

CITY OF EDMONTON - CORPORATE HOMELESSNESS PLAN

Recommendation

That Community and Public Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That the Homelessness and Housing Services Plan, as set out in Attachment 1 of the June 17, 2024 Community Service Report CS01759, be approved.

Requested Action	Committee 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	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Municipal Response Plan • Anti-Racism Strategy • City of Edmonton Indigenous Framework • Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy • Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness Update • Updated Affordable Housing Strategy • Community Mobilization Task Force on Housing and Houselessness 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 17, 2022, OCA01289, City's Response to Homelessness Audit • June 27, 2022, CS01089, Update on Housing Needs Assessment • June 27, 2022, CS00939, Indigenous-led Shelters, Housing and Programming • June 27, 2022, CS00433, Indigenous Affordable Housing Strategy • October 31, 2022, OCM01477, Truth & Reconciliation Commission Implementation Plan Update • November 21, 2022, CS01218, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Action Plan • April 11, 2023, CS01637, Enhanced Encampment and Unsheltered Homelessness Response Plan 		

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- May 1, 2023, CS01762, Edmonton's Approach (2023/24) - Supporting Those Experiencing Homelessness
- May 31, 2023, CS01732, Corporate Homelessness Plan - Research and Project Update
- October 30, 2023, CS01673, Updated Affordable Housing Strategy
- May 21, 2024, CS01853, Updated Community Plan to End Homelessness

Executive Summary

- The City of Edmonton's *Homelessness and Housing Services Plan* (the Plan) outlines the roles and responsibilities of the City in addressing homelessness¹ with consideration of jurisdictional responsibility, strategic priorities, available funding and the coordinated work led by other orders of government and actors in the homeless-serving sector.
- Aligned with the 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness and City Plan target of no chronic or episodic homelessness by 2050, the Plan outlines specific actions the City will take to contribute to collective efforts to achieve Functional Zero² over the next four years.
- The Plan outlines the City's role in addressing homelessness with consideration of maintaining safe and inclusive public spaces, aligned with the Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy and City Plan direction 1.1.1.1, which states "As long as homelessness persists, establish basic amenities throughout the city for people experiencing homelessness."³
- Internal engagement found that current City activities to address homelessness fall into three broad categories: Homelessness Prevention, Homelessness Resolution and Homelessness Response.
- The City of Edmonton's Homelessness and Housing Services Plan embodies a proactive and inclusive approach to homelessness. With its robust financial outlook, strategic pillars and commitment to equity, Edmonton is poised to continue to make significant strides towards achieving Functional Zero and ensuring a safer, more inclusive city for all.

REPORT

On May 31, 2023, Administration provided a project update to Community and Public Services Committee on research and progress toward developing the City's first corporate homelessness plan (CS01732, Corporate Homelessness Plan - Research and Project Update) in order to address the Office of the City Auditor's recommendations (OCA01289, City's Response to Homelessness Audit, Audit Committee, June 17, 2022), and clarify the most suitable and effective role for the City in preventing and ending homelessness. At that meeting, Committee provided feedback for

¹ The goal of Administration is to use respectful, dignified, and accurate language when discussing a person or family's housing situation. While homelessness continues to be a standard term nationally, some community members in Edmonton have started to use and advocate for the use of the word houseless. There is a diversity of perspectives on the language and it remains Administration's intention to use person-first language and to characterize houselessness or homelessness as a temporary condition that does not define an individual's identity.

² "Functional Zero can be simply defined as: a community where homelessness-related resources match or exceed the demand for them from the target population. These resources are optimized and perform at maximum efficacy." Source: <https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/learning-materials/making-zero-count/>

³ The City Plan, page 43,

https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/City_Plan_FINAL.pdf

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Administration that was incorporated into the development of the City of Edmonton's Housing and Homelessness Services Plan (Attachment 1).

Since the presentation of CS01732 in May 2023, Administration completed the following activities, which informed the Plan's development:

- Contributed to the development of the 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness (CS01853, Updated Community Plan to End Homelessness) and reviewed relevant plans and strategies across all orders of government to understand shared priorities and planned actions to address homelessness;
- Completed two rounds of internal engagement with City business areas responding to and impacted by homelessness, supported community-based research of lived/living experiences of youth homelessness in Edmonton and reviewed the Plan with leaders from homeless-serving sector agencies (Attachment 2);
- Completed a comprehensive financial analysis of the municipal cost of homelessness that includes Edmonton Public Library and Edmonton Police Service (Attachment 3); and
- Undertook research to understand municipal responses to homelessness and their funding sources across Canada (Attachment 4) and the homelessness prevention spectrum in Edmonton (Attachment 5).

Edmonton Context

The homeless-serving system of care is made up of numerous agencies that deliver housing programs, including supportive housing and emergency shelter. The system works laterally with allied systems of care, including health (primary and acute care, addictions and mental health), justice, family and children's services and affordable housing. Historically, the City of Edmonton played a supportive role in responding to homelessness by coordinating and convening partnerships to address emerging gaps in service and advance progress on housing solutions (see CS01732 - Attachment 2 - Edmonton Homelessness Response Timeline).

Homeward Trust Edmonton is the federally designated Community Entity and provincial Community Based Organization responsible for aggregating and distributing funding from all orders of government to advance efforts to end homelessness. These efforts include system planning, coordination of housing programs and services, and evaluating progress on ending homelessness over time (see CS01853 - Attachment 1, Homeward Trust System Planning Framework).

Homeward Trust's mandate does not include emergency shelter services. In Alberta, the Government of Alberta funds, regulates and monitors emergency shelters⁴ and is acting on recommendations from the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness task force to resolve chronic homelessness through a recovery-oriented care model that integrates supports with housing options.⁵ The Government of Canada primarily plays a funding role through

⁴ Government of Alberta, Action Plan on Homelessness (2022)
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/5601187b-7dfc-45ab-8238-8f4c0be3c634/resource/0e21de0d-1248-4594-8268-0d96860723a0/download/css-action-plan-on-homelessness.pdf>

⁵ Report of the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force. (2022)
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/0c443da7-0451-419f-9e47-135f67801969/resource/1db86f64-17b0-4fce-b015-d5ffb0f885d5/download/css-recovery-oriented-housing-model-report-of-ccrh-task-force.pdf>

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Reaching Home, a community based program under the National Housing Strategy that provides direct funding to communities to address homelessness.⁶ In 2023, the federal government announced Red Road Healing Society as the designated Community Entity for addressing Indigenous homelessness in Edmonton, providing a \$6.9 million annual budget for programs that previously had flowed through Homeward Trust.⁷

In the past year, there have been significant changes to Edmonton's homelessness response system, particularly as it relates to the process to address encampments and the availability and suitability of shelter services. In fall 2023, the Government of Alberta committed ongoing base operating funding to increase emergency shelter capacity and diversity of service providers to respond to community needs. As a result, as of April 18, 2024, there is funding for 1,801 emergency shelter and transitional spaces, including two new emergency shelter providers to increase shelter options for women and Indigenous peoples.

The Navigation and Support Centre, funded by the Government of Alberta, opened in January 2024. The Centre delivers integrated service delivery from a variety of providers to help individuals transported from encampments secure ID, obtain income support, receive referrals to health and cultural resources and be screened onto housing waitlists before being offered emergency shelter services. On March 26, 2024, the Government committed permanent funding to this service. This resource helps ensure that no unhoused person vacating a closed encampment is left without the option to access services and/or an offer of indoor shelter.

Concurrent to these developments, the Government of Canada announced one-time funding for communities to address unsheltered homelessness that had to be spent by April 30, 2024.⁸ This funding was distributed through Community Entities who used funds to bolster existing housing efforts in addition to ongoing emergency response costs delivered by agencies.

While these new and enhanced efforts are welcome, there remains a gap of safe and adequate affordable housing options for people to flow into housing from shelters. Between 150 to 250 units of bridge housing and 1,400 to 1,700 units of supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness are needed to end homelessness for people with complex health needs by 2030 (see CS01853).

State of Homelessness

The measure of a community ending homelessness is defined by Functional Zero, where the system is designed in such a way that any person or family's experience of homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring⁹. In Edmonton, a number of factors have resulted in an overall increase in

⁶Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy Directives (2023)
<https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/directives-eng.html>

⁷
<https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/the-government-of-canada-supports-indigenous-led-programs-to-help-end-indigenous-homelessness-in-edmonton-through-the-red-road-healing-society-845155161.html>

⁸
<https://www.canada.ca/en/office-infrastructure/news/2023/12/helping-communities-respond-to-unsheltered-homelessness-this-winter.html>

⁹ "Functional Zero can be simply defined as: a community where homelessness-related resources match or exceed the demand for them from the target population. These resources are optimized and perform at maximum efficacy." Source: <https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/learning-materials/making-zero-count/>

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the number of people flowing into homelessness and rising levels of chronicity and complexity of health needs in Edmonton's homeless population. Both the demand for services and the types of services needed outweigh the homeless-serving system of care's ability to respond.¹⁰ Some key indicators of growing need include:

- Homeward Trust's By Name List (BNL) is a perpetually updated registry of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton who are accessing services within the homeless-serving sector. Location of stay is self-reported by individuals in response to the question, "where do you sleep most frequently?" As of April 2024, more than 1,400 people are either unsheltered or staying in emergency shelters. More than 1,850 additional Edmontonians are provisionally housed, meaning they are in short-term accommodations like hotels or couch surfing and do not have permanent tenancy¹¹. People on the BNL are both waiting to access housing services or actively working with a team to find housing;
- A need for an additional 300 to 600 caseload spaces for individuals on the By Name List waiting to be assigned to a housing worker to begin the housing process¹²;
- In its first three months of operation, the Government of Alberta's Navigation and Support Centre supported 700 unique individuals and resulted in 2,500 referrals, of which 220 have been to housing services through Coordinated Access.¹³¹⁴

The 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness draft (CS01853) identifies a number of recommendations and actions in order to address the challenges above. This includes building on and uplifting existing collaborative practices, especially as they relate to youth homelessness and Indigenous homelessness, as well as directing collective efforts towards shared goals and outcomes. It recommends continuous improvement efforts to data collection standards and policies as well as ways to improve the programs and services offered by various partners in both Coordinated Access and in the allied systems of care. The success of the Community Plan is dependent on a number of factors, including a public facing accountability framework where actors across jurisdictions take ownership of actions they are best suited to address. The City of Edmonton is one such stakeholder and the Homelessness and Housing Services Plan has been developed with consideration of the draft actions in the Community Plan in order to clearly demonstrate where and how the City will contribute to collective efforts.

¹⁰ For an analysis of these factors, see CS01661 - Edmonton's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness - Lessons Learned. Source:

<https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=206365>

¹¹ By Name List Data, April 2024 - Homeward Trust Edmonton. Source:

<https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting/>

¹² The 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness as presented in CS01853, Attachment 1 identifies a need for 300 - 600 more scattered site caseload spots to address the backlog of individuals waiting to be connected to a housing worker.

<https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=222671>

¹³ <https://www.edmontonpolice.ca/News/SuccessStories/NavigationCentreUpdate>

¹⁴

https://docs.assembly.ab.ca/LADDAR_files/docs/committees/FC/legislature_31/session_1/20240320_0900_01_fc.pdf

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The City of Edmonton's Role in Preventing and Ending Homelessness

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City, like other municipalities across Canada, assumed an expanded role to keep people experiencing homelessness safer (see CS01732 - Attachment 1). In the past year, as a result of a constrained financial environment and with consideration of the recent expansion of shelter services by the provincial government, the City has discontinued funding for initiatives that were temporarily funded as a part of the pandemic response. Despite new shelters and interventions coming online, the homeless-serving system of care remains challenged and the impacts of homelessness on individuals and communities creates ongoing complexity in delivering City services.

Ultimately, the homeless-serving system of care cannot house people at the rate they are becoming homeless and there is a lack of suitable housing options for people with complex needs who are chronically homeless. There is investment and action needed to address this problem holistically, as outlined in the 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Strategy¹⁵, Government of Alberta's Action Plan on Homelessness¹⁶ and Stronger Foundations: Affordable Housing Strategy¹⁷. Concurrent to efforts to develop 2,700 units of affordable housing in the next five years, the City of Edmonton is responsible for managing the safety and usability of public spaces for all Edmontonians.

The Homelessness and Housing Services Plan

Guided by the City Plan target of no chronic or episodic homelessness in Edmonton, the Homelessness and Housing Services Plan (Attachment 1) describes the actions the City will take to advance objectives on preventing, resolving and improving emergency responses to homelessness. The Plan's three categories of work are:

Homelessness Prevention involves preventing new inflow of homelessness through existing programs, modest enhancements to service coordination and the responsible use of current resources. Currently, this work is being done across a few business areas to deliver prevention services through grants to community organizations, supports to tenants, and transit fare assistance programs, in addition to all the community agencies that deliver homelessness prevention services. An analysis of Edmonton's homelessness prevention ecosystem found that the City is well-positioned to improve the awareness of and access to existing homelessness prevention services, including City funded initiatives, by centralizing and coordinating the referral process for individuals who are precariously housed (Attachment 5). Upstream homelessness prevention services are not currently coordinated by a single entity. While Homeward Trust Edmonton is the systems planner responsible for ending homelessness in Edmonton, their initiatives are designed to respond to the needs of people who have already lost their housing.

¹⁵

<https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/AffordableHousingStrategy2023-26.pdf>

¹⁶

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/5601187b-7dfc-45ab-8238-8f4c0be3c634/resource/0e21de0d-1248-4594-8268-0d96860723a0/download/css-action-plan-on-homelessness.pdf>

¹⁷

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/d17f3af6-fa5a-4cb0-b36e-248823cddff1/resource/d11b4795-763a-4221-b6f9-2f5769df50a5/download/sh-stronger-foundations-albertas-10-year-strategy-affordable-housing-2021.pdf>

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Leveraging the City's ability to play a convening and coordination role, the actions in the Plan will bring together various activities in the homelessness prevention ecosystem, including community based initiatives, to develop a coordinated and integrated prevention program for people at risk of losing their housing. The vision is for the program to be delivered consistently at various locations throughout the city, with integrated resources and referrals to ensure that people are accessing the most appropriate supports in the format that meets their needs, including service provision by phone, online, and in multiple languages. The coordination and integration of services into this program will also serve to deepen the level of connection and collaboration between service providers to enhance and build the capacity of both agencies and the sector. In addition, actions in this category of work will investigate tools and strategies that may help people stay housed, such as one-time financial supports provided by the municipality, other orders of government and community based organizations that can be used to intervene before people lose their housing.

Homelessness Resolution involves prioritizing and aligning limited City resources to provide housing-focused support to unsheltered people who are in crisis in public spaces. Currently, this work primarily consists of various outreach teams that connect individuals to housing and support services, including those funded by Edmonton Police Service and Edmonton Public Library. Actions to improve this area of work operationally include aligning City funded outreach teams who primarily serve houseless individuals under shared reporting requirements and working to develop a deployment model that can improve coordination of outreach efforts and referrals to housing and housing related support services. From a capital funding and development perspective, this area of work also includes a continued commitment to advancing supportive housing development, introducing a bridge housing funding stream in the City's Affordable Housing Investment Plan, and continuing to work with the Government of Alberta and shelter operators to support capacity and system improvements to shelter services wherever possible.

Homelessness Response involves prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness as long as it persists. Current initiatives in this category are overseen by a number of different business areas across the City, including Edmonton Police Service and Edmonton Public Library. Activities undertaken in this category of work are largely addressing the symptoms of homelessness. These activities include cleaning up encampments, responding to individuals and communities impacted by homelessness and the drug poisoning crisis, addressing community safety concerns in public spaces and activating emergency responses to extreme weather conditions and unpredictable circumstances such as the 2023/24 shigella outbreak.

To improve existing efforts, the Plan includes actions to establish basic amenities, including water and hygiene services, by leveraging existing social infrastructure, such as recreation facilities and libraries, and pursuing opportunities to make temporary infrastructure permanent, such as the hygiene hub. The Plan also includes developing a decision-making framework with an identified funding source to guide how and when the City provides one-time emergency funding or services in unique circumstances, recognizing that there are unpredictable circumstances that may require City support to keep Edmontonians safe (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, shigella outbreak).

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This work also includes a significant education and training component for front-line staff to help them feel more safe, prepared and supported in their work.

Implementation

Many of the actions in the Plan require coordination across business areas and with external stakeholders to be effectively implemented. As identified in Attachment 1, Administration will be accountable for stewarding the Plan, with responsibilities assigned to relevant business areas as required. Administration will produce a public facing monitoring dashboard to track progress and will update the Plan alongside the next update to the City of Edmonton's Affordable Housing Strategy, with an eye to integrate these two documents into one to more clearly outline actions being taken by the City of Edmonton holistically along the whole of the affordable housing and homelessness continuum.

Budget/Financial Implications

A corporate-wide financial analysis of the current City of Edmonton expenditures related to homelessness has been performed. Attachment 3 summarizes the operating expenditures in the three homelessness categories of work for 2022 and 2023 and capital expenditures and funding sources for the 2019-2022 and 2023-2026 capital budget cycles.

In the 2019-2022 budget cycle, capital expenditures of \$71.6 million were incurred. Budgeted capital expenditures for the 2023-2026 budget cycle are \$91.1 million with actual capital expenditures in 2023 totalling \$16.2 million.

In 2023, the City, including Edmonton Police Service and Edmonton Public Library, spent a total of \$91.4 million in operating expenditures across all three categories, detailed as: \$47.1 million on prevention initiatives; \$7.9 million on resolution initiatives; and \$36.4 million on response initiatives. This is an increase in spending of \$17.8 million compared to 2022 where operating expenses across all three categories totalled \$73.6 million.

Many of the actions taken by the City in the prevention, response and resolution of homelessness represent service level increases. While these actions were managed primarily within existing budgets or with budget increases for initiatives such as the Healthy Streets Operations Centre, there were still negative variances to absorb (\$7.2 million 2022, \$8.3 million 2023). If these increased service levels are maintained and additional services, such as the creation and advancement of a decision-making framework for exceptional emergency circumstances and the development of bridge housing, are provided, future funding may be required to do so. Any estimated budget impacts will be presented to Council for consideration and potential inclusion in future four-year or supplemental budgets (Attachment 1, page 31).

Community Insight

The Homelessness and Housing Services Plan was developed using a wide range of engagement and research inputs. Previous work indicates that Edmontonians support more being done to address homelessness in Edmonton and that regardless of the role of other orders of government, the City of Edmonton should do more to address homelessness than it currently does (see CS01732). Through sector and lived/living experience engagement as a part of the

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development of the 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, opportunities to improve the whole of the homeless-serving system's response to homelessness were identified, including the City's role (see CS01853).

To align and focus the City's role and responsibilities within the 2024 Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, significant internal engagement was completed. Concurrent to this activity, the City co-funded MAPS Alberta to complete community based research with 32 Edmontonians aged 16-25, to better understand their experiences and perspectives, identify barriers and identify systemic causes behind unsheltered youth homelessness.

These findings, combined with research, informed the development of draft objectives and actions in the Homelessness and Housing Services Plan. In order to further refine the draft, the contents were socialized in a second round of engagement with internal stakeholders. There were 100 individuals from 27 business areas that participated in conversations about the draft content of the Plan.

Research Activities

Alongside the engagement work, Administration undertook two research projects to further understand jurisdictional differences in municipal responses and spending on homelessness (Attachment 4) and the homelessness prevention ecosystem in Edmonton (Attachment 5).

GBA+

Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups underscore the need for tailored, inclusive strategies. The Plan outlines the steps the City will take to consider the unique challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness, including enhancing GBA+ analysis so that the barriers houseless people face to meet their basic needs are consistently considered in delivery of services to all Edmontonians.

Environment and Climate Review

Individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness experience the impacts of climate change disproportionately. Actions the City takes to address homelessness contributes towards increased climate resilience as they can help mitigate exposure to climate related events that present health risks to an already vulnerable population. Attachment 6 provides an overview of environmental and climate intersection points between the Homelessness and Housing Services Plan including increasing climate resilience and supporting equitable transition to a low-carbon future. Including the potential for considering the application of a climate lens to future work will enhance decision making needed to realize long-term climate resilience for Edmonton.

Attachments

1. Homelessness and Housing Services Plan
2. What We Heard Report
3. Corporate Cost of Homelessness
4. Comparative municipal spending on housing and homelessness in Canada's major cities
5. Homelessness Prevention Secondary Research Study
6. Environment and Climate Review