

## COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION TASK FORCE ON HOUSING AND HOUSELESSNESS - FINAL REPORT

### Recommendations

1. That a funding agreement between the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Community Foundation for an amount not to exceed \$1,500,000 to create the Community Fund for Accelerated Retrofits, as outlined in Attachment 3 of the April 8, 2025, Office of the City Manager report OCM02832, be approved and that the agreement be in form and content acceptable to the City Manager.
2. That a funding agreement between the City of Edmonton and the Canadian Mental Health Association — Edmonton Region for an amount not to exceed \$1,000,000 to create the Peer Support Service for Vulnerable Tenants, as outlined in Attachment 3 of the April 8, 2025, Office of the City Manager report OCM02832, be approved and that the agreement be in form and content acceptable to the City Manager.
3. That a funding agreement between the City of Edmonton and the Islamic Family and Social Services Association for an amount not to exceed \$1,000,000 to create the Bridge Between Housing Platform, as outlined in Attachment 3 of the April 8, 2025, Office of the City Manager report OCM02832, be approved and that the agreement be in form and content acceptable to the City Manager.

Requested Action	Decision required
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edmonton's Plan to End Homelessness</li> <li>• Corporate Plan to End Homelessness</li> <li>• Housing Action Team / Housing Accelerator Fund</li> <li>• Zoning Bylaw Renewal</li> <li>• Urban Form Business Transformation</li> <li>• Encampment Response</li> </ul>
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• January 15, 2024 — Office of the Mayor report MO02326, Housing and Homelessness - Verbal report</li> <li>• February 12, 2024 — Office of the City Manager report OCM02332, Actions to Respond to Housing and Houselessness Emergency</li> </ul>

## REPORT

As reviewed in the most recent Edmonton's Affordable Housing Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup> (August 2023), Edmonton has more than 394,000 homes, but fewer than 15,000 homes are social and affordable housing. Close to one in eight Edmonton households (46,155) cannot afford to live in Edmonton, spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. This number is expected to increase to 56,337 households by 2031. According to the By Names List<sup>2</sup> maintained by Homeward Trust, as of February 20, 2025, 2,980 Edmontonians were provisionally accommodated; 775 reported they accessed shelters and 1,283 reported being unsheltered.

At the January 15, 2024, Special City Council meeting, Edmonton City Council declared a housing and houselessness emergency. To accompany the declaration, Council created a task force, to be led by the Mayor, City Manager and an appointed member of Council to mobilize all sectors to create vision and raise capital that can be deployed to complement social service mechanisms. To equip the Community Mobilization Task Force ('the Task Force'), Council allocated \$3.5 million from the Community Safety and Well-being Reserve unallocated funding as seed money to fund innovative solutions and attract additional sources of funding.

### Task Force formation

Mayor Sohi announced the Task Force membership at the May 10, 2024, State of the City Address. Members were selected to represent a variety of sectors, expertise, perspectives and connection to a community or sector in Edmonton. Members included:

1. Councillor Erin Rutherford
2. Michael Phair, Former Edmonton City Councillor
3. Dinika Matychuk, Leston Holdings
4. Doug Griffiths, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
5. Dr. Joshua Evans, University of Alberta
6. Glori Sharphead, Enoch Cree Wellness
7. Gord Johnston, Civida
8. Jim Brown, Sherrick Developments
9. Keri Cardinal, Niginan Housing Ventures
10. Margo Long, later Corey Mowles, Youth Empowerment and Support Services<sup>3</sup>
11. Mike Saunders, Qualico Developments
12. Murray Soroka, Jasper Place Wellness<sup>4</sup>
13. Nick Lilley, HomeEd
14. Omar Yakub, Islamic Family and Social Services Association
15. Rob Yager, United Way
16. Tina Thomas, Edmonton Community Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/CoE-HousingNeedsAssessment2023.pdf?cb=1741365981>

<sup>2</sup> <https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting/>

<sup>3</sup> Margo Long was replaced by Corey Mowles following a leadership transition within YESS.

<sup>4</sup> Jasper Place Wellness withdrew during the Task Force process.

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Miranda Jimmy, representing the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, observed and participated in meetings and activities.

### Terms of reference and mandate

In order to support a community owned and led process, Nick Lilley and Tina Thomas were selected to act as Co-Chairs. Under their leadership, supported by Administration and an external facilitator, the task force finalized their terms of reference. The Task Force aimed to:

1. Establish a common understanding of the needs, approaches and challenges impacting affordable housing and the unhoused situation in Edmonton.
2. Identify and prioritize new opportunities to better mobilize all sectors and expedite red tape reduction related to housing and the unhoused situation in Edmonton.
3. Recommend to City Council:
  - a. the allocation of \$3.5 million from the Community Safety and Well-being Reserve unallocated funding to act as seed money for innovative community-led solutions that may also attract additional sources of funding.
  - b. public policy directions (as applicable) to better mobilize all sectors and expedite red tape reduction related to housing and houselessness in Edmonton.
4. Serve as a bridge and champion of representative sectors to support broader awareness and advocacy building for the Task Force's work where applicable.

### Task Force Process

With the support of an external facilitator with strong experience in social innovation, the Task Force met ten times, with meetings concluding in February of 2025.

The following table outlines their high level process:

Meeting(s)	Purpose
1, 2, 3	Problem framing and understanding
4, 5, 6	Exploration of community mobilization gaps & opportunities
7, 8, 9	Recommendation development & validation
10	Finalize recommendations and report direction

The Task Force immediately acknowledged that affordable housing and houselessness is a massive and complex challenge impacted by numerous socioeconomic factors and systems spanning various government jurisdictions. With an abundance of strategies and investments already being enacted in Edmonton, the Task Force drove a narrow mandate to identify new solutions beyond the scope of current efforts by the City of Edmonton and other stakeholders.

The explicit focus on community mobilization required the Task Force to identify and prioritize community-led initiatives that:

- Address urgent, underserved needs in Edmonton,

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- Can be rapidly initiated and/or scaled, and
- Can be sustained without ongoing government funding, beyond the City's seed investment.

This lens shaped the Task Force's deliberations in several key ways. First, the Task Force recognized the diverse needs across the housing continuum, from houselessness to below market housing. While some Task Force members emphasized the urgency of solutions for those currently unhoused, others highlighted the importance of preventing housing loss to reduce inflow into houselessness. Ultimately, the initiatives the Task Force developed for funding consideration spanned both prevention and intervention, while also accounting for the unique needs and realities of individuals requiring support across the housing continuum.

Second, the Task Force examined the existing system response and identified where community mobilization could be most impactful. The Task Force leveraged a visual framework from Homeward Trust that maps system responses according to prevention and intervention efforts. This helped the Task Force focus on gaps in the response system — areas where solutions were not clearly a government responsibility or where government was already actively engaged.

Given the scale of investment required for housing infrastructure, the Task Force reasoned that heavy capital investments in housing development necessitate government involvement. As a result, the Task Force sharpened its focus on alternative interventions that could be community-led and mobilized with minimal government involvement. Specifically, the Task Force discussed: "how can the Task Force support people in staying housed?" (prevention) and "how can the Task Force help those currently unhoused find stable housing?" (intervention).

By framing the approach this way, the Task Force concentrated on leveraging community actors, assets, and resources in ways that complement but do not duplicate existing government efforts. This focus on community-driven solutions ensured that recommendations targeted high-impact, actionable, and sustainable initiatives that can meaningfully contribute to Edmonton's housing crisis.

Attachment 1 provides a letter from the Task Force Co-Chairs, describing the Task Force process from their perspectives.

### **Progress demonstrated by the City of Edmonton and partners**

As the Task Force's work progressed, Edmonton gained national attention for its efforts in ensuring market and non-market housing affordability. With a significant effort from the City of Edmonton to reduce red tape through removing parking minimums, renewing the Zoning Bylaw and automating permit reviews and risk-based inspections, Edmonton is experiencing record housing starts. The City of Edmonton has developed an Affordable Housing Strategy and a Homelessness and Housing Services Plan. The City provides funding to support the development of affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Investment Grant which has successfully leveraged significant funding from other orders of government.

Administration is also leveraging \$175 million in Housing Accelerator Funding to deliver more than 5,200 new homes over-and-above what would typically be expected. Through these efforts

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coordinated by Administration's Housing Action Team, 35,000 new homes will be permitted across Edmonton by 2026. Finally, with sustained investment from the Government of Alberta, more than 2000 24/7 shelter spaces provide diverse programming to meet interim housing needs with additional surge capacity available during extreme cold<sup>5</sup>.

Attachment 2 provides a full overview of the work completed by Edmonton City Council and Administration to support the housing and houselessness emergency. The Task Force used this information to help refine investment-ready community initiatives and systems-level considerations.

### Task Force recommendations

#### Investment-ready community initiatives

With detailed information provided in Attachment 3, the Task Force proposes three catalyzing investment opportunities for the \$3.5 million in seed funding as follows:

1. A **community fund for accelerated retrofits** supports the reimagining of underutilized properties into housing for vulnerable people, focusing on those commercial properties best suited for swift, cost-effective conversions. A foundation, proposed to be the Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF), will use seed capital and community contributions to offer grants to remove barriers related to feasibility and pre-development activities. Once initial pilots are established and evaluated, the ECF will work with partners (i.e. a group of community volunteers or a fundraising partner) to grow and expand the fund and its purpose, to provide oversight and input on granting decisions and to enlist professional and industry associations to provide in-kind contributions to funded projects. The success of this work will be measured by the amount of net-new housing spaces/units in development via funded retrofit projects, the value of community resources secured for investment and the in-kind hours contributed by community members to enable retrofit projects. The recommended catalyst investment for this initiative is up to \$1.5 million with ongoing sustainment through attracted community contributions.
2. A **bridge between housing platform** establishes a shared digital platform, developed by Islamic Family and Social Services Association, to make it easy for social agencies and landlords to collaborate through secure information sharing, common tenant assessments and collaborative service agreements. The success of this work will be measured by the number of landlord and agency participants, number of tenants supported through the platform and the retention rate of supported tenants. The recommended catalyst investment for this initiative is up to \$1.0 million for initial program coordination and technology solution development with ongoing sustainment through landlord and/or agency user fees.
3. A **peer support service for vulnerable tenants** addresses the scarcity of preventative measures that address potential risk factors before individuals lose housing. The Canadian Mental Health Association - Edmonton Region is already active and present in fostering peer-based supports. This peer support service for vulnerable tenants seeks to scale their

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<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.alberta.ca/shelter-usage-in-alberta&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1742930834326036&usg=AOvVaw1NqS-pUL0a3GRwdYbMQvs5>

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efforts in this space and leverage the organization as a hub to catalyze greater focused effort and draw attention to the impact that peer-based supports can have in Edmonton. The Canadian Mental Health Association - Edmonton Region will hire, train and coordinate peer support workers to guide and support tenants to navigate complex systems, develop essential life skills, and build social connections. The success of this work will be measured by the number of peer support workers hired, trained and deployed, the number of housing providers engaged in the service and resident retention rate in housing where service is deployed. The recommended catalyst investment for this initiative is up to \$1.0 million with ongoing sustainment through landlord service fees.

The Task Force recommends directly granting funds to the three named community organizations who contributed their expertise throughout the idea generation and research process. With collaboration being foundational to bring any of the ideas to fruition, the named community organizations will serve as stewards, not single owners, for the investment-ready community initiatives. Seeking to achieve both action and accountability, direct granting enables these three organizations to mobilize, convene partners and implement the proposed ideas with City of Edmonton Administration performing the oversight required to formalize grant agreements with outcomes and reporting requirements. With the urgency of the housing and houselessness emergency, the Task Force advises against a call for proposals, as this would introduce delays and place a burden on non-profit organizations to apply for grants.

### Ideas explored, but not advanced for catalyst investments

Some community-led concepts the Task Force surfaced were believed to be of value but lacked an immediate community champion to execute on a catalyst investment. While the following initiatives are not prioritized for investment at this time, they serve as future opportunities for community actors to meaningfully contribute to Edmonton's emergency response :

- A community-owned development company with appropriate capacity, financial and legal structure for managing affordable housing developments on behalf of non-profit partners
- In-kind (or community-funded) services for housing sector non-profit organizations in need of timely, short-term capacity and advice to operate and grow
- A communications campaign to showcase community-led success in addressing houselessness while encouraging further participation & support

### Systems level considerations

The Task Force identified several systems-level public policy considerations that could aid with community mobilization and expedite red tape reduction by removing impediments that introduce barriers for ideal outcomes. In addition to those organically surfaced through the deep dialogue and deliberations, the system-level considerations stem from some specific discussion around broader efforts required to ensure that a holistic and thorough response in addressing the emergency is put forward.

To advance timely expansion of affordable and supportive housing, the Task Force recommends that the appropriate level(s) of government explore:



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- Creating a rental housing acquisition fund that stacks with funding for requisite capital expenditures to preserve existing affordable housing
- Modifying (or expanding) property tax relief and grant programs to better incentivize mixed market housing or provide funding not only on a per unit basis but also per bedroom to encourage support for families.
- Divesting publicly owned land inventory for affordable and supportive housing initiatives.
- Reducing development fees and timelines for affordable and supportive housing initiatives.
- Expanding the depth of subsidy and/or number of people served by rental assistance programs.
- Aligning and coordinating affordable and supportive housing project outcomes and financing decisions across funders.

To enhance the supports available to at-risk Edmontonians, the Task Force recommends that the appropriate level(s) of government explore:

- Expanding integrated case management approaches tied to centralized intake for those who are unhoused.
- Coordinating actions between systems to prevent discharge from hospitals, prisons, youth government care and/or care facilities into houselessness.
- Shifting the emergency shelter model to prioritize adequate transitional housing for diverse needs.
- Expanding eviction prevention supports and/or post-eviction stabilization services.

To ensure continuity and ongoing collaboration between the community and City Council on housing and houselessness issues, the Task Force recommends that the City of Edmonton conduct analysis on an ongoing forum, such as a committee of council or another conversation table, to facilitate continued community support, understanding and integration for affordable and supportive housing. The Task Force suggests that membership could include market and non-market housing developers and operators, community groups, houseless-serving agencies and people with lived experience. An assembly of these interested parties could:

- Amplify Edmonton affordable and supportive housing needs and opportunities to other orders of government;
- Mobilize community to improve understanding and acceptance of the value of affordable and supportive housing, and raise community concerns to council as needed;
- Improve collaboration and break down barriers between sectors in support of affordable and supportive housing; and
- Advise on previously approved Council actions which address the housing and houselessness emergency as required.

The forum should exist for a fixed timeframe (a period of up to two years), after which it should be evaluated for its effectiveness related to the above tasks.

### Budget/Financial Implications

In 2024, Council set aside \$3.5 million in one-time funding from unallocated Community Safety and Well-Being funding from unallocated Community Safety and Well-Being funding to act as

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seed funding for ideas identified by the Task Force. This recommendation allocates that \$3.5 million between three community organizations. No additional operating funding is required as part of this recommendation. All catalyst investments recommended by the Task Force are one-time expenses.

### Legal Implications

Bylaw 16620, City Administration Bylaw enables the City Manager to approve grant funding that does not exceed \$1,000,000. Council approval is required for grant funding agreements that exceed this delegated authority limit. With Council approval, Administration will use the Task Force Report to develop grant agreements with each organization.

### Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

### Community Insight

The Task Force was deeply committed to ensuring that lived experience shaped its deliberations at every stage. While it was not structured as a lived experience advisory group, its role as a community mobilization body required that all efforts be centered around the needs of people in the community, particularly those experiencing or at risk of housing instability.

Task Force members brought extensive professional expertise across community development, housing delivery, and frontline service provision, with many leading organizations that work directly with individuals with lived experience. This ensured that insights from those most affected were inherently embedded in discussions and decision-making.

To reinforce this commitment, the Task Force:

1. *Leveraged existing lived experience insights* - Before and after the orientation, Task Force members engaged with previous work conducted by the City that captured perspectives from individuals with lived experience. This ensured that discussions were informed by firsthand accounts and real challenges rather than requiring new engagement that could duplicate existing efforts.
2. *Framed solutions around the needs of those most affected* - Throughout the process, the Task Force focused on mobilizing community efforts where they were most needed—ensuring solutions addressed the realities of those experiencing housing instability. Using prevention and intervention prompts, members prioritized solutions that could meaningfully support:
  - a. Keeping people housed (prevention)
  - b. Helping those who are unhoused find stable housing (intervention)
3. *Benefitted from the expertise of Task Force members working closely with lived experience* - Many Task Force members lead frontline organizations that directly serve individuals facing housing instability. These members were intentionally selected for their deep knowledge of lived experience and long-standing relationships with affected communities. Their ongoing,



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real-world engagement ensured that lived experience perspectives were consistently present in deliberations.

4. *Engaged in experiential immersion* - The Task Force held an on-site meeting at Niginan Housing Ventures' Pimatisiwin, where members participated in a tour and immersive discussion. This experience deepened empathy and focus by bringing Task Force members directly into the environment of those facing housing challenges, reinforcing the importance of practical, community-driven solutions.

The Task Force recognized that engaging people with lived experience is critical to shaping solutions that are relevant and effective. While the Task Force itself did not conduct new, direct engagement, it built upon existing insights and ensured that lived experience perspectives were integrated throughout the process in several ways:

- Leveraging existing City-led research and lived experience insights to ground discussions.
- Drawing on the deep expertise of Task Force members who work directly with individuals facing housing instability.
- Visiting and engaging with frontline housing providers, such as at Niginan Housing Ventures, to immerse members in the realities of those affected.

Rather than duplicating existing engagement efforts, the Task Force focused on identifying community-driven solutions that align with these lived experiences. However, it is recognized that some recommended initiatives will require direct consultation with individuals with lived experience as they move toward implementation, ensuring that the solutions remain responsive and effective.

### Attachments

1. Letter from the Task Force Co-Chairs
2. City of Edmonton Actions to Address the Housing and Houselessness Emergency
3. Investment-Ready Community Initiatives