

Edmonton City Council's declaration of a housing and houselessness emergency on January 17, 2024 reinforced the urgent need for new approaches to help vulnerable Edmontonians meet their housing needs. While government action is critical, we believe Edmonton's greatest strength lies in its community champions – everyday heroes who act with compassion, creativity and collaboration towards making this a great place to live. This Task Force was formed to build on this strength, with a mandate to identify, prioritize and recommend catalyst investment in community-led solutions that address Edmonton's housing needs.

Our Task Force was quick to acknowledge the significant challenges inherent to this mandate. The breadth and complexity of issues that contribute to housing insecurity and houselessness are immense and dynamic, requiring our collective response to also be multi-faceted and adaptable. The diverse backgrounds and perspectives represented by the sixteen taskforce members provided tremendous tangible and intangible benefits. But it also meant that we had different views on where we should focus given that the housing and houselessness emergency spans shelter spaces to near-market affordability and everything in between. It was essential to focus on areas that would mobilize community, have impact and be sustainable.

Not surprisingly, this Task Force cannot "solve houselessness". Instead, our commitment was to address gaps in the current response and identify opportunities to grow untapped community resources and champions. We believe we've accomplished this with the three concepts we are recommending for approval and the additional recommendations identified for government-led system changes.

There are many strengths in the three concepts the Task Force is recommending for approval. They supplement the significant work currently being done by all areas of government. They are both preventative (help people stay housed) and interventional (help people become housed). They mobilize community organizations and members to get involved and add additional resources. They each also have potential to become self-sustaining. Finally, they encourage partnerships and collaboration as none of the proposals can be executed alone.

For each initiative, we identified an organizational champion who is uniquely positioned to steward the recommended investment in collaboration with community stakeholders. Our direct investment approach cuts the red tape that might otherwise prevent these concepts from having a timely impact in the community. If City Council approves these recommended investments today, work can begin right away.

While all suggestions require commitment, collaboration and investment, it's clear that we need to do more to better serve the diverse housing needs of Edmontonians. Edmonton's housing insecurity and houselessness emergency did not occur, nor will it be resolved overnight. Yet through timely, coordinated and sustained action by community and governments alike, this emergency can be overcome.

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