

**PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS
REGINA CITY COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY MARCH 25, 2020—POSTPONED TO APRIL 29 2020
FLORENCE STRATTON**

A few weeks ago, I got off the bus downtown at the same time as a young woman. As we were waiting to cross 11th Avenue, we got to chatting. She told me she'd just finished riding the bus around its whole route—because she is homeless and the bus is a warm and safe place to be.

A few days later, I was standing on the same corner, when an older woman came running across 11th Avenue with two police officers chasing her. When they caught her, they threw her face down on the pavement and wrenched her hands into handcuffs. The woman had apparently shoplifted a few articles—because she is poor and homeless.

As Mayor Fougere said at this year's Memorial for those who have lost their lives to homelessness: "Homelessness is a tragedy. It must be ended!"

How true! Do you know that the life expectancy of a person who is homeless in Canada is 47 years? That's three decades shorter than the average life expectancy in Canada. In other words, homelessness is a death sentence.

According to the Plan To End Homelessness, 2,200 people were homeless in Regina in 2018. How many of them have since died of homelessness?

And just think of the daily—even hourly—trials and humiliations people who are homeless face:

- ▶ Where can I find a public washroom?
- ▶ Where can I find some food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?
- ▶ Where am I going to sleep tonight?

Why do we allow this obscene situation to continue? What kind of people are we? Homelessness is not only an economic and political question. It is also a moral and spiritual matter. Why don't we end the suffering and misery—the tragedy—of homelessness?

It is also true that Regina can't end its homelessness crisis all on its own. That will require financial support from the federal and provincial governments. But Regina can and must do its part.

\$20,000 a year for five years, as proposed by the City Administration at the March 3 meeting of Mayor's Housing Commission doesn't cut it. It doesn't even add up to the \$120,000 of taxpayers' money spent on out-of-province consultants to produce the Plan—money that would have been better spent actually housing homeless people. This is not to mention the \$100,000

spent on out-of-province consultants for the 2013 Regina Comprehensive Housing Strategy—a plan that is currently gathering dust on a shelf.

What Regina must do is make a **SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION** every year for five years to the Plan to End Homelessness. As for the annual amount, here are three possibilities, each of which would be enough to double or even triple the number of people currently being housed under Regina's federally funded Housing First program:

- a) **\$5 million**—the amount of city tax dollars going annually to pay for Mosaic Stadium—making a total contribution of \$25 million.

When the new stadium was in the planning stages, city officials promised that Taylor Field, where the old stadium stood, would be redeveloped to include 700 new affordable housing units. Now is the time to keep that promise, if not by building those promised units, then by providing equivalent funding for Housing First.

- b) **\$3.6 million**—the increase in the 2020 Regina Police service budget over the 2019 budget—making a total contribution of \$18 million.

In support of this proposal is RPS Chief Evan Bray's frequent assertion that homelessness is a determinate of crime.

- c) **\$2 million**—the amount included in the proposal Councillor Stevens put forward at the March 3 2020 meeting of the Mayor's Housing Commission: That administration create a Housing and Homelessness funding stream within the Community Investment Plan with funding levels to start at \$2 million and that it be referred to the 2021 budget process.

Today we have the opportunity to turn tragedy into togetherness. This can be the moment when we, residents, Mayor and Councillors, find our best selves. But we need to speak the language of human decency, the language of fairness, the language of justice—not the language of downloading or jurisdictional authority.

In the name of human decency, fairness, and justice, let's do it—let Regina make a **SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION** to the Plan To End Homelessness so that when go home after the meeting we can feel that we have at least done something for those amongst us who have no home to go to!

Florence Stratton