. Similar to the previous Service Centre section, the main mandate is to engage the Regina community and work with community partners and agencies to provide quality service.

² A home take-over is a term used when a person, who is set up in suitable housing through various organizations such as Carmichael Outreach and Phoenix Housing gets their home taken by others. In some cases, the people doing the take overs steal food, sleep at the place and often time bring temptations or a criminal element to the tenant.

Policy and/or Strategic Implications

Design Regina: The Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 2013-48 includes policies and direction related to the support of Regina’s vulnerable and marginalized populations, including policy 13.14 “to work with others to ensure that all residents have secure access to basic needs, such as food, housing and other services” and policy 13.15 to “participate in the development of a comprehensive plan to address homelessness in partnership with other levels of government”.

The CHS includes several goals for supporting Regina’s homeless population, including:

- Goal 27 “continue to support housing and homelessness initiatives through the Community Investment Grants Program and identify ways to allocate funding for maximum community impact”.
- Goal 28 “continue to play a lead role in the federal government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy by preparing the Community Plan to Address Homelessness”.
- Goal 35 “play a lead facilitation role in establishing and coordinating a housing and homelessness coalition of community stakeholders as a way of coordinating collaboration, engaging stakeholders and obtaining advice”.

Other Implications

None with respect to this report.

Accessibility Implications

None with respect to this report.

COMMUNICATIONS

City Administration will continue to provide updates on the activities of the HPS as the work progresses.

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The recommendations contained in this report require City Council approval.

Respectfully submitted,



Shauna Bzdel, Director
Planning

Respectfully submitted,



Diana Hawryluk, Executive Director
City Planning & Development

Report prepared by:
Charlie Toman, Senior City Planner
Sahar Khelifa, City Planner I