
REPORT TITLE: Housing Services 2020 Annual Update

FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the report from the Commissioner of Human Services, titled “Housing Services 2020 Annual Update”, listed on the July 8, 2021 Regional Council agenda be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing as the Region of Peel’s annual and mandatory housing and homelessness plan update.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

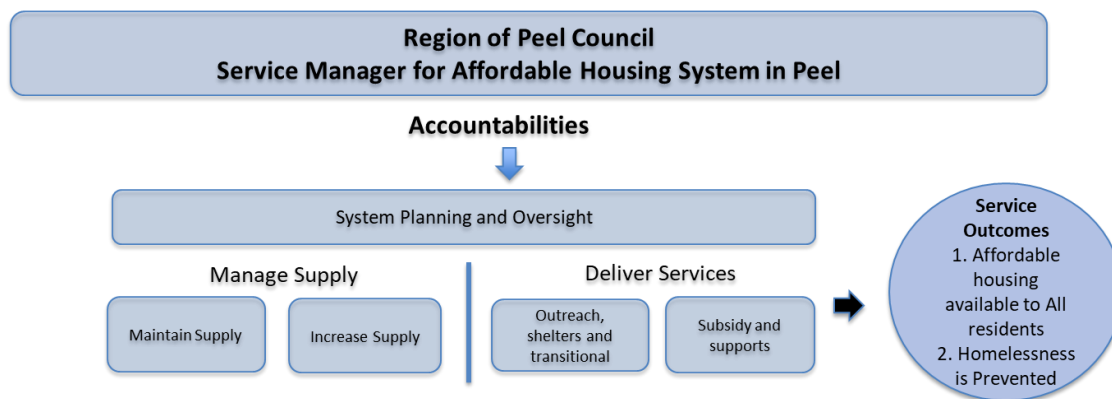
- The Region of Peel is the Service Manager for the affordable housing system in Peel.
- This report provides Council with an overview of key accomplishments for 2020, including progress made on implementing Peel’s 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- 2020 was an unprecedented year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing programs continued to be delivered, while new temporary COVID-19 emergency measures were put in place to protect the homeless.
- Although the pandemic response slowed the implementation of Peel’s 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, progress was still made. Early signs of success are starting to emerge, as evidenced by the number of clients with immediate needs who were housed.
- However, the affordable housing needs of the community continue to grow and evolve.
- Similar to other Service Managers in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area, there has been a significant increase in the number of applicants on the Centralized Wait List.
- When the effect of operational changes implemented to reduce administrative burden is considered, it is estimated that as of December 31, 2020, there were 22,445 households on Peel’s Centralized Wait List.
- Increased investment in affordable housing is needed to improve outcomes.
- Staff recommends increases to the Housing Supports operating budget, and options will be brought forward to Regional Council before the 2022 budget deliberations.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

The Region of Peel is the Service Manager for the affordable housing system in Peel. As Service Manager, the Region is accountable for system planning and oversight, managing and increasing the supply of affordable rental housing, and overseeing or directly delivering services to clients who have a housing need. These accountabilities are depicted in the schematic below.

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This report provides Council with an overview of key accomplishments for 2020, including progress made on implementing Peel's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, and is mandated by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

2. Client Services

The Region of Peel funds, manages, or directly delivers programs to individuals and families experiencing homelessness, those at risk of homelessness and those who are precariously housed. These programs include street outreach, emergency shelters, transitional housing, eviction prevention, subsidy and waitlist administration and case management.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, all housing programs, except for the second unit's renovation assistance program, continued to operate. Program delivery was adapted to ensure the safety of staff and clients. Face-to-face contact with clients, partners and housing providers was replaced with virtual meetings, emails and phone calls.

Peel's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan includes a multi-year strategy to transform the delivery of all housing programs. Implementation of this strategy was slowed in 2020, as significant resources were redirected to Housing's COVID-19 emergency response. However, progress was still made.

Key accomplishments in 2020 include:

- Fully implementing enhanced service levels for street outreach:
 - Street Helpline available 24/7. Calls have increased by 75 per cent.
 - Increased number of outreach vans from 1 to 3, which includes the addition of a mobile medical bus, increasing the number of hours from 57 hours per week with three evenings to 84 hours per week with seven evenings.
 - An 85 per cent increase in number of clients being served by Outreach, a 36 per cent increase in the clients that have been housed and a 56 per cent increase in the provision of medical services to clients.
 - Began an encampment housing pilot to improve the number of street homeless referred to housing supports. As of December 31, 2020, the pilot has helped 84 individuals to come off the street and be connected to Housing supports.
- Increasing the number of shelter beds and changing how shelters operate:

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- Opened a new Family Shelter in Mississauga increasing the number of units from 60 to 120
- Confirmed the site and began pre-construction activities for a permanent youth shelter in Brampton
- Changed how shelter services are provided and issued new shelter operator contracts, creating the opportunity to increase the number of subsidies with no net financial impact
- Designing a new needs-based approach to subsidy administration
 - Received Council approval to administer some subsidies through a needs-based approach instead of through the centralized waiting list
 - Completed program design and policy changes needed to launch and pilot the new approach before the end of 2021

Taken together, the changes underway to transform housing services are starting to show the initial signs of success. In 2020, 1552 clients were housed, and the shift to housing a greater number of clients with higher needs is underway. In 2020, 23 per cent of clients presenting with immediate, complex needs were supported to find permanent housing, representing an increase over the previous two years. In 2019, 21 per cent of clients and in 2018, 13 per cent of clients presenting with an immediate housing need were housed.

Despite these successes, keeping up with the demand for subsidized housing remains a significant challenge given resource constraints. Like other Greater Toronto Hamilton Area Service Managers, Peel has experienced a significant increase in the number of households on the Centralized Wait List. However, it is important to highlight that a component of the increase in Peel can be attributed to operational changes made in September 2019 that eliminated non-value-added work. These changes include: 1) eliminating the review of eligibility when a client applies and is accepted to the wait list (the eligibility review is now only done when a client is unit-ready) and 2) permitting clients to remain on the waitlist who were previously removed, when offered a housing allowance or another type of support (many clients prefer to wait for a RGI unit which can provide a deeper level of subsidy with no set end date).

Taking these operational changes into account, it is estimated that there were 22,445 households in the Centralized Wait List as of December 31, 2020. This is in comparison to the last update provided to Council on November 14, 2019 where the Centralized Wait List was quoted at 14,997 for the period ending June 30, 2019.

Key statistics for all programs can be found in Appendix 1.

3. Maintain and Increase Supply of Subsidized and Affordable Rental Housing

In addition to client services, the Region of Peel supports housing providers within the affordable housing system to comply with provincial legislation and to operate and maintain their buildings in a sustainable way. As of December 31, 2020, there were 7,568 subsidized and 6,252 affordable units in Peel provided by the Region of Peel, Peel Housing Corporation and 46 other non-profit Housing providers. 'Subsidized' refers to units where the landlord or client receives funding to offset the full cost of rent and 'affordable' refers to units that have rents set at or below the average market rent for the area. More details can be found in Appendix I.

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In 2020, \$1.5 million of federal, provincial, and Regional funds were issued to housing providers to keep buildings in a state of good repair and to improve energy efficiency. A lesser amount of funding was allocated during 2020 due to COVID-19 and the inability to complete capital work. A Request for Proposal to secure a vendor to conduct Building Condition Assessments for all community housing providers will be issued in the summer 2021. It will feature improved metrics to identify areas where energy efficiency and low carbon options will help to decrease environmental impacts in support of Peel's Climate Change Master Plan. A Council report on the state of repair of the affordable housing system is planned for 2022.

In addition to the rental stock within the community housing portfolio, the Region also has access to just over 4,000 subsidized rental units through partnerships with private landlords in Peel.

Peel's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan includes several strategies and actions to increase the supply of affordable rental housing in Peel. Key accomplishments in 2020 include:

- Completed construction of the Region of Peel owned building at 360 City Centre Drive, Mississauga, built by the Daniels Corporation, which added 174 units in early 2021
- Supported Brampton Bramalea Christian Fellowship Residences to complete the construction of their affordable project in northeast Brampton, which added 90 new affordable units, including 45 units for Housing Service's clients
- Advancing pre-construction activities on four other affordable housing projects within the Housing Master Plan including:
 - East Avenue, Mississauga (156 units)
 - Brightwater, Mississauga (150 units)
 - Chelsea Gardens, Brampton (200 units)
 - Relocation of the Youth Shelter to a permanent site, Brampton (40 beds)
- Secured Council approval for the new Incentives Pilot to provide capital grants to private and non-profit developers to build new, middle-income affordable rental units with a focus on larger, family-sized units
- Initiated participation in the federal government's Rapid Housing Initiative to create a minimum of 61 new affordable rental units in Peel

Current levels of capital funding are inadequate to meet the need for affordable rental housing in Peel. A report to address the capital funding shortfall for housing will be brought to Council in 2022.

4. COVID-19 Emergency Response for the Homeless

In addition to regular service delivery, Housing Services led the COVID-19 pandemic response for the homeless in Peel, working closely with the Regional Emergency Operations Centre, Peel Public Health, and the Community Response Table. The emergency response for the homeless and other vulnerable residents began in March 2020 and carries on today.

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As previously and regularly reported to Council, Peel's COVID-19 response for the homeless and other vulnerable groups was primarily funded through temporary emergency funding from the federal and provincial governments. Peel's response involved flowing temporary funding to 122 community agencies who support the homeless and other vulnerable groups in our community. The response involved adapting outreach and shelter operations, providing temporary funding for additional drop-in and out-of-the-cold programs and operating isolation and recovery sites. The challenges of the pandemic also led Council to direct staff to explore the feasibility of creating a program in downtown Brampton to improve supports to local businesses concerned with loitering, vandalism, and public safety. Council approved a 'Welcoming Streets' pilot program for downtown Brampton on June 10, 2021.

To date, Peel's COVID-19 response for the homeless has saved lives and prevented a widespread outbreak of the virus amongst the homeless population in Peel. From March 2020 to April 2021, there were only 60 COVID-19 positive cases associated with shelter outbreaks in Peel.

Further information about the impact of our COVID-19 response for the homeless can be found in Appendix II.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

2020 was an unprecedented year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing programs continued to be delivered, while new temporary emergency measures were put in place to protect the homeless; measures that currently continue.

The pandemic slowed the implementation of Peel's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, but progress continued to be made. As stated earlier in this report, early signs of success are starting to emerge, as evidenced by the increased number of clients presenting with an immediate housing need who were housed.

Despite these successes, the affordable housing needs of the community continue to grow and change. Demand for subsidized housing increased significantly. Lessons from the pandemic need to be implemented. Housing's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced. More intentional efforts to find housing solutions that combat racism and that eliminate systemic discrimination are required.

Peel's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan includes strategies to address these issues but an increased investment in affordable housing is needed to improve outcomes.

While advocacy must continue to be a priority in order to secure appropriate levels of funding from the federal and provincial governments, staff is preparing reports for Council outlining options to increase Housing Support net operating and capital budgets. The report focused on the operating budget will be tabled at Council in advance of 2022 budget deliberations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report has no financial implications.

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CONCLUSION

As the Service Manager for the affordable housing system, the Region of Peel is accountable for system planning and oversight, managing and increasing the supply of affordable rental housing, and overseeing or directly delivering services to clients who have a housing need.

2020 was an unprecedented year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing programs continued to be delivered, while new temporary emergency measures were put in place to protect the homeless; measures that continue to today. The pandemic slowed the implementation of Peel's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, but progress was made.

Despite several successes, the affordable housing needs of the community continue to grow and change, and an increased investment is needed to improve housing outcomes. Recommended increases to the Housing Support operating budget will be included in a future report presented to Regional Council in the fall 2021.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - 2020 Housing Services Data

Appendix II - COVID-19 Response for the Homeless

For further information regarding this report, please contact Aileen Baird, Director, Housing Services, Ext. #1898, aileen.baird@peelregion.ca

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Department Commissioner, Division Director and Legal Services.