

## CORPORATE HOMELESSNESS PLAN - RESEARCH AND PROJECT UPDATE

### RECOMMENDATION

That the May 31, 2023, Community Services report CS01732, be received for information.

<b>Requested Council Action</b>	Information Only		
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals</b>		
<b>CONNECTED</b> This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	<b>Healthy City</b>		
<b>City Plan Values</b>	LIVE		
<b>City Plan Big City Move(s)</b>	Inclusive and compassionate	<b>Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities</b>	Community safety and well-being
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	Serving Edmontonians		
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Municipal Response Plan</li> <li>• Anti-Racism Strategy</li> <li>• City of Edmonton Indigenous Framework</li> <li>• Community Safety and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness Update</li> <li>• Updated Affordable Housing Strategy</li> </ul>		
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OCA01289, City's Response to Homelessness Audit, Audit Committee, June 17, 2022</li> <li>• CS01089, Update on Housing Needs Assessment, Community and Public Services Committee, June 27, 2022</li> <li>• CS00939, Indigenous-led Shelters, Housing and Programming, Community and Public Services Committee, June 27, 2022</li> <li>• CS00433, Indigenous Affordable Housing Strategy, Community and Public Services Committee, June 27, 2022</li> <li>• OCM01477, Truth &amp; Reconciliation Commission Implementation Plan Update, City Council, October 31, 2022</li> <li>• CS01218, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Action Plan,</li> </ul>		

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Community and Public Services Committee, November 21, 2022

- CS01637, Enhanced Encampment and Unsheltered Homelessness Response Plan, Community and Public Services Committee, April 11, 2023
- CS01762, Edmonton's Approach (2023/24) - Supporting Those Experiencing Homelessness, Community and Public Services Committee, May 1, 2023
- Upcoming - CS01673, Updated Affordable Housing Strategy, Community and Public Services Committee, October 30, 2023

### Executive Summary

- Findings from a jurisdictional scan and public opinion research will inform the development of the City of Edmonton's first Corporate Homelessness Plan.
- The Corporate Homelessness Plan is one of three interconnected strategic documents being developed, alongside the Updated Affordable Housing Strategy and the Updated Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness.
- Homeward Trust Foundation is the federally designated Community Entity and provincial Community Based Organization responsible for the management and coordination of funding from all orders to government.
- The City of Edmonton's pre-pandemic houselessness response consisted primarily of funding and planning support to Homeward Trust and the homeless serving sector, in addition to contributing land and funding for affordable housing development, in particular supportive housing.
- A Corporate Homelessness Plan will clarify the most suitable and effective role for the City in preventing and ending houselessness, alongside Homeward Trust and other service partners. The plan will evaluate the impact of City-funded initiatives and create clear lines of responsibility and accountability for the City's houselessness work.
- A jurisdictional scan found that many other Canadian municipalities do not have a corporate homelessness plan or strategy that includes accountability and evaluation processes, however, many see potential value in creating a plan.
- Public opinion research found that Edmontonians perceive houselessness as a municipal government/City of Edmonton responsibility and indicated substantial support for increased investments in long-term prevention efforts. These efforts would result in solutions that can help reduce unsheltered or visible houselessness.
- Administration will return with a draft Corporate Homelessness Plan in Q1 2024.

### REPORT

On June 17, 2022, the Office of the City Auditor presented the City's Response to Homelessness Audit (Report OCA01289). The report, recognizing the increase in houselessness and expansion of the City's role since the onset of the pandemic, made three recommendations:

1. Develop a corporate-wide homelessness plan.
2. Assign accountability for the implementation of the corporate-wide homelessness plan.

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3. Develop performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the corporate-wide homelessness plan and its associated activities.

Administration developed a project plan and completed research to inform the approach to developing a Corporate Homelessness Plan. The work includes a jurisdictional scan summary of how other municipalities are structuring their approach, research on Edmontonians' perspectives on the City's role in responding to houselessness and a summary of next steps with consideration of Edmonton's social, economic and jurisdictional context.

### **The Need for a Corporate Homelessness Plan**

Since the early 2000s, the City of Edmonton's role in houselessness has evolved. The City has a convening role in efforts to develop community plans to address houselessness and support Homeward Trust's efforts to implement community plans through an annual subsidy. Shortly before the pandemic, the City of Edmonton increased the scope of this role through the development of more robust encampment and extreme weather responses. The expansion of the City's role was directed by Council in response to an increase in unsheltered or visible houselessness since 2015 (CR\_6674 Interim Housing, Community and Public Services Committee, May 8, 2019; CR\_7228 Reduction of Makeshift Camps - Progress Update and Interim Housing Options, Community and Public Services Committee, December 4, 2019; Policy C620 Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions).

The COVID-19 global pandemic greatly exacerbated these challenges and necessitated an emergency response coordinated at a local level. In Edmonton, the City worked closely with Homeward Trust, service partners and other orders of government to enhance the collective houselessness response during the global health emergency, which significantly expanded the scope of the City's homelessness response (Attachment 1). While the immediate health threat of COVID-19 has subsided, cities continue to grapple with its long-term economic and social impacts on local communities. As a result, many municipalities are considering their continued roles in addressing houselessness in their communities.

The City of Edmonton is shifting from an ad-hoc, emergency decision-making environment towards proactive planning to respond to houselessness. The Corporate Homelessness Plan will:

- Clarify the most suitable and effective role for the City in preventing and ending houselessness alongside Homeward Trust and other service partners.
- Evaluate the impact of City-funded initiatives.
- Create clear lines of responsibility and accountability for the City's houselessness work, with consideration of jurisdictional responsibilities and efficient use of available resources.

### **Background**

The Corporate Homelessness Plan is one of three key strategic documents in development in 2023, alongside the Updated Affordable Housing Strategy and the Updated Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. These plans and strategies will align to shape how the City addresses the affordable housing and houselessness challenges facing Edmonton.

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In defining the City's role going forward, it is important to consider the City's historic role in houselessness, which has been shaped by changing political, economic and social environments that have determined how houselessness is experienced at a local level.

The number of people experiencing houselessness and the complexity of need in the homeless population is a modern phenomenon resulting from disinvestment in affordable housing development by all orders of government over time.<sup>1</sup>

The City has played various roles in houselessness response over the past 50 years.

- In the 1970s the City provided land and subsidies for social housing, which helped meet the needs of people who would otherwise be at risk of houselessness.
- As the investment in social housing from all orders of government decreased drastically through the 1980s and 1990s, houselessness in cities across Canada increased drastically, resulting in a new role for the City in planning and coordinating with community organizations to address the issues specifically associated with increased houselessness and substandard housing.
- By the 2000s, with some return of federal funding to address houselessness, the City's role again evolved to include responding directly to encampments and continuing its planning, convening and coordinating function to support collective community efforts.

By 2008, when the peak of people experiencing houselessness reached 3,000, a key result of the collaborative community planning efforts was the merger of the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Homelessness into the Homeward Trust Foundation (also colloquially called Homeward Trust Edmonton), which became the designated community entity responsible for planning, funding aggregation and coordinating housing programs and services to end houselessness in Edmonton.

In the years since, Edmonton has experienced significant successes, such as the reduction of houselessness by approximately 50 per cent by 2016<sup>2</sup> and multiple community and provincial plans to address houselessness. Edmonton is a Vanguard City with the Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness<sup>3</sup>. During this time, there have also been significant challenges, including inconsistent funding from other orders of government, the emergence of drug poisoning that has increased the depth of needs, the emergence of large encampments or "tent cities," and the economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering social impacts. Additional details about the history and chronology of houselessness response in Edmonton, are outlined within Attachment 2.

### **Edmonton's Current Community Response**

Edmonton's community response to houselessness is an intersection of health, social and housing services funded by the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Homelessness in Canada, 2016, p. 12. Stephen Gaetz, Erin Dej, Tim Richter, Melanie Redman

<sup>2</sup> "'A lot more work to do': Homelessness falling in Edmonton, report shows" CBC article, September 26, 2019

<sup>3</sup> The Institute of Global Homelessness website

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- Homeward Trust works with the Government of Alberta to implement strategies set out in the province's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness and other strategic plans
- Homeward Trust acts as the Community Entity on behalf of the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Program.
- Federal, provincial and municipal funding for initiatives to end houselessness are distributed by Homeward Trust to a number of service partners to deliver housing programs and services.
- Service partners typically augment government funding for services through fundraising initiatives.
- In addition to funding Homeward Trust, the Government of Alberta also funds all permanent emergency shelter services directly through operating agreements between shelter providers and the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

There is an overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples living in housing insecurity or experiencing houselessness both locally and nationally. The federal government has made efforts to be more equitable in its response to houselessness by creating a specific stream of Reaching Home funding to Indigenous communities off-reserve. In Edmonton, this funding is distributed by Homeward Trust.

The City of Edmonton does not receive ongoing funding from the federal or provincial government for houselessness program service delivery. During the COVID-19 pandemic, limited one-time federal funding was made available to support cities' response efforts; some of this funding was used to support houselessness initiatives (outlined in Attachment 1).

The expanded nature of the City's response to houselessness extends across the corporation (see Table 2 below). The nature of the City response varies depending on whether or not the participating business area is delivering direct services (e.g., coordinating and implementing the response to unsheltered people in encampments), delivering indirect services (e.g., funding agency partners to deliver shelter services) or responding to the impacts of houselessness (e.g., fire rescue services responding to emergency calls in encampments or abandoned buildings).

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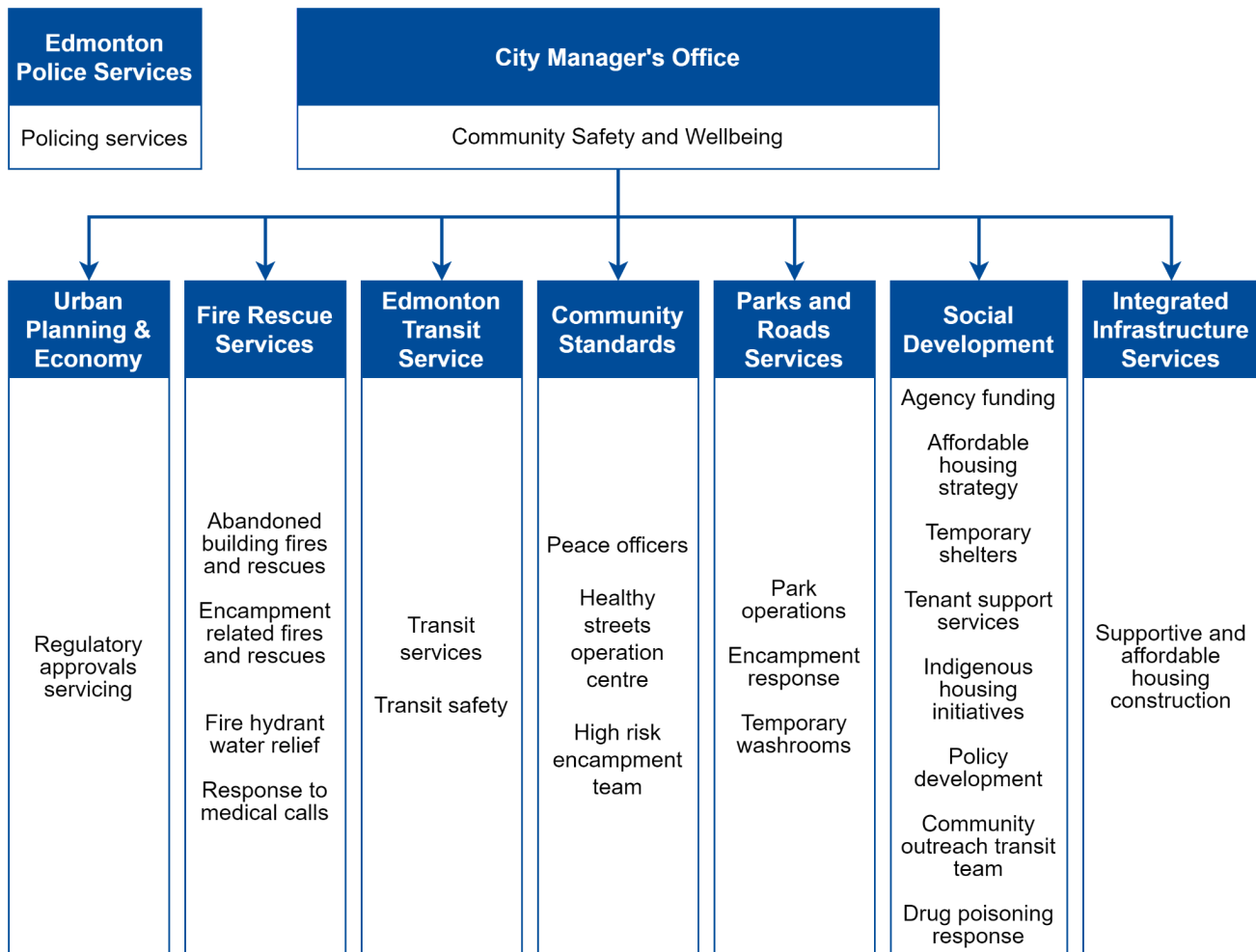


Table 2. City's Response to Homelessness

### Jurisdictional Scan Findings

Administration conducted an environmental scan of North American cities, and prioritized eight Canadian cities for in-depth interviews about their municipal homelessness strategy and response (Attachment 3). Additional research was conducted of American cities with demonstrated success in addressing homelessness (Attachment 4). While the American examples have jurisdictional differences from Edmonton, there are valuable learnings about systems integration, approaches and reporting.

Like Edmonton, most cities shared that their roles expanded due to the pandemic. Many North American cities have expanded their responses to unsheltered homelessness, encampments and community safety.

A municipality's homelessness response can be impacted depending on legislative authority and available funding. A common theme was that municipalities not designated as Community Entities under Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, and do not have provincial funding as "community-based organizations" or have statutory authority under provincial legislation to be homelessness response service providers, tend not to have a corporate homelessness plan. These cities, however, often will have a number of plans and strategies for developing housing, increasing community safety and well-being, and reducing poverty. In such

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cases (including Edmonton), houselessness plans and implementation tend to be coordinated by a community-based organization that is a recipient of both federal and provincial funding.

### **Next Steps**

The new Corporate Homelessness Plan will be drafted to clearly outline the City of Edmonton's roles, responsibilities and legislated accountabilities in addressing houselessness. In addition, houselessness work is frequently influenced by emergent issues and changing circumstances. As such, there may be new or additional work that will influence the City's role that will need to be accounted for, such as direction to pursue Indigenous-led shelter and/or deliver outreach services.

In the next phase of the project, Administration will:

- Identify, in additional detail, all City services in the Corporation that respond to houselessness.
- Develop and implement an internal engagement process to understand and evaluate existing efforts.
- Conduct an in-depth cost analysis of these efforts that expands on the high-level work of the City Auditor (OCA01289, City's Response to Homelessness Audit, June 17, 2022, Audit Committee).
- Develop a Corporate Homelessness Plan that aligns these efforts under a shared set of principles, outcomes and measures in a cohesive evaluation framework and includes clear lines of accountability for the types of work underway.

Administration will return to Council with a draft Corporate Homelessness Plan in Q1 2024.

### **Legal Implications**

In Canada, the constitutional division of powers does not contain express language to allocate responsibility for matters such as "housing" or "homelessness" to a particular order of government. Given the complexity of these issues, there is interplay between different orders of government.

The approaches taken by municipalities to address these issues may differ across Canada, especially where provincial legislation differs. As such, the City should exercise caution in considering approaches taken in other provinces or jurisdictions, as enabling provincial legislation may differ from the Alberta context.

The City must also exercise caution in considering American models and case studies, given many fundamental differences in the underlying government systems and funding mechanisms.

## **COMMUNITY INSIGHT**

In March 2023, Administration conducted public opinion research to understand Edmontonian's perception of the City's role in addressing homelessness and the priority areas they would like the municipal government to invest in. This research includes focus groups, in depth interviews, and an online survey distributed to a third party online survey panel.

Attachment 5 provides the summary of research findings. Highlights are provided below.



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- 80 per cent of survey respondents agree that more should be done to address homelessness in our city.
- 73 per cent of survey respondents agree that regardless of the responsibility of other orders of government, the City of Edmonton should do more than it currently does to address homelessness.
- Among the activities the City of Edmonton is involved in to address homelessness, Edmontonians who participated in this research prioritized a few areas including transit safety and outreach, affordable housing, year round safe shelter, coordinated response among stakeholders, connecting people in encampments to support, and implement shelter standards to improve accessibility and appropriateness of emergency shelters.
- Sub-group analysis using a GBA+ approach indicates that regardless of their exposure to visible homelessness, age, income, or neighborhood they live or work in, Edmontonians want more to be done about homelessness.

### GBA+

It is critical to hear the voices of diverse members of the community, particularly the voices of those with lived experiences of houselessness and other equity deserving groups. This is particularly true when the research is intended to improve the very systems impacting their lived experience. As part of the public opinion research, efforts were made to elevate lived experience voices in both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study (Attachment 5).

In the qualitative phase, five one-on-one interviews were conducted with individuals who had experienced housing insecurity in the past two years, including experience accessing emergency shelter. These interviews took place in addition to the six focus groups.. All participants were compensated for their time and expertise. Lived experience participants validated information gathered in focus groups with the general public. However, some key differences emerged, including:

- Greater focus on support programs, skills building and employment readiness.
- Desire for accountability of programs and services.
- Strong associations between high cost of living/affordability of housing and houselessness.
- Critical attitude of police and/or fire as primary responders to houselessness.

Within the quantitative survey, a broad definition of housing insecurity was used to inform an identifier question for participants. The inclusion of this criteria was helpful to isolate and better understand the perspectives of those who met the housing insecurity threshold and were providing input based on lived experience. To ensure fair representation of individuals over-represented in houselessness, the quantitative survey sample included additional quotas for specific socio-demographic groups such as Indigenous Peoples, newcomers and males aged 25-45 years.

On Homeward Trust's By Names list of people currently experiencing houselessness, males are over-represented at 53 per cent to 44 per cent females, one per cent transgender and two per cent gender-unknown.<sup>4</sup> The 25-44 year age range has the highest percentage of people currently experiencing houselessness at 45 per cent, with the next age range being 45-64 years at 33 per

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<sup>4</sup> Data, Analytics & Reporting, Homeward Trust webpage, accessed 04/12/23



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cent. Given that homelessness rates have been increasing amongst women, newcomers, veterans, gender and sexual minorities, Indigenous Peoples and youth,<sup>5</sup> the Corporate Homelessness Plan will consider equity measures that address the unique barriers experienced by equity deserving groups when they are seeking or maintaining housing security.

The Corporate Homelessness Plan will consider the four roles contained in the Indigenous Framework (Listener, Connector, Advocate and Partner) as a way to evaluate the City's role in its response to Indigenous homelessness. It will follow the guiding principles of relationships, agreements, celebrations and renewals. The Corporate Homelessness Plan will align with the Community Services Department's Action Plan to fulfill the seven commitments outlined in the City's Indigenous Framework.<sup>6</sup>

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. City of Edmonton's Expanded Response to Homelessness
2. Edmonton Homelessness Response Timeline
3. Municipal Homelessness Initiatives: Jurisdictional Scan Summary
4. Case Studies: Homelessness Responses of American Municipalities
5. Summary Research Report Public Opinion Study for the Corporate Homelessness Plan - April 18, 2023

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<sup>5</sup> A portrait of Canadians who have been homeless, Statistics Canada, March 14, 2022

<sup>6</sup> City of Edmonton Indigenous Framework