

UPDATE ON HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

RECOMMENDATION

That the June 27, 2022, Community Services report CS01089, be received for information.

Report Purpose

Information only

Community and Public Services Committee is being provided with an update on Administration's work to date on a comprehensive Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment, including engagement with organizations from the housing and homelessness sector. The final report will be presented on September 26, 2022, as part of the Affordable Housing Strategy refresh.

Executive Summary

- Phases 1 and 2 of the Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment project are complete and Phase 3 is underway.
- Administration is incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data into the Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment to help to provide an understanding of current and future housing needs.
- This work will help to identify existing and projected gaps in affordable housing and will inform current and future housing strategies, investment plans and approaches.
- The final report will be presented to Community and Public Services Committee on September 26, 2022, as part of the Affordable Housing Strategy refresh.

REPORT

Background

Administration has undertaken a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment to better understand the housing requirements of Edmonton's most vulnerable residents. This work involves the synthesis of federal Census data and qualitative data to better define core housing

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need in Edmonton, anticipate housing trends, and determine which forms of housing are most needed. Core housing need is a nationally recognized measure used to identify households living in unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable housing, who do not have the ability to pay the median rent for alternative local housing.

The resulting analysis, and subsequent updates as new data becomes available, will inform current and future housing strategies, programs, investment plans and overall approaches to affordable housing in Edmonton. Because affordable housing is a foundational part of city-building, the Housing Needs Assessment will also help the City of Edmonton meet other strategic objectives.

This work will inform affordable housing conversations with other orders of government and serve as a resource for other agencies and strategic partners. In addition to aligning with the National Housing Strategy and the national Housing Assessment Resource Tools project, the Housing Needs Assessment will be one of the first in Alberta as this type of analysis becomes standardized. In late 2022, the Government of Alberta is expecting to release a template to guide the development of future municipal Housing Needs Assessments in Alberta. While Housing Needs Assessments will not be mandatory, the Province has identified Housing Needs Assessments as valuable resources for better understanding the housing needs of vulnerable residents. It is anticipated that Edmonton's Housing Needs Assessment will exceed the provincial requirements.

Housing Needs Assessment Approach

This project consists of three phases:

- Phase 1: City-wide assessment utilizing quantitative data (complete)
- Phase 2: One-on-one interviews with community organizations across the housing sector (complete)
- Phase 3: Engagements with individuals with lived and living experiences (in progress)

The Housing Needs Assessment is on track, with the recent completion of Phases 1 and 2. Phase 3 is in progress. Beyond Phase 3, the intent is to maintain an updated and publicly available tool that will regularly adjust the needs assessment results according to the most recent available data. For example, the 2021 federal Census data on housing will be available in fall 2022 and the needs assessment results will be updated accordingly and made available publicly.

Because particular population groups face higher rates of core housing need, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has identified 12 priority population groups for affordable housing in alignment with the National Housing Strategy. An additional priority population group was added by the Housing Assessment Resource Tools project, which is developing a consistent methodology for Housing Needs Assessments across Canada. Edmonton's Assessment will complete further analysis regarding the relative need for each of these priority groups. These 13 priority population groups are listed in Attachment 1.

During summer 2022, engagement will include individuals with lived and living experiences of core housing need. The results of these interviews will also be included in the final report and

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help provide context to the analysis conducted in Phases 1 and 2 (Attachment 1).

Initial Preliminary Findings

Some initial themes have been identified during Phases 1 and 2, which are subject to change during engagements that will take place over the next few months. These themes account for both the quantitative data accumulated in Phase 1 and the qualitative data collected in Phase 2 through interviews with 47 community organizations about the groups that they serve. Detailed information of Phase 1 and 2 are outlined in Attachment 2.

1. Key Housing Findings

- a. In 2016, 49,215 households were living in core housing need, which means that their housing did not meet one or more of the following three standards:
 - i. Affordable - costing no more than 30 per cent of their household income;
 - ii. Suitable - has enough space and bedrooms for the household;
 - iii. Adequate - is not in need of major repairs;and, the household could not afford to find alternative housing in their community that meets these three standards without spending more than 30 per cent of their household income.
- b. Furthermore, 26 per cent of all renter households in Edmonton were in core housing need. Renter households were four times as likely as homeowners to be in core housing need.

2. Housing Needs Among Priority Populations

The initial findings for the following eight priority population groups are listed in order of the magnitude and relative needs of the priority groups under consideration. The magnitude and order of this listing was derived from the the percentage of the total households in each group that are in core housing need, consideration of reasonable alternative options that each group may have for safe, suitable, adequate, and affordable housing and consideration of the qualitative data that was collected for these groups via the interviews undertaken in Phase 2. Not all priority population groups are listed here, due mostly to a lack of reliable quantitative data and information. Administration is currently using 2016 Census data while awaiting the 2021 Census data (which will be incorporated into the final report). The research team will pursue other sources of data and information for these groups to integrate into the final housing needs assessment report.

- a. **Single Mothers and Female Heads of Household:** In 2016, there were 6,845 renter female lone-parent heads of household living in core housing need, which constituted 51 per cent of all female lone-parent renter households.
- b. **Women and Children Fleeing Domestic Violence:** Census or other quantitative data was not available for this group. However, engagement with key stakeholders in this space consistently highlighted the gap for both transitional and long term affordable housing need for women and children fleeing domestic violence. Phase 2 engagement participants

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recommended that there would be benefit in moving away from a short-term crisis intervention model and instead adopting a long-term holistic approach.

- c. **Seniors:** In 2016, there were 9,055 senior renter households living in housing that did not meet at least one of the affordability, adequacy or suitability criteria, which constituted 61 per cent of all senior renter households. Participants in the engagement felt that senior housing eligibility should likely be expanded to include individuals over the age of 50, rather than 65, as there is little housing currently available for this age cohort.
- d. **Accessible Housing for People with Mobility Challenges:** In 2016, there were 57,230 renter households with physical health and mobility challenges who were living in housing that did not meet at least one of the affordability, adequacy or suitability criteria - this was a larger number of households than any other priority population group.
- e. **People with Intellectual Disabilities:** In 2016, there were 18,895 renter households who had an individual with an intellectual disability who were living in households that did not meet at least one of the affordability, adequacy or suitability criteria, which represents the third largest priority population group. The research team heard concerns regarding low staff wages, high staff turnover and recommendations for the provision of affordable housing options that would enable them to live in homes in communities, rather than in institutionalized settings.
- f. **People Dealing with Psychosocial Disabilities, including Mental Health and Addictions Issues:** In 2016, there were 15,715 renter households who had an individual dealing with a psychosocial disability living in households that did not meet at least one of the affordability, adequacy or suitability criteria. This represents the fourth largest population group. The research team heard that there is a critical need for additional mental health supports.
- g. **Indigenous Households:** Housing is needed that incorporates the needs of Indigenous residents, including multigenerational families and which reflect cultural beliefs and create space for traditional ceremonies. In 2016 there were 4,860 Indigenous renter households living in core housing need. Administration will bring forward a report on the Indigenous Affordable Housing strategy (CS00433) June 27, 2022.
- h. **Housing for LGBTQ2S+ individuals:** Quantitative (Census or other national) data was not available for individuals who identify as LGBTQ2S+. The research team, through the engagement process, heard consistent themes regarding the dire need for safe housing for LGBTQ2S+ individuals.

3. Additional Insights

Beyond the priority population groups, there were additional themes and gaps that the research team discovered through the quantitative and qualitative data that indicated other potential areas for further analysis and work (Attachment 2):

- a. **Lack of affordable units for large families:** There is a need for more multi-bedroom units that can accommodate larger families and multigenerational family arrangements. There is also a need to incorporate a broader cultural lens than the National Occupancy Standards, which imposes restrictions on use of rooms for tenants, especially those

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looking for subsidized housing and landlords that might not reflect cultural practices around housing.

- b. **Wrap-around Supports:** The research team consistently heard that there is a need for additional training and individualized wrap-around supports within existing and new affordable housing developments to help individuals to maintain their housing. Participants in Phase 2 engagement emphasized that this is needed across all priority population groups.
- c. **Person-Based Subsidies:** The research team consistently heard that there is a need for person-based subsidies – or direct-to-tenant rent subsidies – paid directly to an individual instead of being tied to a specific housing unit. Person-based subsidies provide individuals with the ability to select a specific housing unit by increasing the range of affordable options available to them.
- d. **Location Matters:** The research team consistently heard that there is a need to provide individuals and households with diverse options regarding housing location. For example, proximity to public transportation or child care may be essential for some individuals; others may want to be situated away from the downtown area.
- e. **Bridge/Transitional Housing:** The research team consistently heard that additional bridge housing/transitional housing is needed to address the emergency shelter gap for families, women and children fleeing domestic violence and youth. This was also raised as a need for newcomers, especially larger families until they find more permanent housing.
- f. **Intersectionality:** Priority population groups may be framed as exclusive categories but many people living in core housing need actually belong to multiple population groups. These multiple intersectional identities can significantly influence housing needs. Intersectional households not only tend to have increased needs and considerations, they often have fewer available housing choices.
- g. **Human-centered approach:** Finally, the research team also consistently heard that for housing to be successful, there is much more to be considered than simply four walls and a roof. A human-centered approach is required to understand all of the overlapping and compounding challenges faced by households who struggle with affording housing in Edmonton.

Next Steps

In order to complete Phase 3 of the project, Administration will engage with individuals with lived and living experiences. The results of this work will be included in the final report, which will be presented to Community and Public Services Committee at the end of September 2022.

The Housing Needs Assessment insights will inform the review and refresh of the City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Strategy, work on which has already been initiated. The Housing Needs Assessment insights will also inform the Affordable Housing Investment Plan, which will be presented to Community and Public Services Committee in Q3 2022.

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Budget/Financial Implications

Per previous direction from Council, Administration will be bringing forward the Affordable Housing Investment Plan funding requirements for consideration by Council during the 2023-2026 budget deliberations. The Investment Plan is informed by the Housing Needs Assessment insights presented in this report.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

During Phase 2, Administration worked with 47 community organizations across the housing and homelessness sector to add insights into the housing needs and challenges of the individuals they serve. These groups informed the actions and decisions made by Administration in identifying existing and projected gaps in affordable housing and will inform current and future housing strategies, investment plans and approaches. Each engagement opportunity that was undertaken as part of this work was guided by principles of inclusion and equity and was structured around learning about the housing needs of a range of Edmonton residents with a particular focus on those struggling to meet housing needs independently or through existing housing market options. Throughout the process, the research team considered equity so that these groups will be able to benefit from housing policies, programs and services.

During Phase 3, additional engagement with individuals with lived and living experiences will also be conducted by InWithForward, EndPovertyEdmonton and the Community University Partnership at the University of Alberta.

GBA+

Edmonton's Housing Needs Assessment will explore available quantitative and qualitative data to determine the overall need for affordable housing in Edmonton and how housing need disproportionately impacts different segments of Edmonton's population. Data that is disaggregated by gender, race, disability, age and other grounds can reveal patterns of structural inequality. Disaggregated data is an essential first step in redressing injustice. The population groups that were prioritized for this work were considered in order to understand the unique housing needs of each of the population groups, through a lens of inclusion and equity.

The number of Edmontonians experiencing homelessness has almost doubled since the beginning of the pandemic. Homeward Trust's By Name List serves as a real-time record of all known people currently experiencing homelessness across Edmonton. As of May 2022, there are more than 2,800 people on this list. Of those 2,800+ people, over 1,150 are either currently staying in a shelter or sleeping outdoors, with the remainder provisionally accommodated (couch-surfing, short-term housing, etc.) Despite making up only five per cent of Edmonton's overall population, over 60 per cent of these individuals are Indigenous. Of the more than 2,800 individuals experiencing homelessness, approximately 45 per cent identify as female. Women are more likely to be represented in the "hidden homeless" population. Women are less likely to use shelters, services and other services for individuals experiencing homelessness. As a result, they are often under-reported in homelessness counts.

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In addition to the ongoing barriers individuals experiencing homelessness face in accessing public services like transportation, regular and appropriate health care, food, and shelter, the identities of those individuals intersect with other equity-seeking groups. The experience of racialized and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and two-spirit plus (2SLGBTQ+) community members experiencing homelessness is uniquely challenging in that they face additional discrimination and lack of appropriate support when trying to access existing shelter, housing, and social service systems. People with disabilities and significant health challenges are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness – being homeless worsens health issues and itself is a cause of poor health and an elevated risk of death. Many services available to people experiencing homelessness are not designed to meet the needs of people with significant and complex physical and mental health challenges, including substance use disorders.

Affordable housing solutions need to be based on a good understanding of these realities, their impacts on women and other vulnerable populations, and identify a holistic approach with integrated services to meet the needs of women and 2SLGBTQ+ Edmonton residents.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Overview of Approach/Methodology
2. Affordable Housing Needs Assessment Preliminary Research Findings