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**REPORT TITLE: Homelessness Policy and Programs**

**FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1. That actions as outlined in Section 3 a), which includes maintaining Peel’s no turn away policy in the shelter system and other previously approved actions, in the report from the Commissioner of Human Services, listed on the October 26, 2023, Regional Council agenda titled “Homelessness Policy and Programs” be endorsed; and**
- 2. That the recommended actions for implementation; subject to future budget approval, if required, as outlined in Section 3 b), in the subject report be endorsed; and**
- 3. That the contract (Document 2022-602N) between the Region of Peel and Logixx Security Inc., for security services for the Wilkinson Shelter and Peel Family Shelter, be increased in the estimated amount of \$374,000, for a revised total contract amount of \$884,571(exclusive of applicable taxes),-for an additional 12-month term commencing January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**
- 4. That the contract (Document 2022-507N) between the Region of Peel and Logixx Security Inc., for mobile security services for the Cawthra Road Shelter, be increased in the estimated amount of \$444,000, for a revised total contract amount of \$1,074,000 (exclusive of applicable taxes), for an additional 12-month term commencing January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**
- 5. That approval be granted to the Director of Procurement, to further extend the security service contracts for the Region of Peel shelters (Documents 2022-507N and 2022-602N), between the Region of Peel and Logixx Security Inc., as required to address the need for additional and/or enhanced shelter and mobile security services in 2024, subject to the receipt of suitable pricing and available budget, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**
- 6. That the contract (Document 2022-362N) previously awarded to various Peel hotels to provide temporary emergency shelter overflow accommodations for individuals in need, be increased by the estimated amount of \$35,694,952 (exclusive of applicable taxes), for an additional 12-month term commencing January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**

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7. That the Director of Procurement and the Director of Housing be authorized to add additional suitable hotels, having the experience and specialized amenities required in Peel for the provision of temporary shelter overflow accommodations for families and individuals experiencing homelessness, to the contract (Document 2022-362N), if required, to address the ongoing need for shelter overflow accommodations in 2024, subject to the receipt of suitable pricing and available budget, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and
8. That the contract (Document 2023-563N) for as required catering services at the temporary overflow locations be awarded to On the Move Catering Services Inc. in the estimated amount of \$1,142,505 for the supply and delivery of meals for families and individuals experiencing homelessness or seeking asylum, between July 2023 through to December 31, 2024, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and
9. That approval be granted to further extend the contracts with the Peel hotels under Document 2022-362N and On the Move Catering Services Inc. under Document 2023-563N, as required, to address the ongoing need for temporary emergency shelter overflow accommodations and catering services in 2024, subject to the receipt of suitable pricing and available budget, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and
10. That the Director of Housing Services be delegated authority to execute such agreements and ancillary documents on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor and Commissioner of Legislative Services, as may be necessary to extend the Grant Agreement with The Corporation of The City of Brampton, subject to available budget for the Welcoming Streets pilot program.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Over the last few years, and since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Peel has increased. The system is unable to keep up with demand.
- The number of people experiencing homelessness living outside on the streets and in encampments is increasing and Peel's emergency shelter system is operating above 270 per cent occupancy.
- Overflow expenses have grown significantly, projected to be \$26.9 million for 2023, and projected to be approximately \$42 million in 2024. Anticipated costs exceed approved budgets and funding.
- Despite Peel's 'do not turn away' policy, asylum claimants and Peel residents in need of emergency shelter are being turned away due to a lack of space.
- More investments in homelessness prevention, emergency response and permanent housing solutions are required to better address current pressures and achieve better outcomes. Staff recommend implementing several existing and new actions simultaneously.
- The recommendations contained in this report will help to reduce homelessness, but they will not solve the issue in its entirety. Significantly more resources, well beyond the

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limited revenue-generating capacity of Regional or local government are required to operate at a scale that will effectively reduce and eliminate homelessness in Peel.

- Ongoing advocacy is required to influence policy and program change, and to secure significantly more funding from federal and provincial governments.
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## DISCUSSION

### 1. Background

The Region of Peel is the Service Manager of Peel's affordable housing system. In Peel, the affordable housing system includes a variety of public and non-profit funded housing options and supports to assist people experiencing homelessness, people at risk of homelessness, and people who cannot afford to live in the private market.

Over the last few years, and since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Peel has increased to unprecedented levels. The system is struggling to keep up with demand. It is estimated that available resources meet 19 per cent of core housing need in our community.

This report provides Regional Council with an overview of homelessness in Peel and includes recommendations to improve service, address system pressures, and help more people experiencing homelessness get and keep housing they can afford.

### 2. Current State

Experiencing homelessness is a traumatic event, and even a brief period without stable housing can lead to a range of negative life outcomes. People experiencing homelessness have a life expectancy that is 30 years less than a stably housed person in Canada.

#### a) Those who are living rough

Most people living rough in Peel are single, adult men and women, between the ages of 25 and 54. However, Peel Outreach is starting to see an increase in seniors and youth living rough as well as an increase in people who have never experienced homelessness before. Currently, there are also approximately 102 asylum-claimants residing unsheltered outdoors at the Dundas Street shelter.

Overall, the number of people experiencing homelessness living outside on the streets and in encampments is increasing. In 2023, there have been 128 known encampments within the region, which is a 167 per cent increase from 2022. Compared to other jurisdictions like Toronto, Waterloo and Hamilton, which have large encampments concentrated in a few locations, Peel's encampments are relatively small, and exist in a variety of locations that are sometimes hidden from sight.

In Peel, people who are experiencing homelessness living rough receive help with basic needs and other social supports from a variety of non-profit community agencies, as well as from local, regional, provincial and federal government programs.

In addition to income supports, the Region delivers services to people experiencing homelessness who are living rough, primarily through a street outreach program,

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currently contracted to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). The annual budget for the Peel Outreach program is \$4 million. The program includes a 24/7 street helpline and two mobile outreach teams and a place-based outreach team situated in the Cooksville-Port Credit Business Improvement Areas. Peel Outreach provides basic life essentials, access to health services, and service navigation support to those living rough, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Peel Region also funds the Welcoming Streets program in downtown Brampton, operated by the City of Brampton, as well as drop-in programs and out-of-the-cold programs which provide respite and access to meals, showers, laundry and other services to people experiencing homelessness.

### b) Emergency shelters

The Region of Peel owns, funds or operates 8 emergency shelters with a combined total of 449 beds, for youth, single adults and families experiencing homelessness. Due to Peel's long standing 'no turn away' policy, Peel also provides temporary emergency shelter through hotel rooms when shelters are at 100 per cent occupancy. Details about the shelters funded by the Region of Peel can be found in Appendix I.

In 2022, just over 4,000 clients used Peel's shelter system, an increase of 43 per cent from 2021. The increase was due in large part, to the rise in homelessness amongst families and youth. In 2022, 455 families used Peel's shelter system, doubling the number of families served compared to 2021. The number of youth in emergency shelters increased by 53 per cent, with 694 youth using Peel's shelter system in 2022.

In 2022, Peel's shelter system operated above 100 per cent occupancy every week of the year. The number of individuals and families in overflow hotels exceeded historical norms, reaching 508 households.

In 2023, to date, Peel's shelter system has experienced a 30 per cent increase in calls from Peel residents compared to 2022. At the same time, and as previously reported to Council, the system is serving a growing number of asylum claimants experiencing homelessness. Currently, 767 asylum claimant households are residing in Peel shelters and overflow hotels, representing 62 per cent of all households residing in shelters. As a result, the shelter system is operating above 270 per cent occupancy and an average of 156 calls per week result in a person having to be turned away from service due to a lack of beds.

Appendix II provides a demographic breakdown of shelter system clients as of September 25, 2023.

The 2023 operating budget for Peel's shelter system is \$23.3 million - \$19.3 million for shelters and \$4 million for overflow. The shelter system is estimated to meet approximately 75 per cent of need for emergency shelter amongst Peel residents.

Staff is seeking Council approval to extend the contracts for the provision of additional security services, the provision of temporary overflow hotel accommodations, and as required catering services for the supply of meals for families and individuals experiencing homelessness or seeking asylum, for the period commencing January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024. Throughout the course of 2024, staff will conduct market

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scans to explore long term solutions and identify additional vendors, who may possess the experience and specialized amenities required for the provision of temporary shelter overflow accommodations and catering services, for families and individuals experiencing homelessness and asylum seekers in Peel.

### 3. Proposed Direction

The Region of Peel recognizes that the solution to reducing and ultimately ending homelessness is ensuring the most vulnerable in our community have access to safe, affordable housing, with the wrap-around supports needed to foster stability.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to addressing the housing affordability crisis and reducing homelessness. More investments in homelessness prevention, emergency response and permanent housing solutions are required to better address current pressures and achieve better outcomes. Staff recommend implementing several existing and new actions simultaneously.

A list of all actions is available in Appendix III.

#### a) **Continue to implement actions already approved and underway, subject to 2024 budget approval**

Peel's 10-year housing and homelessness plan includes several actions designed to reduce homelessness. Many actions are in progress and must be fully implemented to have the desired impact. Staff recommend completing these actions, as follows:

##### i) **Enhance Peel's outreach program**

In May 2023, and due to the results achieved by the Welcoming Streets pilot in downtown Brampton during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response, Council approved staff's recommendation to shift to an enhanced, place-based outreach program. Work to design the new program is underway. The proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget includes a request of \$6.4 million required to operate the enhanced program.

##### ii) **Maintain do not turn away policy at shelters**

The current asylum claimant crisis has challenged Peel's 'no turn away' policy but staff recommend maintaining the policy, as it helps to alleviate street homelessness and reduce the number of encampments. The do not turn away policy can be accommodated within the proposed 2024 shelter overflow budget of \$12.4 million, assuming the federal government reimburses the Region for asylum claimant costs.

##### iii) **Increase the number of shelter beds**

Peel's Community Housing Development Program, previously referred to as Peel's Housing Master Plan, includes 3 projects that will add approximately 338 shelter beds (includes 186 replacement beds), to Peel's shelter system by 2028. All shelter projects are fully funded and in progress. Details can be found on our website at [peelregion.ca/housing/development/](https://peelregion.ca/housing/development/)

##### iv) **Improve community and business relations**

Complaints from businesses impacted by street homelessness escalated during the pandemic. Security was increased as an immediate solution in some

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neighbourhoods. Staff is seeking Council approval to extend security contracts. However, the success of the Welcoming Streets pilot program in downtown Brampton highlighted the importance of building relationships and working proactively with businesses impacted by street homelessness. Peel's enhanced placed-based outreach program includes more emphasis on business and stakeholder relations. A shelter outreach model is also being designed which will eventually phase out the need for neighborhood private security.

### **v) Increase subsidies**

As explained in a companion report on today's agenda entitled "Enhancing Housing Subsidy and Supports", Peel is helping those in core housing need find permanent, affordable housing faster by introducing more portable needs-based subsidies. Currently, staff are disbursing 200 needs-based portable subsidies that are directly funded by Peel to people experiencing homelessness. It is estimated this will reduce the number of clients who are experiencing homelessness and on Peel's By-Name list by 26 per cent. The proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget includes a request of \$6 million to help 300-400 households, including clients who are homeless.

### **vi) Improve access to health and other supports for those experiencing homelessness**

Supporting people experiencing homelessness to become and remain stably housed often requires access to health and other supports, in addition to housing. In March 2022, Council approved staff's recommendation to co-design a new model to deliver health services to the homeless, providing temporary funding to deliver enhanced health supports at Peel's Dundas Street shelter in the interim. As per the report on today's agenda, entitled "Enhancing Housing Subsidy and Supports", the proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget includes a request of \$4 million to provide additional social supports to clients.

### **vii) Improve case management**

In 2018, Housing Services created a new Housing Support Worker role which provides case management supports to clients who need housing assistance. Since that time, referral pathways to Housing Support Workers from community agencies, hospitals, street outreach and shelters have steadily improved. However, demand has also increased, with a 238 per cent increase in service requests in 2022 compared to 2021. This created a backlog of service requests and reduced response times from 2-3 days to 6 to 8 months. Current caseloads are 50-75 clients, well above the industry norm of 20-25. In order to design and implement Council endorsed programs, restore response times and align caseloads to industry standards, the proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget includes \$5 million for additional staff.

### **ix) Secure temporary space for asylum claimants outside of shelter system**

As reported to Council on September 14, 2023, staff has been looking into alternative options to temporarily house and support asylum claimants that are separate and apart from Peel's shelter and overflow system. Staff has identified a possible solution and will present it to Council through a future report.

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### **b) Implement additional actions, subject to future budget approval**

Due to recent and significant increases in demand for homelessness supports, staff is seeking Council approval to begin working on six additional ideas. Implementing these ideas will require additional funding. If approved, staff will return to Council with program details and budget implications in future reports. In priority sequence, the additional ideas include:

#### **i) Expand drop-in/homelessness respite programs**

Peel Region flows funding to community-led drop-in programs and out-of-the-cold/stay the night programs. To move quickly and to supplement our typical enhanced winter response, staff recommend increasing the number and expanding the hours of these programs, so they provide year-round alternatives to shelters. There are sufficient funds in the proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget to start to expand programming for the 2024 winter season. Further investments in 2025 will be required to operate at a scale that will result in significant change.

#### **ii) Create encampment policy and Protocols**

Peel Region does not have a Council endorsed encampment policy and protocols. Staff recommend working with local municipalities and other stakeholders to ensure practices across the Region are aligned with a recent ruling by the Ontario Superior Court that found that the City of Waterloo's attempt to evict encampment residents in the absence of permanent shelter spaces violates Charter rights.

#### **iii) Enhance homelessness prevention with a focus on families and youth**

Shelter protocols have been updated to increase diversion, and an estimated 150 callers per week have been prevented from accessing an emergency shelter. Peel's Housing Stability Fund together with the Homelessness Prevention Fund, have been increased by \$1.6 million to a total of \$7.2 million, successfully preventing 3,411 evictions in 2022. With additional investments and by improving the program to focus on earlier interventions for families and youth, pressures on Peel's shelter system could be further alleviated.

#### **iv) Remove more barriers to shelter use**

Input from individual and families experiencing homelessness reveal that some existing shelter designs, policies and practices create barriers to shelter use. Continuing to remove these barriers could help to reduce encampments. Fully implementing this action will require operating and capital investments in 2025.

#### **v) Increase shelter beds**

In addition to the 3 new shelter projects that are funded and underway, staff recommend adding more shelter beds for families and single adults. Staff recommend prioritizing a Family Shelter in Brampton, and adding space throughout the Region for single adults. In addition to traditional builds, adding shelter beds can be done relatively quickly through utilizing modular construction techniques. The existing Family Shelter on Surveyor Rd. and the adult single shelter on Cawthra Rd. have space to accommodate modular units. Adding these shelter beds will require additional capital investments in 2025 and beyond.

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### vi) Co-design and advocate for a more appropriate and sustainable emergency response program for asylum claimants

As previously reported to Council, staff will work with stakeholders to co-design an effective, sustainable emergency response program for asylum claimants, separate from our homelessness system of supports, advocating for sustainable funding from the immigration sector instead of the housing sector.

## RISK CONSIDERATIONS

If the current and planned actions do not proceed, there is a risk that Peel's shelter system will continue to be strained, further increasing the instances of street homelessness and encampments within the region. Discontinuing this work will not effectively reduce and eliminate homelessness.

If external funding is not granted or does not meaningfully address the costs associated with sheltering asylum claimants, Peel risks running a significant deficit in the 2024 Housing Support operating budget which could impact service delivery in other areas within Housing Services.

## BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

Bill 112 has created a tremendous amount of uncertainty for regional staff, as well as vendors and agencies that receive funding from and deliver services for the Region of Peel. This adds considerable staff retention, funding, contract and service continuity risks to a system already under significant strain due to chronic underfunding and rapidly growing levels of need.

Regional staff remain committed to working with our local government and community partners to implement viable solutions that will help to prevent homelessness, manage emergencies and improve access to affordable and supportive housing options for Peel's most vulnerable residents.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

For 2024, the estimated cost increase for neighborhood security is \$818,000 and will be funded within the proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget subject to Council's approval of the budget. Staff will be returning to Council in 2024 to provide an update as part of the enhanced place-based outreach report.

For 2023, shelter overflow costs are estimated at \$26.9 million, of which approximately \$15 million is attributed to asylum claimants. The approved 2023 Housing Support operating budget includes \$3.2 million HPP funding, \$3.5 million Reaching Home and \$0.8 million Regional funding for shelter overflow costs. It is anticipated that a significant portion of the remaining \$16.5 million will be reimbursed through Peel's IHAP 2023 funding claim, otherwise shelter overflow costs could drive a deficit in the 2023 Housing Support operating service.

Shelter overflow costs for 2024 are anticipated to reach approximately \$42 million (currently estimated at \$3.5M per month). The proposed 2024 Housing Support operating budget includes \$4.9 million HPP funding, \$6.7 million Reaching Home, and \$0.8 million Regional funding for shelter overflow costs. External funding from Interim Housing Assistance Program and Peel's Reaching Home for 2024/2025 has not yet been announced. Without confirmation of external



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funding, shelter overflow costs could drive an operating deficit in the 2024 Housing Support program.

### CONCLUSION

Peel is experiencing an affordable housing crisis and the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness is on the rise. The system is not able to keep up with demand, as current levels of investments are estimated to meet just 19 per cent of Peel's core housing need.

This report provides an overview of homelessness in Peel and provided Regional Council with several recommended actions to improve service, address system pressures, and help more people experiencing homelessness get and keep housing they can afford.

The recommendations contained in this report, if fully funded, will reduce homelessness and help more vulnerable people get and keep housing they can afford, but they will not solve the issue of homelessness in its entirety. Significantly more resources that are well beyond the limited revenue-generating capacity of Regional or local government are required to operate at a scale that will effectively reduce and eliminate homelessness in Peel.

Ongoing advocacy is required to influence policy and program change, and to secure significantly more funding from federal and provincial governments.

### APPENDICES

Appendix I - Overview of Peel's Shelter System

Appendix II - Demographic Breakdown of Emergency Shelter Occupants in Peel

Appendix III - Summary of Current and Future Actions to Reduce Homelessness in Peel

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Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

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