
REPORT TITLE: Additional Immediate Actions to Address Concerns about Homelessness

FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

That up to \$250,000 of federal or provincial COVID-19 emergency funding for the vulnerable be allocated to St. Leonard's Place Peel to operate an out of the cold program until March 31, 2021;

And further, that up to \$300,000 of federal or provincial COVID-19 emergency funding for the vulnerable be used to enhance access to health care for the homeless and other vulnerable residents until March 31, 2021.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The COVID-19 pandemic has converged with the housing, mental health and addictions crises, creating additional hardship for the homeless.
 - Pandemic-related protocols have restricted access to many places of refuge (e.g. malls, community centres, public libraries, drop-in programs etc.) and as a result, the homeless and other vulnerable residents have congregated in outdoor spaces. This phenomenon has caused increased concerns for some business owners and residents in downtown Brampton, who have reported that their properties have been vandalized and damaged.
 - On October 15, 2020 staff was directed by the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Committee to explore additional actions that could be implemented quickly to address homelessness related concerns.
 - Through this report, staff recommend three actions for immediate implementation including an additional Brampton drop-in/out of the cold program, and in Brampton and Mississauga, enhanced access to health care services for the homeless, and additional measures for needle exchange and pick-up.
 - These initiatives can be implemented immediately, on a temporary basis using up to \$550,000 of the federal or provincial emergency COVID-19 funding, however committing funds in this manner may affect the ability to consider new applications from community agencies that require financial support.
 - A review of housing and homelessness service levels is planned for the first quarter of 2021, with a report back to Council before the fall of 2021.
 - Staff recommend that Council delay permanent changes to housing and homelessness service levels and budgets until this review is complete.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

The Region of Peel is the Service Manager for the community housing system in Peel. As Service Manager, the Region is responsible for system planning, maintaining existing community housing stock and increasing the supply of affordable housing. The Region also delivers programs to individuals and families who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness. These programs include case management, subsidy administration, eviction prevention supports, shelter and transitional housing operations and street outreach. Descriptions of these programs can be found in Appendix I.

As previously reported to Regional Council, the lack of affordable housing in Peel has reached crisis levels. Currently, 80 per cent of households in the Region of Peel cannot afford to buy a home or move into a new rental unit, based on a 30 per cent of household income affordability threshold. Rental vacancy rates are very low at just 1.2 per cent, with minimal rental stock being added to the market annually. This lack of affordable housing, and particularly the lack of affordable rental housing, is placing unprecedented pressures on the community housing system. Demand for subsidized housing far exceeds supply and the emergency shelter system is increasingly being used to accommodate households for extended periods of time.

At the same time, mental health and addictions challenges grow in tandem. Only one-in-three Peel residents are reported to be able to receive the treatment they need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has converged with the housing, mental health and addictions crises, exacerbating challenges for households across the community and creating additional hardship for the homeless. Pandemic-related protocols have restricted access to the usual places of refuge (e.g. malls, community centres, public libraries, drop-in programs etc.). As a result, the homeless and other vulnerable residents have congregated in outdoor spaces.

Both Housing and Health Services are actively implementing Council endorsed strategies to address these significant and complex issues. Full details about the 10-year Peel Housing and Homelessness Plan (PHHP) and the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan can be found on the Region of Peel's website.

In addition, and since the beginning of 2020, several actions have been implemented to address the more acute and urgent housing issues in the community, either due to gaps in the system or as a result of the pandemic. To date, these actions have been funded by realigning \$2.5 million of existing funds within the Housing Supports operating budget to urgent needs and by allocating \$26 million of federal and provincial COVID-19 emergency COVID funds on homelessness focused responses. Details can be found in Appendix II.

Despite these investments, challenges remain. In downtown Brampton in particular, business owners and residents continue to raise concerns about ill-mannered behaviours, loitering, and damage to private property attributed to the homeless and other residents. These concerns were shared with Regional Council through delegations on September 24, 2020.

As a result of these concerns, staff was directed by the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Committee on October 15, 2020 to explore further actions that could be implemented quickly to alleviate this situation. This report provides Regional Council with three additional actions that can be implemented quickly.

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2. Additional Immediate Actions

Three additional actions are recommended for immediate implementation. These actions are being recommended because they fall within the mandate of human services and provide the homeless and other vulnerable residents with additional safe indoor spaces during the winter and improved access to health services. It is anticipated that these actions will also help to address the growing concerns about loitering and property damage from downtown Brampton business owners and residents.

It is important to note that the challenges being experienced in Peel Region are not unique. The media has reported upon similar frustrations in Waterloo Regionⁱ, Niagara Regionⁱⁱ, Durham Regionⁱⁱⁱ, and the issue of homeless encampments is being experienced in most urban municipalities in Ontario.

It is also important to note that these social issues and their consequences (e.g., property damage, public intoxication, biohazardous waste, loitering, etc.) are not strictly a matter of homelessness policy or services. The opioid epidemic, gaps in the justice system and the lack of mental health services are critical contributors to the prevalence and persistence of activities and behaviours which affect public security, and which tarnish the vibrancy of the areas in which they occur. These are complex issues that cannot be quickly resolved and require ongoing collaboration and coordination across the relevant sectors.

a) Additional Drop-In Centre/Out of the Cold Program

In addition to the drop-in centres previously contemplated and referenced in Appendix II, the Region is proposing to partner with St. Leonard's Place Peel to administer an Out of the Cold program at their 1105 Queen Street East facility in Brampton. St. Leonard's Place Peel will provide meals, hygiene kits, winter accessories, and sleeping quarters for up to 16 overnight guests at a time. The total cost for operations and necessary construction is estimated at \$250,000 and the program will run from November 2020 through March 31, 2021.

Once operational, the additional drop-in centres will provide the homeless with a safe indoor space to congregate, reducing the need to loiter outside and on private property.

b) Enhanced Access to Primary Care Services

In addition to the additional drop-in centre in Brampton, health services currently provided to the homeless in the COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Programs can be extended into Brampton and Mississauga to provide primary care to vulnerable residents in the community from December 2020 through March 31, 2021.

The care team will include physician oversight, a part-time Nurse Practitioner and a full-time Registered Nurse and will provide a variety of primary care services, including: chronic disease management; physical examinations; mental health services; addictions services; palliative care; prenatal care; geriatrics; case management; care coordination; foot care; minor procedures; episodic care; medication reconciliation; and, ODSP application support. The clinics will be administered from the site of new drop-in programs located in Brampton and Mississauga, once suitable facilities have been secured. Costs are estimated at \$300,000.

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Inequities of access to care have become more pronounced through the pandemic where even healthcare services have shifted to virtual delivery methods. The provision of holistic care, including general medical services has contributed to the improved well-being of Isolation and Recovery program residents and facilitated connections to enable them to establish supports in the community. Expanding clinical services will improve access to essential medical care, including mental health and addiction services for vulnerable community members.

c) Improved Coordination with the Needle Exchange Program

The Peel Works Needle Exchange Program and its community partners play a critical role in the health and safety of the community in the face of the ongoing opioid epidemic. The recent delegations from business owners and residents in downtown Brampton highlighted that discarded needles and drug paraphernalia continue to be problematic. To address this specific concern, Housing Services is coordinating with Peel Public Health to improve harm reduction services in Mississauga and Brampton.

Immediate improvements will include supplying street outreach teams with portable sharps containers to dispense to service users, as well as furnishing street outreach vehicles with large sharps disposal units like those in the Needle Exchange Program mobile units, to enable street outreach to collect used needles from community members. Housing Services is supporting the coordination of these expanded harm reduction services and is not assuming any costs in association with these improvements, which can be made within existing budget allocations. In the short-term, staff is also considering partnership opportunities for improving harm reduction services in other program facilities.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

The additional measures proposed in this report are being assembled quickly to enhance the supports to the homeless and most vulnerable residents during the winter, while also addressing concerns raised by the business community and residents in downtown Brampton.

These supports can be implemented immediately as they are within the human services mandate and are therefore eligible for emergency COVID-19 funding for the vulnerable received from the federal and provincial governments. This funding is temporary. If these additional services are found to be effective through the service level review, and the need continues, staff will return to Council with options for sustained funding.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no net impact to the budget as a result of the additional actions proposed in this report. These services can be immediately implemented, on a temporary basis, using emergency COVID-19 Reaching Home funding allocated to Peel. Services will be procured according to the emergency procurement processes. Estimated costs are as follows:

Program	Estimated Cost
St. Leonard's Place Peel Out of the Cold Program (November 2020 – March 31, 2021)	\$250,000
Community Health Clinic Services (December 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021)	\$300,000
Harm Reduction Service Expansion	no cost
Total:	\$550,000

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These additional services do not pre-empt any other planned services or require reallocation of funds. However, committing this funding to additional homeless services does potentially limit the ability to consider future applications for funding from community agencies requiring financial support. Further, there are insufficient funds in the Housing Supports operating budget to deliver these services on an ongoing basis after March 31, 2021.

Housing Services is conducting a review of service levels in the first quarter of 2021. Findings and recommendations will be reported to Council before the fall of 2021. It is recommended that decisions about permanent changes to housing and homelessness service levels and budgets be deferred until this review is complete. If the programs and services as recommended in this report are found to be effective, staff will return to Council to seek a further temporary extension on the timeline to beyond March 31, 2021.

CONCLUSION

Peel is experiencing a confluence of crises in housing, mental health and addiction. The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating these crises and intensifying tensions in downtown Brampton.

Several actions are currently underway to support the homeless and other vulnerable residents during these unprecedented times, while simultaneously addressing the concerns raised by business owners and downtown Brampton residents. This report proposed three additional actions in response to direction received by the Strategic Housing and Committee on October 15, 2020.

While it is anticipated that these short-term actions will help to address current concerns, they are temporary. Staff will monitor the impact of all actions underway and will keep Council informed. Recommendations for permanent changes to housing and homelessness service levels and budgets will be tabled at Regional Council before the fall of 2021.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Housing Client Services Service Offerings

Appendix II – 2020 Homelessness Service Enhancements

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

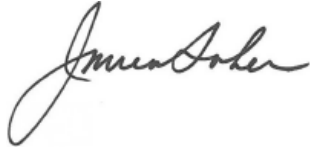
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Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner, Division Director and Financial Support Unit.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



J. Baker, Chief Administrative Officer

ⁱ Martin, Ray (2019, August 15). 'Appalled' by what she found, Cambridge mayor addresses concerns over The Bridges shelter at town hall meeting. *Cambridge Times*. Retrieved from cambridgetimes.ca

ⁱⁱ Benner, Allan (2019, September 13). Downtown businesses frustrated with ongoing addiction, homelessness issues. *Welland Tribune*. Retrieved from wellandtribune.ca

ⁱⁱⁱ Szekely, Reka (2019, October 9). 'Why do they get to shoot up in the middle of the street?' Frustration grows over homelessness in Oshawa. *Durham Region*. Retrieved from durhamregion.com