

HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE STRATEGY - SUPPLEMENTAL SHELTER PLAN 2022 TO 2024

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the October 17, 2022, Community Services report CS01536, be received for information.
2. That Attachment 1 of the October 17, 2022, Community Services report CS01536 remain private pursuant to sections 24 (advice from officials) and 27 (privileged information) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Requested Council Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	LIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the future		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	A short list of the most relevant items, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C620 - Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions 		
Related Council Discussions	A short list of Council discussions and/or short-form pending motions related to the Item (include the meeting type and date): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CS01278, Homeless and Encampment Response Strategy - Update, Community and Public Services Committee, October 11, 2022 • CE01417, Intergovernmental Update, City Council, Sept 12/Oct 3/Oct 7, 2022 • CS01347, Small scale sanctioned encampments, City Council, July 4, 2022 • CS00796 City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards, City Council, June 27, 2022 		

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- OCM00991 Community Safety and Well-Being Strategy, Community and Public Services Strategy, May 16, 2022
- CS01225 Homelessness and Encampment Response Strategy, City Council, April 25, 2022
- CS00506 - Emergency Shelter Standards and Operating Requirements, City Council, August 25, 2021

Executive Summary

- Homelessness in Edmonton has increased dramatically over the past two years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic pressures.
- In 2019, City Council approved City Policy C620 - Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions, which provides direction for the City to supplement and support the existing homeless-serving system during extreme weather (extreme heat, cold or poor air quality).
- In preparation for the 2022/23 winter season, the Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton have identified a number of activities to support Edmontonians experiencing homelessness. This report provides an update on those plans.

REPORT

Background

As of October 12, 2022, Homeward Trust's By Name List indicates that more than 2,650 Edmontonians are experiencing homelessness. Of those on the list, over 1,300 people self-identify as primarily sleeping in emergency shelters or outdoors. Existing service providers have been challenged to meet increased demand within current facilities and budgets.

Prior to the pandemic, the City of Edmonton's role in emergency shelter provision was limited to the provision of overflow shelter space during extreme weather periods only. With the onset of the public health emergency caused by COVID-19, the City of Edmonton took on a larger role by working with the Government of Alberta and other partners to ensure the adequate provision of emergency shelter space. Shortly after the public health emergency was declared, the City supported the activation of a day shelter at the EXPO Centre and overnight shelters at Central Lions Seniors Centre and Kinsmen Recreation Centre. For the past two winters (2020/21 and 2021/22), temporary shelters were activated at City-owned facilities, including at the Edmonton Convention Centre, Spectrum building at Exhibition Lands and Commonwealth Stadium. The City of Edmonton has also directly funded and provided in-kind support to emergency shelters and other homeless-serving agencies when necessary to help meet the growing demand for services.

Current State

The lifting of pandemic restrictions in early 2022 meant that there are now 622 permanently funded emergency shelter spaces in Edmonton. Both the Government of Alberta and City Administration have agreed this level of shelter spaces is insufficient for winter 2022/23.

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In response to the need for additional supports and shelter spaces, both the Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton have been working collaboratively on a plan for winter 2022/23 and winter 2023/24. This partnership has resulted in a number of commitments, described below. Additional considerations for Council are provided in Attachment 1.

Government of Alberta Winter 2022/23 and 2023/24 Response

On October 1, 2022, the Government of Alberta released *Alberta's Homelessness Action Plan*. In addition to commitments towards system modernization and better alignment with the Council-approved Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards, the plan includes five commitments for Edmonton:

1. Creating 450 additional temporary emergency shelter spaces for winter 2022/23 and winter 2023/24.
 - a. This will increase shelter spaces in Edmonton to 1,072 total spaces during the winter months
2. Expanding all provincially funded shelters to 24/7 access.
3. Piloting a service hub model at shelters, focused on recovery, housing and emergency financial support.
4. Equalizing funding between community-based organizations in Edmonton and Calgary.
5. Improving data collection and reporting to support innovation, inform decision-making and better understand homelessness.

City of Edmonton Winter 2022/23 and 2023/24 Response

In anticipation of the increased needs for Edmontonians experiencing homelessness, the City of Edmonton is planning or has underway a number of key activities to provide additional supports this winter. These include, but are not limited to:

Extreme Weather Bus

Administration is currently making preparations to operate an Extreme Weather Bus, which is an overnight transportation service that operates during extreme weather events to transport people from central locations to shelters. This service is provided in partnership with ETS (Charter Bus and Operators) and Community Standards and Neighbourhoods (Transit Peace Officers), with outreach workers from agency partners. Funding for this work is accommodated within the City's existing operating budget.

Boyle Street Community Service's Outreach Bus

Administration will extend funding again to Boyle Street Community Services' Winter Warming Bus from November 1, 2022 to May 31, 2023. This bus operates a regular day-time route that focuses on providing people experiencing homelessness in areas outside the central core, a space to warm up, access to supplies essential for survival (blankets, winter clothing and health supplies) and provide connections to housing and other services. Funding for this work is to be accommodated within the City's existing operating budget.

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Extension of Bissell Day Services Contract

During the October 7, 2022 City Council meeting, Council approved \$2.66 million for the purpose of entering into a subsidy agreement with Bissell Centre for day services in their Community Space until May 31, 2022 (CE01382). The funding enables Bissell Centre to operate seven days per week, ten hours per day. The Community Space functions as a service hub, where participants can access a constellation of supports, including: basic needs (laundry, showers, meals, and community closet, Indigenous Cultural supports, housing supports, and other support services (medical, mental health and addictions, etc).

Provincial Government Funded Shelter Support

The Government of Alberta has communicated to Administration that they will continue to keep the City informed on its winter shelter plan and Administration will continue to support the Government of Alberta on rollout planning, such as support with permitting/zoning and assistance with neighbourhood engagement.

Potential Additional Activities

Administration will work with its partners to continue to monitor shelter capacity and other related impacts throughout the coming months and may propose further strategies for ensuring the safety of vulnerable Edmontonians in response to changing conditions or unforeseen circumstances that may emerge this winter.

Budget/Financial Implications

Funding, as required, to activate the Extreme Weather Bus is through existing funds available within the 2022 Social Development branch operating budget for this activity.

One time funding of \$288,367 to Boyle Street Community Services to operate the Outreach Bus will be accommodated using existing funds within the previously approved Social Development 2022 operating budget.

The Government of Alberta provides operational funding only (see Attachment 1), therefore facility capital and site set-up costs may be required to allow existing operators to expand their facilities.

One time funding of \$2.66 million to Bissell Centre to allow for extended operating hours and day services in their Community Space until May 31, 2023 was previously approved at City Council on October 7, 2022 using COVID-19 funds previously appropriated within the Financial Stabilization Reserve.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Administration works with community stakeholders to address shelter and service gaps for individuals experiencing homelessness in preparation for winter. Stakeholders include Homeward Trust and homeless-serving organizations, including shelters, day shelter providers, and those who deliver outreach services. These groups informed the actions and decisions made by

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Administration, which prioritizes City efforts to augment existing services to ensure every vulnerable person has access to a safe space to meet their basic needs.

GBA+

As of October 12, 2022 Homeward Trust's By Name List indicates that there are more than 2,650 people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton. Of those 2,650+ people, over 1,300 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, roughly 60 per cent of these Edmontonians are Indigenous. Of the more than 2,650 individuals experiencing homelessness, approximately 45 per cent identify as female.

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 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. People with disabilities and significant health challenges are over-represented among those experiencing homelessness – being homeless also worsens health issues and creates an elevated risk of new health issues and 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.

As a 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. Overview of Winter 2022/23 and Winter 2023/24 Considerations - PRIVATE