

COVID-19 Pandemic Homelessness Response - Council Update

Recommendation

1. That the Social Development branch 2021 operating expenditure budget be increased by \$7,585,000, on a one-time basis, with funding from the COVID-specific funds set aside in the Appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve, for costs related to providing City buildings and supports to shelter operations until October 31, 2021.
2. That the Parks and Roads Services branch 2021 operating expenditure budget be increased by \$515,000, on a one-time basis, with funding from the COVID-specific funds set aside in the Appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve, for costs related to providing temporary washroom facilities within business areas around the downtown core until October 31, 2021.

Executive Summary

Administration, the Government of Alberta, Homeward Trust, and homeless-serving agencies have been working collaboratively to ensure individuals' needs will be met during the spring and summer months. Day drop-in spaces have been identified as a gap for individuals experiencing housing insecurity and as means to support economic recovery in core business areas. Administration is proposing to fill this gap and support homeless-serving agencies by providing City-owned buildings and offering financial support for day drop-in spaces. This enhanced role in homelessness support will be temporary while physical distancing requirements are in place at homeless-serving agencies and until the opening of the new Hope Mission Herb Jamieson Building which will provide space for up to 400 individuals.

Due to public health measures put in place due to COVID-19, many public facilities are closed or have limited access. Administration is proposing placing mobile washrooms in up to six locations where temporary shelters are in close proximity to business areas.

Administration estimates the cost of addressing this gap in service is up to \$8.1 million.

Report

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly limited the ability of homeless-serving agencies to provide overnight and daytime drop-in services to meet the basic needs

(food, hygiene, etc.) of Edmontonians experiencing homelessness. The need for support continues to grow as economic disruption associated with COVID-19 increases the overall number of people experiencing homelessness, and the number of precariously housed people requiring support (Attachment 1).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the City has acted in its emergency management role in collaboration with the provincial government and social support agencies to help ensure sufficient health, isolation, and programming spaces are available. The City's contribution has been through problem-solving, planning, offering of space and, when necessary, direct funding. This contribution also included licensing a variety of City-owned facilities for day services and shelter, including the EXPO Centre, Kinsmen Sports Centre, Central Lions Seniors Centre, Commonwealth Stadium and the Edmonton Convention Centre.

Government of Alberta's Overnight Shelter Plan

The Government of Alberta is responsible for ensuring sufficient emergency overnight shelter spaces exist for people experiencing homelessness. By April 30, three large 24/7 temporary shelters (Edmonton Convention Centre, Commonwealth Stadium, and the CESSCO building) will close and the overall sector response to homelessness will move from larger congregate facilities to smaller, more distributed shelters, drop-ins and transitional housing spaces. This will allow increased client interaction at each site, reduce the risk of large-scale outbreaks and ensure better coverage throughout the city.

The Mustard Seed permanently closed their temporary 99 Street shelter location on March 31 and worked with the Government of Alberta to transition services into four churches on the city's south side and its Strathcona Neighbour Centre. Before the end of April, the Hope Mission operations at Commonwealth Stadium will move to the City-owned Spectrum Building (former horse race track) south of the Edmonton EXPO Centre. Hope Mission will continue to operate 24/7 shelter services at their downtown location and at the Spectrum Building. To support the Government of Alberta in the achievement of its shelter plans, Administration proposes to license the Spectrum Building to Hope Mission for temporary use.

The Government of Alberta has indicated to Administration that the 819 shelter beds it currently directly funds are sufficient to meet emergency shelter needs in Edmonton.

These overnight spaces will be supplemented by approximately 450 temporary transitional housing spaces primarily funded by Homeward Trust through federal funds.

Service Gap - Day Drop-in

Tipinawâw (at the Edmonton Convention Centre), which serves up to 600 unique individuals a day, is scheduled to close on April 30. The new shelter spaces and

transitional housing operations do not have the same capacity as Tipinawâw to offer day programming space. Day support spaces offered by non-profit agencies are typically funded through a combination of fundraising, auxiliary businesses providing revenue (eg., thrift stores) and grants from government and other charitable organizations. These funding sources have been impacted by the pandemic and the Government of Alberta has indicated that it does not have funding to support day programming spaces in Edmonton.

Due to capacity challenges at the homeless-serving agencies brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Administration recommends that City Council approve funds to ensure people experiencing homelessness have sufficient safe places to go during the day to access food, washrooms, showers and social supports. This would be achieved through supporting the creation and extended hours of day drop-in spaces at the following locations:

- *105 and 105 Building (10542 105 Street NW)*
57 new day drop-in spaces in a City-owned building licensed to an operator with an estimated 300 unique participants every day over 15 hours per day, 7 days per week.
- *Boyle Street Community Services Building (10116 105 Ave NW)*
45 additional spaces serving up to 120 unique participants will be created at the existing location through the regular staffing and programming of their adjacent courtyard space. Boyle Street Community Services' operations will be extended from five days per week to seven days per week.
- *Bissell Centre (10527 96 St NW)*
Re-opening of 50 day drop-in spaces serving up to 275 unique participants with extended hours of up to 15 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Together this investment will ensure 152 spaces are available at any given time to serve up to 695 unique visitors each day.

Service Gap - Public Washrooms

Due to public health measures put in place due to COVID-19, many public facilities are closed or have limited access. This has resulted in an increase in public defecation and urination, especially downtown. The City has received requests from residents, businesses and business improvement areas to provide washroom facilities to meet the needs of individuals needing access to public facilities.

If funding is approved, mobile washrooms will be available everyday from May 1 to October 31, 2021. Mobile washrooms will be placed in up to six locations where temporary shelters are in close proximity to business areas. The final locations and hours of service will be determined in consultation with the Business Improvement Area Council.

The City of Edmonton's Overall Ongoing Pandemic Response to Homelessness

The creation of permanent supportive housing is a continued focus of the City. However, the scope of service offered by the City has temporarily increased to help fill gaps in the system. This enhanced role is temporary while physical distancing requirements are in place at homeless-serving agencies and until the opening of the new Hope Mission Herb Jamieson Building in the fall, which will provide space for up to 400 individuals. The City's temporary enhanced role is multifaceted and includes direct support and strategic short-term investments intended to keep people safe during the pandemic, lead to greater housing outcomes and assist in the economic recovery of our core business areas.

Proposed City of Edmonton activities between May 1-October 31 include:

- Supporting the provincial government's responsibility of providing overnight shelter spaces by making the Spectrum Building operable and available to Hope Mission.
- Assisting day service operators by making the 105 and 105 Building available for use.
- Supplementing operational funding through procurement or subsidy agreements for the 105 and 105 Building and other day service locations within the downtown core.
- Developing community plans that include additional City and partner resources around temporary homeless-serving locations to help keep areas clean and safe.
- Providing temporary washroom facilities within business areas around the downtown core.
- Developing an encampment strategy with agency partners and Edmonton Police Service focused on housing support.

The estimated cost of providing the City buildings, supporting day service operators and providing temporary washrooms is approximately \$8.1 million.

Next Steps

Administration will confirm an operator for the 105 and 105 Building, prepare agreements with agency providers, and will return to City Council to seek applicable agreement approvals where needed.

At the end of October 2021, Administration will no longer fund overnight or day programming.

Budget/Financial Implications

The amount of COVID-19 funds unallocated and available in the reserve prior to this recommendation are \$23.8 million. If City Council approves the use of \$8.1 million for this request, the revised unallocated balance would be \$15.7 million. Additional

requests for funding related to COVID-19 pressures will be brought forward on April 19, 2021. Under the Reserve and Equity Accounts Policy C217C, Council approval is required to move money out of any City reserve.

Public Engagement

Administration and the facility operators will develop good neighbour plans for the new shelter facilities and day-use facilities which outlines service standards, information about security and cleanliness, and contact information for reporting concerns will be created for the new sites and posted online. Letters will be sent to neighbours, community organizations and businesses informing them of the temporary use of these buildings and directing them to the good neighbour plans. This follows the process established for Tipinawâw, Commonwealth, and CESSCO locations.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmonton is a safe city			
Outcome	Measure	Result	Target
Edmontonians have safe and adequate housing	Number of unsheltered individuals	January 2020: 451	Decrease annually

Risk Assessment

Risk Element	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Score (with current mitigations)	Current Mitigations	Potential Future Mitigations
If recommendation is approved						
Suppliers	Social agencies may not be able to provide services that meet the needs of homeless population	2 - Unlikely	2 - Moderate	4 - Low	City would contract only experienced service providers with a history of providing service to the homeless population	Bi-weekly activity and service level reporting
Suppliers	Social agencies experience cost overruns or unforeseen expenditures	2 - Unlikely	2 - Moderate	4 - Low	Social agencies are using actual costs from past operations in budget development	Reduction in services levels or length of time operations continue

Liability	Liability exposure to the City as the property owner	3 - Moderate	1 - Low	4 - Low	Negotiation of agreements to include indemnity clauses and insurance requirements Operators have sufficient safety and security plans	N/A
If recommendation is not approved						
Public Perception	The City may be viewed as an organization with low empathy to the homeless population in core business and neighborhood areas	4 - Likely	2 - Moderate	8 - Medium	City provided supports at Tipinawaw during winter months	N/A
Health and Safety	Without adequate services there is a greater likelihood of encampments being established putting individuals in need of help at a greater risk of harm	4 - Likely	2 - Moderate	8 - Medium	The City and social agency led Encampment Response Team connects individuals sleeping rough to available services	N/A

Attachments

1. By Name List - March 2021
2. Service Access Map

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
- K. Fallis-Howell, Acting City Solicitor