

INDIGENOUS-LED SHELTERS, HOUSING AND PROGRAMMING

RECOMMENDATION

That the June 27, 2022, Community Services report CS00939, be received for information.

Report Purpose

Information only

Committee is being provided a summary of the work completed, considerations and next steps for how to increase Indigenous-led shelters, housing and programming for the 2023-2026 Budget Cycle.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 30, 2021, City Council meeting, the following motion passed:

That Administration provide a report that considers and outlines how to increase Indigenous-led shelters, housing, and programming for the 2023-2026 Budget Cycle.

Executive Summary

- The vast majority of emergency shelter spaces in Edmonton are provided by non-Indigenous, faith-based non-profit organizations. More trauma-informed, culturally diverse and low-barrier shelter options in Edmonton could result in a decrease of encampments across the city.
- The City of Edmonton's Community Safety and Well-being Task Force and the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls have both called for increased access to Indigenous-led shelter spaces for Indigenous people in general and Indigenous women in particular.
- Administration has undertaken preliminary engagement regarding the provision of Indigenous-led shelters, housing and programming. Stakeholders support the expansion of Indigenous-led programming when it comes to addressing homelessness and have expressed mixed support for Indigenous-led shelters, with a preference for more affordable housing options which can reduce and ultimately end homelessness. They also highlighted various considerations for designing and operating Indigenous-led shelters.

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- At the May 24/27, 2022, City Council meeting, Council approved \$1.0 million in one-time funding for 2022 for Administration to work with Indigenous-led community partners to develop the project scope and approach for an Indigenous-led shelter project (Community and Safety Well-Being Strategy OCM00991).
- Administration acknowledges that for this initiative to be truly Indigenous-led, the City will need to focus on outcomes for Indigenous people and be willing to maintain an openness to approaches and ideas that may or may not, in the end, look like traditional shelter or programming.
- Administration has already begun implementing several next steps resulting from the approval of this funding and will continue to engage with First Nations and Métis representatives, Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, urban Indigenous communities and organizations, and provincial and federal government representatives to ensure that key perspectives are integrated into the planning and design of Indigenous-led solutions.

REPORT

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.

Indigenous experiences of homelessness are linked to historical trauma, oppression, racism and discrimination. The abuse and cultural trauma of the residential school system, followed by the practice of removing Indigenous children from their communities through what is referred to as "the Sixties Scoop" and subsequent interventions, have contributed significantly to multigenerational instability and experiences of alienation. These practices and policies have been linked to experiences of social exclusion, familial dysfunction, substance abuse, addictions, health issues and community violence, all of which are considered direct contributors to homelessness. Indigenous people are also more likely to experience discrimination and racism during transitions from living on reserve to cities, directly affecting their ability to access and maintain housing and services.

Although Indigenous people in Canada are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing insecurity, the vast majority of emergency shelter spaces in Edmonton are provided by non-Indigenous, faith-based non-profit organizations. There is a growing recognition that culturally appropriate services can improve uptake, utilization and the success of services and supports, leading to better outcomes for service users and the health and social services sectors. Available shelter services are not accessible to many Indigenous peoples, especially those with historic or intergenerational trauma and resulting complex health needs. The relative lack of

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trauma-informed, culturally diverse and low-barrier shelter options in Edmonton is a contributing factor to the rise of homeless encampments across the city.

Improvements To The Existing Emergency Shelter System

As a result of the challenges described above and with previous direction provided by City Council over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Administration has undertaken efforts to contribute to an improved emergency shelter system.

In 2021, Council approved the Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards to support existing emergency shelters to become more accessible, housing-focused and better able to provide appropriate supports, such as Indigenous cultural services. While the reception of the Standards have been positive, existing operators have indicated that full adoption and implementation of the Standards would require additional resources. The June 27, 2022, Community Services report CS00796, City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards - Education and Communications Update, contains the details of the work that has been completed on the Standards.

The Province of Alberta's Ministry of Community and Social Services administers funding agreements to shelter operators across the province. To date, representatives from the Ministry have indicated that the Standards will be integrated into their expectations for operators as much as possible. At this point, there is no additional provincial funding is available to expand services or shelter spaces.

Indigenous-led Shelter Project

Although the City's role in emergency shelter operations was limited prior to the pandemic, the demand for services has significantly challenged existing systems, including the homeless serving system of care, the health care system, justice and law enforcement services and the City's encampment response. Further impacts have been felt by residents and businesses as well, in particular in downtown and core neighbourhoods. These extremely challenging conditions and mounting pressures, along with no new commitments for new shelter funding, have led to City Council direction to explore how an Indigenous-led shelter may be enabled to serve as an additional pathway to housing for Indigenous people in Edmonton.

Edmonton does not currently have any Indigenous-led emergency shelter facilities. The disproportionate representation of Indigenous people who are unsheltered and living in encampments is a complex structural problem with significant impacts. The City of Edmonton is committed to eliminating the systemic racism and discrimination faced by Indigenous people, and doing so in an inclusive and respectful manner that includes Indigenous worldviews and supports Indigenous people to take a leadership role. This approach reflects the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice. It is further endorsed by Edmonton's Community Well-Being and Safety Task Force, which identified that culturally-appropriate, Indigenous-led emergency shelter and housing pathways are needed to reduce demand on police services and provide accessible support for Indigenous peoples. Such work also supports the recently approved Community Safety and Well Being Strategy (May 16, 2022 City Council report OCM0991) which prioritized an Indigenous-led shelter.

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While the City is keen to support the development of Indigenous-led shelters, it is critical to acknowledge that truly Indigenous-led solutions will require a willingness and openness to creative and non-traditional approaches and ideas. It is also important to first understand the capacity and priorities of existing Indigenous-led organizations and stakeholders and to seek their perspectives and wisdom on pursuing Indigenous-led solutions. The comparable work and results from other municipalities will be helpful to understand as well, since the challenges faced in Edmonton are mirrored in other jurisdictions.

Administration has developed a three phase approach for this Indigenous-led shelters project.

1. Phase 1 - Jurisdictional Scan (Attachment 1) - Complete
2. Phase 2 - Stakeholder engagements (Attachment 2) - Complete
3. Phase 3 - Additional engagements, research and report development - Underway

Phase 1

The first phase, undertaken in January and February 2022, provided a greater understanding of Indigenous-led shelter, housing and programming initiatives present in Canada and other similar jurisdictions. The results of the scan are well-aligned with the results from the engagement in Phase 2.

Phase 2

The second phase, from March to April 2022, invited stakeholders to participate in one-on-one conversations with Administration. Overall, participants had mixed reactions to the idea of creating Indigenous-led shelter and programming in Edmonton, especially to the idea of increasing shelter spaces. Participants were unequivocal in underscoring the need for more affordable and supportive housing over that of expanding shelters to address homelessness. Indigenous non-profit housing providers were divided in their interest and involvement in creating and operating emergency shelters.

Participants were also unclear on what might constitute Indigenous-led. Areas for further consideration are outlined below. An expanded summary of these themes is available in Attachment 2.

- Co-create solutions to end homelessness with Indigenous communities.
- Recognize that the emergency shelter system may not align well with Indigenous worldviews.
- Define what “Indigenous-led” means and what practical implications of this definition are.
- Recognize, respect and integrate Indigenous cultural diversity.
- Mitigate potential harms of incorporating Indigenous-led services in the current emergency shelter system.
- Address community concerns over commodifying Indigenous cultural services.
- Do not assume existing Indigenous organizations are interested and/or have the capacity to operate emergency shelters without additional resources.
- Consider and avoid potential unintended consequences.

Preliminary insights into participants’ vision/preferences for Indigenous-led shelters, temporary housing options and programming are reported in Attachment 2, including elements such as site

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considerations, funding, governance and staffing, service approach and program offerings, safety considerations and transportation needs. Participants also expressed a strong preference for not locating Indigenous-led shelters in the downtown core.

Non-Indigenous participants, especially existing shelter operators, expressed a strong desire to collaborate with Indigenous organizations to build Indigenous capacity in their organizations and to offer appropriate cultural services to Indigenous clients.

Through the engagement, participants expressed a preference for the City to play multiple roles in supporting Indigenous pathways out of homelessness. Some examples include:

- Developing a range of affordable housing options to accommodate different needs of individuals experiencing homelessness;
- Brokering and supporting partnerships to build community capacity to develop Indigenous pathways out of homelessness; and
- Funding to expand the Community Outreach Transit Team and integrate Indigenous cultural programming in the current emergency shelter system.

Phase 3

At the May 24/27, 2022, City Council meeting, Council approved \$1.0 million in one-time funding for 2022 for Administration to work with Indigenous-led community partners to develop the project scope and outcomes and complete a functional program site location analysis (OCM00991). Administration will engage with First Nations and Métis representatives, Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, urban Indigenous communities and organizations, and provincial and federal government representatives to ensure that key perspectives are integrated into the planning and design phase of this work. The emphasis for engagement will be on listening to participants and partners of this work to understand the needs and potential solutions that are best suited to a successful Indigenous-led approach. This work will require striking a balance between making progress to address urgent needs and taking the time to build effective, long term relationships to ensure the success of any future Indigenous-led solutions.

The following summary of Phase 3 activities comprise Administration's next steps:

- Engagement planning has already been initiated and Phase 3 engagement activities will begin this Spring. They are expected to continue throughout 2022.
- Other overlapping engagement activities for Phase 3 scheduled for summer 2022 include engaging individuals with lived experience of homelessness, which will inform the City's encampment response evaluation and Housing Needs Assessment. Associated Council reports are expected in fall 2022 and will provide further insights into the needs and gaps for Indigenous people and the implications for an Indigenous-led shelter.
- Further research and analysis with representatives from other Canadian jurisdictions which have recently created Indigenous-led shelters (such as Calgary, London and Whitehorse) to identify potential lessons learned and best practices that may apply to the unique Edmonton context.
- Administration will explore the development of Indigenous support programming, which would support the implementation of the Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards and the

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strategy recommendations from the June 27, 2022, Indigenous Affordable Housing Strategy report (CS00433).

- Administration will also work with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Indigenous Services Canada and other provincial and federal government representatives to leverage relevant programs and funding opportunities:
 - Federal Budget 2018 announced \$1.5 billion for distinction-based Indigenous housing strategies that would be delivered by Indigenous Services Canada: \$600 million over three years to support co-development of a First Nations Housing Strategy along with First Nations; \$400 million over 10 years to support an Inuit-led housing plan in the Inuit regions of Nunavik, Nunatsiavut, and Inuvialuit; and \$500 million over 10 years to support the Metis Nation's housing strategy.
 - In fall 2021, the Federal Government through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation announced \$724.1 million to expand supports for Indigenous women, children and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people escaping gender-based violence, as well as transitional homes (in addition to emergency shelters) across Canada. As part of this, Indigenous Services Canada will invest \$304.1 million over five years and \$96.6 million annually to support the operational costs of new shelters and transitional homes, and will expand funding for culturally-relevant violence prevention activities.
 - Federal Budget 2021 announced a \$1.5 billion expansion of the Rapid Housing Initiative that would be used to build 6,000 affordable homes starting in 2022-23 (Phase 1 announced \$1 billion in 2020 for RHI funding; nearly 40 per cent of the approved Phase 1 Rapid Housing Initiative projects are for Indigenous projects).
 - Budget 2022 announced \$300 million over five years to co-develop and launch an Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy.
 - The Government of Alberta has committed a total of \$40.7 million over three years to their Indigenous Housing Capital Program that is focused on increasing the supply of affordable housing units for Indigenous peoples in need through construction (including additions/extensions), purchase and repurpose.

Budget/Financial Implications

At the May 24/27, 2022, City Council meeting, Council approved \$1.0 million in one-time funding for 2022 for Administration to work with Indigenous-led community partners to develop the project scope and outcomes and complete a functional program site location analysis (OCM00991). Together, these deliverables would inform next steps for design and delivery of the facility, including budget and schedule estimates which would be presented to Council at a future date. Administration will continue to advocate to the provincial and federal governments for related investments.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Administration worked with community stakeholders to identify possible shelter, service, and outreach gaps for Indigenous individuals experiencing homelessness. Stakeholders included

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Métis Housing, Indigenous housing and social service organizations, social service operators of outreach, homeless-servicing organizations including shelters providers and mutual aid groups, Homeward Trust, members of local Indigenous community and other stakeholders such as the Human-Centered Engagement and Liaison Partnership Unit and Edmonton Police Service's Police and Crisis Team and High Risk Encampment Team. These groups informed the actions and decisions made by Administration in exploring ways the City can increase Indigenous-led shelters and programs to ensure every Indigenous Edmontonian has access to a safe space and services to meet their basic needs.

GBA+

In addition to the ongoing barriers people experiencing homelessness face in accessing public services like transportation, basic hygiene, regular and appropriate health care, food, and shelter, the identities of those individuals also intersect with other equity-seeking groups, who may face additional structural barriers to their housing security and well-being. For example, experience of racialized and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and 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.

As a limited funder of the homeless-serving sector, the City endeavours to include contractual provisions in its agreements with agencies to best ensure the removal of barriers to access for vulnerable persons experiencing homelessness.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Jurisdictional Scan/Research Overview
2. Engagement Approach and Findings