

## Shelter Operations and Funding (M. Nickel)

### Recommendation

That the February 17, 2021, Citizen Services report CS00197, be received for information.

### Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 13, 2020, Community and Public Services Committee, Councillor M. Nickel made the following inquiry:

That Administration provide a report:

- summarizing known best practices and standards for shelters serving vulnerable populations
- the amount of funding provided by the City and other orders of government to shelters within the City
- describing current operational models for shelters operating within the City, including restrictions and services offered.

### Executive Summary

Emergency shelters, along with day services and outreach, are emergency services that provide temporary accommodation and essential services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Beyond meeting people's basic shelter needs, emergency shelters serve as a key portal to the housing system. Ending homelessness requires emergency shelters to be accessible to everyone. Administration conducted a review of the evidence-based best practices that make a shelter low-barrier and housing-focused and current operational models and funding sources of emergency shelters in Edmonton.

Prior to the pandemic, there were 714 overnight emergency shelter beds in Edmonton provided by Hope Mission and E4C. Shelter services were also previously available at the George Spady Centre; however, since the COVID-19 pandemic began, George Spady Centre has changed its operating model and no longer provides emergency shelter.

The Government of Alberta is the primary funder of emergency shelters in Edmonton. During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Government of Alberta provided approximately \$49.7 million to agencies across the province with approximately \$10 million of that directed to Edmonton for the combined purposes of emergency shelter, short-term

(transitional) and long-term supportive housing and temporary winter accommodation. This funding was directed to several agencies in Edmonton including Hope Mission, E4C, and several short-term and long-term supportive housing operators such as the Salvation Army, Urban Manor and Operation Friendship.

Since the onset of the pandemic, a number of additional temporary shelters have opened to accommodate additional requirements for physical distancing. The Edmonton EXPO Centre operated as a temporary day shelter and isolation space between March and August 2020; concurrently, temporary overnight shelter services were offered by the Mustard Seed and Hope Mission using City facilities. In October 2020, the City opened Tipinawâw at Edmonton Convention Centre to support up to 300 people. Since the fall, two other temporary shelters, run by Hope Mission and the Mustard Seed have also opened at Commonwealth Stadium and CESSCO Warehouse.

### **Report**

Emergency shelters provide temporary accommodation and essential services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Emergency shelters should be designed to ensure that an individual's stay in the shelter is brief and non-recurring. In order to be a successful intervention, emergency shelters should provide access to integrated health, income, and social service supports that link guests to permanent housing options.

In Edmonton, emergency shelter services are provided by homeless-serving agencies. Funding for these services is mostly provided by the Government of Alberta, which is jurisdictionally responsible for providing shelter to Albertans who have no fixed address. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the shelter system significantly, introducing public health measures that have challenged the system's overall sheltering capacity, which has necessitated further assistance from the municipal government.

### **Emergency Shelter Best Practices**

In 2019, the City of Edmonton and Homeward Trust conducted research to better understand why individuals in Edmonton sleep outside despite available shelter spaces. Individuals reported several reasons for avoiding existing emergency shelter options such as feeling unsafe, fearing theft of their belongings, overcrowding, a lack of privacy, a lack of independence (too institutional), and a lack of Indigenous-focused and trauma-informed services. Some individuals also reported discomfort with the overtly faith-based nature of some service providers. Conditions present in emergency shelters like overcrowding, lineups, and barrack-style shelter beds were identified to trigger behavioural responses and cause distress for individuals with mental health conditions. Individuals experiencing mental health and/or substance use disorders face a lack of integrated support services embedded in shelters. Emergency shelters that

cannot accommodate individuals with pets or couples pose further accessibility challenges. These challenges are barriers for people experiencing homelessness and suggest there is an opportunity to lower barriers to access at Edmonton's emergency shelters.

Low-barrier shelter is critical for ensuring the most vulnerable Edmontonians, including those with the most complex needs, can access emergency shelter as a pathway to housing. Low-barrier sheltering is not the absence of rules or expectations but having rules and expectations in place so that individuals accessing services can be successfully and safely accommodated in the shelter. Supporting people in this way requires investment in staffing, training and appropriate facilities.

In order to ensure any experiences of homelessness are rare, brief, and non-recurring, all components of the homeless-serving system also need to be engaged in housing-focused efforts. This means that all shelters need to share a common goal of moving their clients into housing. Becoming a housing-focused shelter is not about adding a team of housing workers but a transformation of how the entire shelter functions. The Canadian Shelter Transformation Network is a national network of leading homeless shelters that share research and strategies to transition shelter operations across the country towards ending homelessness by becoming housing-focused. Their findings show that improving access to emergency shelter services by adopting low-barrier, trauma-informed, and housing-focused practices and policies is key to breaking the cycle of chronic homelessness. Administration reviewed the network's findings and has identified some of the best practices adopted by low-barrier and housing-focused emergency shelters that could be most effective (Attachment 1).

### Funding

The Government of Alberta funds emergency shelter services across the province. Provincial funding is often used in combination with other program funding and private donations facilitated by the non-profit agencies delivering shelter services.

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year (ending March 31, 2020), the Government of Alberta provided approximately \$49.7 million to agencies across the province to deliver emergency shelter and transitional housing services. Approximately \$10 million of that was provided to non-profit agencies in Edmonton to deliver 591 emergency shelter spaces, 310 short-term and long-term supportive housing spaces, and an additional 201 temporary winter spaces. About half of the funding provided to Edmonton was directed to Hope Mission to provide 525 emergency shelter beds.

The pandemic has impacted the number and location of emergency shelter spaces. Shelter capacity in Edmonton fluctuated over the past year as a result of COVID-19 outbreaks among the homeless population and available space that was adequate to safely provide day services and overnight shelter. Additionally, all stakeholders

identified the need for shelter spaces that could allow individuals to self-isolate and get medical care and attention. In response to the pandemic, the Government of Alberta has committed an additional \$17 million, to date, to shelter operators and community organizations in Edmonton in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The funding is being used for additional shelter facilities to meet physical distancing guidelines and to expand overnight services into 24/7 shelter, including basic day supports and isolation spaces. This funding supports the operations of up to 850 emergency shelter spaces (not including isolation spaces with medical care for COVID-19 positive individuals) and approximately 300 transitional housing spaces.

A temporary day shelter and isolation space opened at the Edmonton EXPO Centre in March 2020. The centre offered essential service delivery, including meals, hygiene services, daytime sleeping space, and housing programs. Medical and isolation space was also delivered on-site for individuals who were required to self-isolate as a result of COVID-19. The space could accommodate up to 600 individuals at one time. Funding for the Edmonton EXPO Centre was provided by the City, Government of Alberta, Homeward Trust, and Alberta Health Services. Total costs to operate the facility, including the isolation space, were \$12.5 million. The City's portion of the total was \$5.1 million. A number of community agencies relocated their operations to the facility and it is expected that approximately one-third of the staff resources came from existing programs, which is not included in the total.

Following the closure of temporary services at the Edmonton EXPO Centre in July, homelessness and the number of people sleeping in encampments in Edmonton grew in the summer and fall of 2020. This is, in part, due to the inability of existing shelters to support individuals with complex needs, a significant loss of day shelter space and the corresponding access to services, and fear from community members of catching COVID-19 in congregate shelter settings. Organized encampments set up during the summer resulted in public health and safety concerns for vulnerable individuals and surrounding communities. There were also additional costs incurred by the City to support vulnerable people at these sites.

In October 2020, the City opened a 24/7 temporary accommodation at the Edmonton Convention Centre which supports up to 300 people. Indigenous Elders ceremonially gifted the space with the name Tipinawâw (at Edmonton Convention Centre), which is a Cree word meaning 'shelter from the elements, cold and wind'. City Council approved up to \$8.5 million to fund the temporary accommodation, primarily using funds from the Municipal Operating Support Transfer Program, which is operating funding provided by the governments of Alberta and Canada under the Safe Restart Agreement.

### Shelter Operating Models

Edmonton's emergency shelter providers run under a variety of operating models (Attachment 2). While there are currently no mandated service standards in Alberta,

Alberta Health Services has guidelines related to basic sanitation and hygiene and the Government of Alberta has voluntary guidelines for LGBTQ2S youth housing and shelter. Shelter providers, as well as the emergency and justice systems, struggle to help those with complex needs who cannot be supported in a shelter and are otherwise banned. Although shelter providers are working to incorporate housing-focused policies and trauma-informed approaches to their operations, clear guidelines with measurable outcomes are needed to improve guest experiences and ensure an expedited transition from shelter to housing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated more collaboration and integration between shelter providers and other homeless-serving agencies. The Government of Alberta, Homeward Trust, and the City of Edmonton are leading a strategic planning effort to respond to the challenges of the pandemic through 2021 and to establish a framework for continued collaboration in the future.

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

While the City of Edmonton does not normally provide direct funding for emergency shelters, the COVID-19 pandemic has required increased municipal involvement. The City provided \$5.1 million to partially fund the daytime shelter services at the Edmonton EXPO Centre. The remaining costs were covered by Homeward Trust and the Government of Alberta.

The City is providing financial, logistical and operational support to Tipinawâw (at the Edmonton Convention Centre). In October 2020, City Council approved up to \$8 million for Boyle Street Service, Mustard Seed and Bissell Centre to operate the temporary shelter accommodation until the end of February 2021. An additional \$500,000 was reallocated from within existing budgets to support the operations. Bent Arrow Healing Society provides services through an agreement with City-contracted agencies. The \$8.5 million is supplemented by an additional \$1.5 million of funding from Family and Community Support Services and a further commitment of \$1.5 million from Homeward Trust. While efforts are already underway to extend the operation until the end of March, those conversations have not yet concluded and the financial implications are not yet finalized.

In 2019, City Council approved City Policy C620 - Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions, which formalized the City's role in providing additional support for vulnerable people during extreme weather where the need for support exceeds the capacity of available resources.

## Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmontonians have what they need to succeed			
Outcome	Measures	Results	Targets
Edmontonians have safe and adequate housing and shelter space	Number of unsheltered individuals	December 2020: 1943	Decrease year over year

### Attachments

1. Summary of Emergency Shelter Best Practices
2. Edmonton Emergency Shelter Operating Models

### Others Reviewing this Report

- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- S. McCabe, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor, Office of the City Manager