

EDMONTON'S APPROACH (2023/24) - SUPPORTING THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

RECOMMENDATION

That the May 1, 2023 Community Services report CS01762, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Decision required		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C620 - Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CS01637 Enhanced Encampment and Unsheltered Homelessness Response Plan, April 11, 2023, Community and Public Services Committee CS01536 Homelessness Response Strategy - Supplemental Shelter Plan 2022 - 2024, October 17, 2022, City Council CS01603 Update on Emergency Shelter Space in Edmonton, November 30, 2022, City Council Budget 		

Executive Summary

- City Policy C620 - Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions formalizes the City's role in ensuring a systematic response to extreme weather conditions in

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order to safeguard the health and lives of vulnerable Edmontonians. The City's implementation of this policy has evolved significantly in recent years in response to the marked increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton and in response to direction from City Council.

- Administration has extended the bridge/transitional housing portion of the West End Shelter (former Bedford Inn) operation for up to seven months. The operator is forecasting funding will provide four months of operations (up to September 30, 2023). As the project currently has unspent funds, no further funding is required to do this. The original agreement term was approved by City Council on November 30, 2022 through Community Services report CS01603.
- For Winter 2023/23 Administration plans to implement a base level of supports using its existing budget allocation. However, the results of the 2022/23 winter season have also been used to provide early information about service options for supporting those experiencing homelessness that could be considered during 2023/24 winter season, such as augmenting day shelter spaces and increasing City investment to add additional bridge/transitional housing spaces. Information about day services subsidy agreements that are expiring this Spring has also been included should City Council wish to consider extension of these services. Council may also wish to consider advocacy to the Government of Alberta for investment in additional services prior to committing additional City funds, however unless a firm deadline for confirmation of funding decisions is set the window for implementing new services could close.
- An evaluation of who is best suited to run the ongoing cold weather transportation services will also be undertaken, considering social sector partnerships, City run service and contracted models.
- A broader strategic plan for Edmonton's role in homelessness will be presented during the October 30, 2023 Community and Public Services Committee report CS01853- Updated Community Plan to End Homelessness and the Q1 2024 Community and Public Services Committee report CS01759 - City of Edmonton - Corporate Homelessness Plan.
- Homelessness can only be reduced through affordable housing and adequate health and support services. Investments made in short term solutions may reduce the opportunities for investment in long term solutions, however, it is important to ensure an adequate crisis response exists to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

REPORT

Edmonton is a leader among Canadian cities in its response to homelessness. Since 2008, over 15,500 people have been housed through Housing First programs and overall homelessness fell by 45 per cent between 2008 and 2018. This momentum was significantly impacted by the economic shock and stressors related to the global COVID-19 pandemic as well as the combined impacts of a structural shortage of affordable housing and a significant gap in mental health and addiction care. Edmonton, like most cities across North America, has experienced a rise in the number of people sleeping outside.

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Since 2019, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton has nearly doubled¹. Homeless-serving agencies have struggled to keep up with the increased demand for more services and the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness has also grown. Between 2016 and 2022, encampment-related requests for service to 311 increased by 1,075 per cent, from 790 inquiries in 2016 to 9,300 in 2022. Part of the growth in unsheltered homelessness can be attributed to the inability of Edmonton's emergency shelter system to adequately meet the needs of those who require their services.

City Policy C620 - Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions formalizes the City's role in ensuring a systematic response to extreme weather conditions in order to safeguard the health and lives of Edmontonians who are vulnerable. Administration has a range of supports to address the intent of the policy. These plans are developed in consultation with the Government of Alberta, Homeward Trust, emergency shelters and the homeless-serving sector. In previous years, the City's plans have been finalized following the confirmation of funding and facilities from other partners in the early to late fall. The Government of Alberta's October 1, 2022 announcement of \$5 million per year in winter emergency funding for a period covering two winters (Winter 2022/23 and 2023/24) combined with more recent announcements regarding the expansion of its shelter hub program and 24/7 shelter hours, provides additional clarity and allows for confirmation of City plans this spring.

Attachment 1 provides a summary of activities in place for Winter 2022/23 while Attachment 2 outlines options for supporting vulnerable Edmontonians through to spring of 2024.

Winter 2022/23 Overview

The City's 2022/23 winter response to support Edmontonians experiencing homelessness focused on a number of key activities, noted below, with a total approximate cost of \$14.1 million.

Emergency Shelter

According to Homeward Trust's By Name List, over the winter of 2022/23, between 2,650 and 2,800 Edmontonians were experiencing homelessness at any one time. Of those on the list, between 1,250 and 1,350 people self-identified as primarily sleeping in emergency shelters or outdoors.²

Over the course of the winter approximately 1,202 emergency shelter spaces were made available by the Government of Alberta, including 627 permanent and 575 temporary emergency shelter spaces. In addition to the 1,202 Government of Alberta funded shelter spaces, the Al Rashid Mosque provided up to 75 shelter spaces during extreme weather activations and the West End Shelter (former Bedford Inn), funded by the City, provided up to 150 shelter spaces.

The Government of Alberta funded shelters were routinely at over 70 per cent capacity during non-extreme weather times and over 75 per cent capacity during extreme weather events. While the shelter system never exceeded capacity during winter 2022/23, large numbers of vulnerable

¹ "Data, Analytics & Reporting". <https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting/>. Homeward Trust. Cited April 6, 2023.

² "Data, Analytics & Reporting". <https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting/>. Homeward Trust. Cited April 6, 2023.

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Edmontonians were still found to be sheltering in transit facilities. Between January 1 and February 28, 2023, an average of 225 individuals were removed from ETS facilities during nightly lock-up procedures, with an average of 106 individuals refusing transportation to shelter on the shuttle bus per night, when offered during weather-related responses.

Extreme Weather Activations

The City of Edmonton operated an augmented version of its extreme weather response, which was designed to respond to the incidences of people sheltering in transit facilities and ensure all people experiencing homelessness had safe and consistent access to emergency shelter spaces. These activities included:

- ETS Extreme Weather Buses - two buses that operated as shuttles on designated routes to transport vulnerable Edmontonians to shelters. These routes were activated overnight when the weather fell below -20°C including windchill for a period of at least 72 hours.
- The Boyle Street Warming Bus - provided basic necessities and services and transport to shelters and operated every day regardless of weather conditions.
- Shelter Spaces - supported up to 75 shelter spaces at Al Rashid Mosque.
- Encampment Response - encampment response teams conducted wellness checks and only addressed high-risk encampments.
- City Facilities - City of Edmonton recreation facilities and Edmonton Public Library locations were open for warming purposes during regular hours of operation.

Connecting People Experiencing Homelessness in ETS Facilities to Supports

In the 2022/23 winter season, Administration also enacted an additional response outside of extreme weather activations that included:

- Winter response - one bus operated on call to respond to needs identified by transit peace officers or through monitoring ETS security cameras when the weather fell between -10°C and -20°C .
- Daily well being checks of Edmontonians experiencing homelessness in ETS facilities, including access to crisis diversion, well being and medical aid, Community Outreach Transit Team resources and referrals to social services.
- ETS station nightly lock up support - ensuring those who may not have the capacity to look after their own well being were connected with crisis diversion, Emergency Medical Services or any other available form of transportation when ETS stations are locked nightly.

West End Shelter (former Bedford Inn)

The City provided \$7.5 million from the Financial Stabilization Reserve in funding for a proposal from Jasper Place Wellness Centre, who collaborated with Tallcree Tribal Government (legal entity - Tipeemso Development Limited Partnership), for 150 congregate shelter spaces and 59 units of single-occupancy transition housing. The site provided 24/7 staffing and security, meals, overdose response, and housing supports. Bridge/transitional housing spaces have been well used, with

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full occupancy since the beginning of March. Shelter space occupancy has varied, but over time has reached up to 80 to 85 per cent capacity, even during non-extreme weather periods.

Day Services

During Winter 2022/23, Edmonton had 280 day shelter spaces, 627 permanently funded 24/7 shelter spaces, and 90 temporarily funded 24/7 shelter spaces, for a total of 997 24/7 spaces.

During a four month period this winter, there were 33,473 visits made by vulnerable people to the Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) for an average of 279 per day. Administration is funding Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) and Bissell Centre, as highlighted below, to augment their day shelter operational hours and programming. These agreements expire shortly.

For 2022/23, the City provided funding towards a number of services and supports to those experiencing homelessness that will be expiring in Spring 2023. These agreements include:

- **Day Shelter Services Spaces** - Ongoing needs exist in day shelter services.
 - Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) was allocated \$750,000 in funding from the City to support the provision of expanded day service capacity and programming at its day service operation for the winter months, as well as temporary operation of a mobile shower trailer in an adjoining courtyard area, until April 30, 2023, with funding through existing budget.
 - Bissell Centre was allocated \$2,660,000 in funding from the City to provide day services for extended hours, 10 hours per day, seven days per week, until May 31, 2023, with funding through the COVID-19 funds appropriated within the Financial Stabilization Reserve.

Sufficient day services for people who are experiencing homelessness has been identified as a gap in the homeless-serving system of care that will be further widened when both of these agreements expire. The absence of these agreements will leave a critical gap in supports and services for people experiencing homelessness. While the recommendation for this report focuses on extending the subsidy funding agreement with Jasper Place Wellness Centre for extended provision of bridge/transitional housing, there is no funding source available for the day services agreement renewals.

Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) has existing funding in place to operate their day services eight hours per day, five days a week. Boyle Street Community Services (The Boyle Street Service Society) has requested City funding for expanded hours for winter 2023/24. Bissell Centre is also seeking additional City funding to continue its operations as a service hub year round and would only be able to continue operating three hours per day, five days per week with minimal support services unless alternate funding is secured.

West End Shelter (former Bedford Inn)

Funding for the bridge/transitional housing and congregate shelter spaces has been extended from an original expiry date of May 31, 2023 to December 31, 2023.

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- Jasper Place Wellness Centre will continue the bridge/transitional housing spaces for an extended time period but not the congregate shelter spaces. Administration will support Jasper Place Wellness Centre on a transition plan for current occupants if an agreement extension is not supported.
- At the time of the writing of this report, unspent funds from the initial agreement and originally approved funding of \$7.5 million are estimated to be up to \$1.9 million by the end of May 31, 2023.
- Jasper Place Wellness Centre is forecasting funding will provide four months of operations (until September 30, 2023), however, they may be able to operate longer, potentially to the end of 2023. The agreement extension allows the bridge/transitional housing spaces to operate up to December 31, 2023 should funds remain.

Options for Supporting Those Experiencing Homelessness (Winter 2023/2024)

Administration has identified several options for supporting those experiencing homelessness, including a base set of activities for summer 2023 and winter 2023/24, with optional activities that would augment day shelter supports or increase City investment in bridge housing. Attachment 2 provides detailed information on these options.

Base Level of Supports Using Current Budget Allocation

This level of service would include the continuation of some winter 2022/23 support activities, namely the extreme weather activations, base support for people experiencing homelessness in ETS facilities and support for Government of Alberta funded shelters with transportation, permitting assistance, etc. An evaluation of who is best suited to run the transportation service will be undertaken, considering social sector partnerships, City run service and contracted models. This level of support does not include additional activities such as Administration's shigella response, day shelter funding, or overtime funding for transit operators and transit Peace Officers.

This base level of support would have access to a base budget funding of \$1 million for extreme weather response and \$0.25 million in available one-time operational funding (carry-forward of 2022 unspent funds) for a total of \$1.25 million for winter 2023/24.

Potential Supplemental Activities

If City Council is interested in pursuing any of the following supplemental options, Administration will need clear direction now so that the appropriate planning can take place over the summer and fall months. This would include determining the appropriate costs for the options and the required funding sources that would need to be approved prior to winter 2023/2024. Administration will return to the Fall SOBA budget discussions with more detailed plans for activation and required funding. Any, or all, of the following additional activities could supplement the base level of support to vulnerable Edmontonians with additional City funding. The costs are based on estimates and are subject to change. Funding requirements will be refined for future budget decisions as necessary.

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- Day shelter supports - \$3.79 million (Bissell Centre - June 2023 to April 2024; Boyle Street November 2023 to April 2024), to support extended hours of operations.
- Bridge housing - \$11 to \$13 million (per year)
 - Administration will continue to work closely with the Government of Alberta to determine any additional funding opportunities that may exist for winter 2023/2024 that could be applied towards day services or bridge housing spaces, beyond the 24/7 spaces funding that has been included in current shelters and any funding that may have been provided to Homeward Trust for bridge housing. The window of opportunity to seize potential funding opportunities for additional day service and bridge housing spaces will be small, acknowledging that the May provincial election will likely delay planning conversations with the Government of Alberta.
 - Administration will also work with Homeward Trust to identify additional 200 shelter and housing spaces, such as continuous stay shelter or bridge housing. Homeward Trust operated bridge housing sites in Edmonton had an average length of stay in 2022 of 105 days. As a caveat, unique circumstances at some of the sites, may have had an impact on the length of stay of some of these participants.
- Supplemental transportation services, such as transportation to shelters, increased shuttle buses, additional Transit Peace Officer staff to support operations and transit centre lock-ups for people experiencing homelessness in ETS facilities.
 - Costs to be identified once evaluation and planning work complete.

Of the supplemental activities, congregate shelter spaces have not been included for future City investment. Instead, Administration has focused on targeted interventions that may enable the system to better meet the needs of people whose needs are not well met by existing services (e.g. bridge housing geared to women).

Budget/Financial Implications

On November 30, 2022, City Council - budget approved one-time funding of \$7.5 million from the Financial Stabilization Reserve, to be spent on a multi-year basis (2022 and 2023), in relation to bridge/transition housing and shelter spaces at the West End Shelter (the former Bedford Inn) for up to a six month period of operations (December 1, 2022 to May 31, 2023). This agreement has since been extended to December 31, 2023. The subsidy funding agreement was signed in December 2022, but as funds were unable to be released until 2023, the full \$7.5 million was requested for carry forward from 2022 to 2023 which Council approved on March 14, 2022.

Jasper Place Wellness Centre is currently estimating that up to \$1.9 million of the originally approved \$7.5 million will remain unspent at the end of the original six month period of operations, on May 31, 2023. The \$1.9 million is already committed by way of an executed subsidy agreement with Jasper Place Wellness Centre, and would be available to fund the extension of the subsidy funding agreement with Jasper Place Wellness Centre for the continued provision of bridge/transition housing up to December 31, 2023. The available funding is forecast to support the bridge housing until September 30, 2023. In the event that funding is able to support operations for a longer period of time, and to avoid returning for another extension, Administration has extended the funding of project operations up to a maximum time period to December 31, 2023. This will create flexibility in the agreement to best align the continued

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support of project operations with the exact end date to match the exhaustion of the remaining funds originally awarded on the contract.

Currently, there is \$1.25 million of funding available for the 2023/24 winter response including a mixture of dedicated ongoing funding for Extreme Weather Response (\$1.0 million) and one-time carryforward of funding from 2022 (\$0.25 million). The funds will be used for extreme and cold weather activations, support for GoA-funded shelters, and an evaluation of transportation service as further detailed in Attachment 2.

The estimated costs for unfunded additional potential supplemental activities are discussed in the report and further explained in Attachment 2. Potential funding sources for an enhanced Winter 2023/24 response include Community Safety Well-being funds held within Financial Strategies or new funding requests through the 2023 Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment process, which may include reallocation of tax-levy to unfunded priorities through the OP12 work currently underway. The funding could be provided on an ongoing basis, or one-time basis, or a combination, depending on the City's financial capacity.

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 perspectives informed the actions and decisions made by Administration, to ensure every vulnerable person has access to a safe space to meet their basic needs.

GBA+

Every person experiencing homelessness is unique. There is no one way into homelessness and there is no one way out. The overall population is incredibly diverse in terms of age, gender, ethno-racial background and educational attainment. However, of those individuals currently experiencing homelessness, 58 per cent³ identify as indigenous.

Administration is committed to increasing indigenous representation in the services provided by the City. To this end, the City funded Jasper Place Wellness Centre in respect of the bridge/transitional housing and shelter spaces, which involves a collaboration with Tipeemso Development Limited Partnership. The City is also exploring an indigenous led shelter and just launched an Indigenous Housing Grant program.

In Edmonton, the number of people experiencing homelessness has dramatically increased over the last couple of years, nearly doubling from 2019 to 2022.⁴ When it comes to public safety, people experiencing homelessness are generally at an increased risk for victimization from both within the community and outside of it.

³ "Data, Analytics & Reporting". <https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting/>. Homeward Trust. Cited April 6, 2023.

⁴ "Data, Analytics & Reporting". <https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting/>. Homeward Trust. Cited April 6, 2023.

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Historically, 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians, as well as other at-risk groups, including youth, seniors, Indigenous People, newcomers, and/or people with mental health or addiction issues have accounted for a large percentage of Canadians who are homeless, at risk of being homeless, or in core housing need.⁵In Edmonton, consistent with national research, Indigenous adults and youth experience a higher rate of unsheltered homelessness, compared to non-Indigenous adults and youth. Indigenous women experiencing homelessness face significant risks of both physical violence and sexual assault⁶.

People living in encampments have relatively high rates of complex health needs but face barriers in accessing timely, consistent and appropriate health care. While there is limited local data on the mortality rate from homelessness, research shows that people experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of opioid poisoning and contracting communicable diseases such as COVID-19 and most recently, Shigella.

In the colder months of the year, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are at increased risk of fire injury or death.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Overview of Winter 2022/23 Supports for Edmontonians Experiencing Homelessness
2. Overview of Options

⁵ "2SLGBTQIA+ Housing Needs and Challenges."

<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/blog/2022/2slgbtqia-housing-needs-challenges>. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Cited March 7, 2023.

⁶ Heidinger, Loanna. *Violent victimization and perceptions of safety: Experiences of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit women in Canada*. Statistics Canada. April 26, 2022.