
REPORT TITLE: Asylum Claimant Response - Update and Approach

FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That subject to execution of the applicable lease or other accommodations agreements for each of the two new asylum claimant emergency shelters approved through the Closed Session report from the Commissioner of Human Services, listed on the February 22, 2024 Regional Council agenda titled “Asylum Claimant Response – Proposed Lease Agreements”, the Commissioner of Human Services, and the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer be granted delegated authority to enter into Direct Negotiations with and award contracts to service provider(s) possessing the required expertise and specialized supports/services, for the provision of emergency shelter operator services, for an initial contract term of 12 months from commencement and up to four subsequent 12-month extension terms, subject to available budget and /or external funding, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**
- 2. That subject to execution of the applicable lease or other accommodations agreements for each of the two new asylum claimant emergency shelters approved through the subject Closed Session report, the Commissioner of Human Services and the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer be granted delegated authority to enter into Direct Negotiations with and award contracts to Vendor(s) for necessary capital improvements at the emergency shelters not covered under lease agreements, subject to available budget and /or external funding, pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**
- 3. That the Director of Housing Services and the Director of Procurement be authorized to enter into and award Direct Negotiations with vendors, suppliers, and service providers as may be necessary for the facility start-up, operations of emergency shelter facilities, accommodation of asylum claimants, and the provision of community support services to those asylum claimants temporarily housed in the emergency shelter facilities, for an initial contract term of 12-months from commencement and up to four subsequent 12-month extension terms, subject to available budget and /or external funding, all pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023; and**
- 4. That the contracts outlined in recommendations 1, 2 and 3 be collectively defined as the “Emergency Shelter Contracts”; and**
- 5. That the Director of Housing Services be authorized to execute agreements, including extensions and amendments to existing and new agreements, with respect to the Emergency Shelter Contracts, along with any ancillary documents as may be required, provided such agreements, extensions, amendments, and**

Asylum Claimant Response - Update and Approach

ancillary documents, are subject to available budget and/or funding, and are on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services, and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor and Commissioner of Legislative Services; and

6. That, the Director of Housing Services and the Director of Procurement be authorized to approve increases to all such Emergency Shelter Contracts as may be required to deliver services necessary for the operation of the emergency shelter facilities, and for the accommodation and support of asylum claimants at the emergency shelter facilities, within the initial contract term and extension terms, subject to available budget and/or funding, all pursuant to Procurement By-law 45-2023.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The influx of asylum claimants into the Peel has placed immense pressure on Peel's shelter system, which is now operating at 383 per cent capacity and asylum claimants occupy 72 per cent of the available shelter and overflow hotel beds in Peel.
- As reported to Council in the fall of 2023, staff is implementing a more sustainable model for asylum claimants outside of the shelter system. The new model includes opening dorm-style shelter facilities for asylum claimants and designing a Regional Reception Centre with federal, provincial and municipal partners.
- Staff is seeking approval to enter into direct negotiation contracts with service providers to operate facilities and with required specialized vendors, contractors and suppliers for the capital improvements required for facility start-up.
- New locations are recommended through the accompanying Closed Session report from the Commissioner of Human Services, listed on the February 22, 2024 agenda titled "Asylum Claimant Response – Proposed Lease Agreements".
- The Region is preparing a proposal for the federal and provincial governments to request additional funding for the reception centre, temporary shelter facilities and ongoing supports. Full details will be shared with Council in March 2024.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

On November 23, 2023, staff updated Council on the Region's asylum claimant response and advocacy efforts. As of February 4, 2024, there are approximately 1,529 asylum claimants in Peel's shelter system. The shelter system is now operating at 383 per cent capacity and asylum claimants occupy 72 per cent of the available shelter and overflow hotel beds in Peel. The influx of asylum claimants is expected to continue at current, or increased, levels.

This report provides an update on the Region's asylum claimant response, including recommendations for expanding the new asylum claimant model and next steps. Additional recommendations on Peel's asylum claimant response will be addressed through the companion Closed Session report on today's agenda titled "Asylum Claimant Response – Proposed Lease Agreements".

Asylum Claimant Response - Update and Approach

2. Moving Towards a more Sustainable Model for Asylum Claimants

Peel's shelter system has long been used to temporarily support asylum claimants experiencing homelessness after arriving in Canada. Historically, asylum claimants accounted for approximately 5 per cent of Peel's shelter population. In 2023, due to global conflicts and crises, Peel, like many other municipalities across Ontario, experienced a sharp and unprecedented increase in the number of asylum claimants in need of support. This number surpassed historical norms in the spring of 2023 and has continued to rise exponentially, with asylum claimants now representing more than 70 per cent of the Peel's shelter population.

In response, the Region has opened 6 more overflow hotels to meet the demand for shelter beds, bringing the total to 11. This approach cost the Region an additional \$26.9 million in 2023, and it is anticipated these costs will increase to more than \$68 million in 2024. The Region has submitted a claim to the federal government's Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) for incurred costs, but this approach is not cost-effective nor viable over the long-term.

As a result, to help improve service and reduce costs, the Region is shifting to a new, more sustainable model for supporting asylum claimants in Peel.

a) Dedicated Temporary Shelter Facilities

To better support the unique needs of asylum claimants and to free up spaces in the shelter system, the Region opened a dorm-style temporary shelter site specifically for asylum claimants in December 2023. This site provides short-term accommodations, settlement supports and other services on-site. The facility supports up to 228 individuals per night and is currently operating at 100 per cent occupancy.

Additional sites are needed to re-locate the remaining 1,300 individuals remaining in the shelter system and overflow hotels. The proposed sites, as described in the companion Closed Session report, provide space across Peel to support both families and individuals outside of the shelter system, using a flexible approach that can change based on need.

Through this report, staff is seeking Council approval to enter into direct negotiation contracts with service providers to operate the facilities and with required specialized vendors, contractors and suppliers for needed capital improvements.

b) Regional Reception Centre

Peel Region is partnering with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Province of Ontario, the City of Toronto, and other Housing Service Managers across Ontario to design a regional reception centre for asylum claimants. The centre will serve as a point of intake for asylum claimants in the GHTA and will provide streamlined services and supports, immediate respite, and additional shelter spaces for asylum claimants staying in Peel. The centre will also refer asylum claimants to participating municipalities for ongoing provision of housing and other settlement supports in their communities.

Asylum Claimant Response - Update and Approach

A recommendation for the location of the reception centre is included in the companion Closed Session report on today's agenda. Staff is preparing a proposal to the federal and provincial governments, requesting the funding required to open and operate the reception centre, and to provide the supports required to adequately support asylum claimants to integrate into various communities across Ontario. Staff will return to Council in March 2024 with full details on the reception centre service model, referral pathways to other municipalities, costs and proposed funding model.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Continuing to support asylum claimants through the shelter system and overflow hotels is not sustainable. A different approach, with appropriate sustainable allocation-based funding is required to improve service to asylum claimants, while reclaiming space in the shelter system for local individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Additional, sustainable and allocation-based funding is required from the federal and provincial governments in order for Peel to open the proposed regional reception centre. Should the necessary funding not be secured, the proposed sites can be operated as temporary shelters dedicated to asylum claimants, providing more cost-effective solutions than the current approach which relies heavily on the use of hotels. Full costs are provided in the Closed Session report on today's agenda. Staff will continue to monitor and manage risks.

BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

The passing of the *Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution)*, 2023 on June 8, 2023, formalized a plan to dissolve the Region of Peel effective January 1, 2025. On December 13, 2023, the provincial government announced that Peel will not be dissolved, and that new legislation will be passed in 2024 to repeal or amend Bill 112. Until new legislation is passed, no implications can be determined.

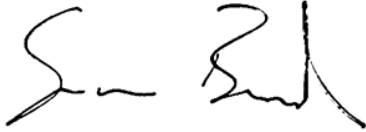
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff will return to Council in March 2024 with a complete cost analysis and proposed funding model to open and operate the regional reception centre and temporary shelter sites for asylum claimants.

CONCLUSION

The influx of asylum claimants has placed immense pressure on Peel's shelter system. Together with federal, provincial and municipal partners, staff is developing a more sustainable solution to meet the needs of asylum claimants in Peel and beyond. Staff will return to Council in March 2024 with full details.

Asylum Claimant Response - Update and Approach

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Baird', written in a cursive style.

Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

Authored By: Shannon Gander, Housing Specialist