

Reduction of Makeshift Camps

Progress Update and Interim Housing Options

Recommendation

That the December 4, 2019, Citizen Services report CR_7228, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 8, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a progress update report to Committee, on the work underway to reduce the number of Edmontonians sleeping in makeshift camps around the city, including Dawson Park.

Executive Summary

Residents, businesses, and communities are expressing concerns about the increasing number of encampments and the negative impact that homelessness is having on both individuals experiencing homelessness and the broader community. As a result of collaborative efforts to address encampments, a coordinated encampment response team was launched this fall to better integrate the actions of a number of agencies and pilot a coordinated selective enforcement and clean-up approach. This process incorporated evidence-based recommendations from previous research into encampment resolution, and the lessons learned will help improve encampment response in the future.

Efforts to reduce the number of people sleeping outside continue to be impeded by a lack of lower-barrier shelter options, bridge housing and permanent supportive housing.

Administration explored several approaches that could more immediately contribute to the reduction of the number of people sleeping outside. The expedited delivery of bridge housing and of permanent supportive housing would achieve the most significant impact in the short to medium terms. The preferred method of delivery for bridge housing would be through the acquisition of an existing building; however, the use of workforce trailers or modular purpose-built bridge housing are potential alternatives. Expediting the construction of permanent supportive housing through the

use of modular, off-site construction could also quickly increase the supply of permanent supportive housing in Edmonton.

Along with its partners, Administration will continue to work with partners including the Government of Alberta and Homeward Trust to develop proposals to support the rapid deployment of bridge housing and permanent supportive housing. Administration will also continue to advance efforts to capitalize on existing capacity in the shelter system by working with the Government of Alberta and existing shelter providers to encourage the further reduction of barriers to accessing shelter.

Report

In recent years, Edmonton has experienced an increase in encampments along with an increase in citizen complaints related to encampments in all parts of the city. As of October 31, 2019, there were approximately 1,700 people experiencing chronic homelessness in Edmonton. Of those experiencing chronic homelessness, approximately 25 percent were unsheltered (sleeping outside or in areas not fit for human habitation) and 15 percent were using emergency shelter services.

Unsheltered people experiencing chronic homelessness are more likely to struggle with complex, co-occurring physical and mental health disorders, including addictions, which can impede their ability to access and retain shelter or housing.

Edmonton is unique relative to other cities because there are significant issues with homeless encampments despite available emergency shelter capacity. On average approximately 200 shelter beds remain unused in Edmonton on any given night.

In early 2019, Administration partnered with the Homeward Trust Foundation (Homeward Trust) to conduct research into the reasons people were choosing to sleep outside instead of in shelters. The following barriers to accessing emergency shelters were identified:

- shelter patrons fear for their physical safety and security
- lack of personal space and privacy at shelters, making it difficult to sleep
- lack of independence/too institutional: having to queue for shelter, go to sleep, eat meals, and leave the shelter all at set times
- lack of Indigenous and/or trauma-informed services
- shelters have limited storage options for personal possessions

Managing Encampments

The City receives and responds to ongoing complaints from the public and businesses about the impacts of homelessness encampments. Between January 1 and October 30, 2019, there were 4,004 reported homeless encampments across the entire city, up from 2,171 in all of 2018. This includes situations where a camp is shut down in one location and is re-established elsewhere by the same individual(s).

On average, Administration investigates 20 to 30 encampments and cleans 10 encampments every day. The estimated cost of camp closure and clean-up efforts are more than \$1.8 million per year. In 2019, additional clean-up efforts in the Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine cost approximately \$246,000. These expenditures are in addition to regular ongoing efforts including the costs associated with peace officers and parks operation crews and the cost of funding Boyle Street Community Services Street Outreach Team.

The Edmonton Police Service also spends a significant amount of time and resources addressing social disorder. Approximately 92.7 percent of calls for service are driven by social issues. The complexity of need present in people experiencing chronic homelessness in many circumstances results in their frequent contact with the justice system and emergency services. This could be prevented through the provision of adequate supportive housing options.

New housing investments are required to move beyond the current reactionary solutions that shift encampments from one area to another. Potential systemic solutions for addressing the growing number of encampments include changing how existing emergency shelters operate, changing the way outreach staff interact with people sleeping rough, improving leadership and coordination among the homeless-serving sector, increasing the supply of permanent supportive housing and introducing immediate or bridge housing options for people sleeping outside.

Fall 2019 Inner City Encampment Response

In May 2019, due to the risks related to an increased number of brush fires occurring in Dawson Park and Kinnaird Ravine, Administration increased enforcement in the park to address the public safety risk and to allow for remediation of significant environmental degradation.

Throughout the summer of 2019, an increased number of encampments were reported throughout the inner city. The number of people living in these encampments consistently grew despite enforcement attempts. In late summer, encampments began to emerge across four sites, located near homeless-serving agencies in the core and running north along the LRT tracks.

In response, Homeward Trust convened the Encampment Response Team to specifically target the inner city sites. The Encampment Response Team is comprised of representatives from the City of Edmonton, Homeward Trust, Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Edmonton Police Service, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Supports, and the Government of Alberta. The team piloted a coordinated selective enforcement and clean-up approach to enable concurrent outreach and housing efforts by multiple partner organizations. As a result of this work, 127

individuals were identified and 73 individuals were connected to teams to start the housing process.

Additional Measures for Improving Encampment Response

Administration has completed a review of interventions that would improve its response to encampments and have the potential to reduce the number of people sleeping outside in the short term. Specifically, there are three barriers that consistently impede attempts to reduce the number of people sleeping outside:

- 1) A lack of low-barrier shelter options.
- 2) The length of time it takes to connect outside sleepers to housing, which is further exacerbated by the mobile nature of the unsheltered population.
- 3) The lack of available capacity/long wait times for permanent supportive housing or affordable housing combined with on-site health and social support for individuals with complex needs.

The City of Edmonton has developed a plan for increasing the supply of permanent supportive housing in Edmonton by 900 units over the next six years and is working with Homeward Trust to advance funding requests to the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Even with secured funding, new permanent supportive housing would take two or three years to plan and build. There are three interim shelter and housing solutions that could be executed in the meantime to address the barriers identified above.

1) *Temporary Low-barrier Shelter*

Temporary low-barrier shelters could augment existing emergency shelter inventory in Edmonton by providing additional options for individuals sleeping outside. These shelters would be smaller in size and reduce barriers to access through extended operating hours, increased access to hygiene services, increased storage for client belongings, increased privacy, and integrated on-site housing workers to connect individuals to more permanent housing.

2) *Bridge Housing*

Bridge housing is short-term, continuous stay accommodation for individuals awaiting placement into permanent housing. The process of moving someone experiencing chronic homelessness to permanent housing involves several steps that vary based on individual circumstances and can take an average of 45 days. Bridge housing serves clients awaiting housing by allowing them to immediately access short-term housing and corresponding health and social supports while going through the steps necessary to move them into permanent housing. Bridge housing could also improve overall housing first system performance by reducing inefficiencies caused by the challenges housing workers face when trying to locate and connect with their unsheltered clients. Bridge housing is delivered in a congregate-living style environment with private or semi-private rooms and a shared kitchen.

3) *Expedited Permanent Supportive Housing*

Increasing the supply of permanent supportive housing will help individuals with complex needs. A segment of the unsheltered population of people experiencing chronic homelessness in Edmonton requires permanent supportive housing to access and maintain housing and a lack of permanent supportive housing means they cannot be housed. This expedited option explores faster ways to deliver permanent supportive housing in the short-term using modular structures or by acquiring and retrofitting an existing building.

Administration has completed an analysis of each of the three categories described above including a jurisdictional scan, interviews with other municipalities, housing providers and vendors, and has worked with Homeward Trust to estimate the operating costs for each option (Attachment 2).

Engagement with the Government of Alberta

In advance of the Government of Alberta’s 2019 budget, Administration focused advocacy efforts on the City’s funding request for 900 units of permanent supportive housing. The provincial budget did not include any new funding for permanent supportive housing. There were also cuts to capital funding and rental assistance programs, both of which could be potential funding sources for the interim housing solutions described above. The provincial budget did prioritize increased investments in addictions and mental health over the next three years. Preliminary conversations with provincial staff have indicated there may be some potential for alignment between these funding streams and bridge housing in particular, but further discussion is required to explore this.

Next Steps

Administration will continue to work with Homeward Trust and other partners, including the Governments of Alberta and Canada to explore opportunities for collaboration on bridge housing or expedited permanent supportive housing solutions. As well, Administration will continue working with the Government of Alberta and partner organizations to implement recommendations from the Report on Homeless Encampments on Public Land (March 2019) for encampment resolution, including working with existing emergency shelter providers to reduce barriers to accessing shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is a safe city			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmontonians have safe and adequate housing	Number of unsheltered individuals	October 2019: 456	Decrease year over year

Attachments

1. Homeless Encampment Update
2. Interim Shelter and Housing Solutions Analysis

Others Reviewing this Report

- G. Cebryk, Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- A. Laughlin, Acting Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor