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Item No. 2
Halifax Regional Council
April 12, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 29, 2022

SUBJECT: Emergency Supportive Housing and Shelter Accommodation update –
March 2022

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

August 31, 2021 Regional Council motion (item 14.1):

Moved by Mayor Savage, seconded by Councillor Mason.

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to implement a range of emergency supportive housing and emergency shelter accommodations for those who are unhoused in collaboration with and based on feedback from community-based social services providers and the Province of Nova Scotia to address immediate and emergent needs including measures such as the fit-up of spaces for temporary accommodations, renting of hotel and other spaces and further, and to coordinate and collaborate with community-based social services providers and the Province of Nova Scotia in that respect;

Direct that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to \$500,000 from Fiscal Services in respect of addressing these needs, and report on the use of said funds through monthly public updates as an information report at Regional Council meetings until the end of the fiscal year and then quarterly at a minimum; and,

Further direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with Department of Community Services and community service providers on a needs-analysis including determining how many people are unhoused, how many of them are currently tenting or occupying other forms of shelter within parks and other public lands in Halifax Regional Municipality and how many can be accommodated in a safer manner.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

November 9, 2021 Regional Council motion (Item15.1.9)

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to \$3.2 million from Fiscal Services to purchase, install and maintain modular units at two sites and to address suitable temporary housing to address needs of unhoused residents. Regular updates to Regional Council will occur monthly until the end of the fiscal year and then quarterly at minimum.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

November 9, 2021 Regional Council motion (Item15.1.4)

MOVED by Councillor Cuttall, seconded by Councillor Kent THAT Halifax Regional Council direct that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to an additional \$1,200,000 from Fiscal Services to purchase and install modular units at two sites and to address suitable temporary housing to address needs of unhoused residents.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

March 1, 2022 Regional Council Motion (Item 15.1.5)

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Stoddard THAT Halifax Regional Council: 3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to allocate the \$205,601 to the Emergency Housing Fund as a contingency to purchase, install and maintain modular units at two sites and to address suitable temporary housing to address needs of unhoused residents.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED (15 in favour, 2 against)

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39 provides:

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

...

(b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and

(c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

BACKGROUND

Halifax is in an emergency shelter crisis on top of a housing crisis. The city is growing at an unprecedented rate and increased homelessness is one result. There are approximately 200 shelter beds in Halifax and over 450 people experiencing homelessness, a rate of one shelter bed for every 2.5 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. In addition, the city's rental vacancy rate is below 1%, the minimum wage is \$13.40 and the average cost of a 1-bedroom apartment is \$1600. While the three orders of government continue to invest in rapidly built new housing, including supportive housing options, the homelessness crisis continues to persist. New pathways to ensure access to emergency shelter are needed until an adequate amount of deeply affordable housing, as well as supportive housing, is made available.

In August 2021, Halifax Regional Council identified \$500,000 for use in addressing urgent and emergency needs related to homelessness and directed the Chief Administrative Officer to work with the Province of Nova Scotia and community partners to explore use of this funding. On November 9, 2021 Regional Council directed that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to an additional \$3.2 million for this

purpose and on January 11, 2022 Regional Council approved another \$1.2 million. On March 1, 2022, Regional Council voted to reallocate a \$205,601 surplus in 2021/22 supplementary education funding to the emergency housing fund. The majority of the additional \$4.6 million approved by Council is to support installation of modular units on sites in Dartmouth and Halifax.

The situation with homelessness is dynamic and changes frequently. Therefore, monthly updates provided to Regional Council will be reflective of a specific period, up to the point of having a report prepared in time for review and distribution on the Council agenda. This is the final monthly update report requested by Council and covers the period up to and including March 29, 2022.

DISCUSSION

Modular Units

The construction of the modular housing shelter located at 7 Church Street in Dartmouth is complete (the project received all required occupancy permits). The finished development includes four modular sleeping units (total capacity 24 persons), one barrier free modular sleeping unit including single washroom (total capacity 2 persons), commercial kitchen modular unit and an office trailer with a small program space to accommodate Out of the Cold staff. The modification of the commercial kitchen modular unit was turned over to the service provider on March 18th. Out of the Cold have received their NS Food Establishment Permit and began serving on-site prepared food on March 29th.

The Municipality has signed a license agreement with the Province of Nova Scotia, which is responsible for determining placement of individuals and providing wrap-around services onsite through Out of the Cold. HRM purchased the units, is providing all normal municipal services (i.e. garbage pick-up, snow removal), and is covering the cost of utilities and maintenance.

The Halifax modular housing development is located on a portion of the parking area of the Centennial Pool accessed from Cogswell Street. The development includes six modular sleeping units (total capacity 36 persons), one barrier free modular sleeping unit including single washroom (total capacity 2 persons), commercial kitchen modular unit including small common area and an office trailer with a small program space to accommodate Out of the Cold staff, who have been confirmed by the province as the service provider for the Halifax site.

As of the writing of this report, the following construction work is proceeding to support the development:

- The civil work (installation of water, sanitary and electrical infrastructure) within Cogswell Street and on site is complete
- Installation of the nine modular units onto the foundations is complete
- Installation of sanitary, water and electrical systems underside modular units is underway
- Construction of electrical and mechanical building structures to accommodate Halifax Water and NSPI services is underway
- Renovation of three modular units to accommodate the commercial kitchen and barrier free bedroom(s)/washroom is underway
- Construction wood skirting to enclose modular units is underway
- Construction of wood stairs and ramps to all modular units is underway.

The municipality continues to work with partners to complete the work as quickly as possible. As with the Dartmouth site, exact timing for occupancy is dependent upon the province, which is responsible for determining placement of individuals and providing wrap-around services onsite through Out of the Cold.

Estimated costs to purchase, install and construct the modular units are as follows:

- Dartmouth site - estimated at \$1,948,760
- Halifax site - estimated at \$2,214,652

The anticipated costs identified with the construction of both sites have increased due to unforeseen circumstances. Typically, the management of a capital construction project includes sufficient time for the development of a well-defined scope of work that assists with accurate budgeting and cost estimates. Due to the unique nature and urgency of this project, risks associated with unknown issues, program requirements and other variables have had an impact on the budget and schedule for both projects.

Partnerships

An ongoing priority for the municipality and its partners is to work with persons sleeping outdoors to try to identify suitable temporary housing options. Staff from the municipality and partner organizations are making best efforts to visit sites regularly and, in coordination with multiple service providers, placement of people in hotel rooms and other shelter options has been occurring regularly. Staff are aware of more than 20 locations at which people are sleeping outside. This number may not be accurate because it is estimated from different sources, including information from community outreach workers and the municipal 311 system. In addition, due to the transitory nature of residents sleeping outside, the number of sites and/or individuals onsite can vary daily.

The municipality provided a portion of the Council-approved funding to a coalition of 11 community service providers (COPSO) to use for crisis hotel stays. In conjunction with service providers, the municipality has also directly covered the cost of hotel rooms for some individuals. This funding created a rapid support model to provide immediate access to safe, indoor space via hotel accommodation - essentially a scattered site emergency bed program run collaboratively by community agencies. The range of members in the coalition enabled broad access to support from across the system (youth, families, men, women, domestic violence survivors, etc.). Agencies have referred clients to the COPSO fund and each person referred is attached to a support worker as a condition of acceptance.

The COPSO model was proposed in September as a temporary (6 to 8 week) program to connect people to indoor accommodation, primarily those who had been sleeping rough. Although the program was intended to act as a short-term bridge to provincially funded housing options, the emergency shelter crisis has resulted in continued need for access to immediate hotel accommodation. To date, the municipality has provided emergency shelter accommodation via hotel rooms for approximately 140 people experiencing homelessness. This activity has added approximately 5200 shelter bed nights to the system, the equivalent of 27 shelter beds nightly. As of the writing of this report, the net projected 2021/22 municipal cost for hotel rooms is approximately \$20,000, the Province has contributed \$840,000 toward the total cost of \$860,000.

Municipal staff are working closely with provincial colleagues to support the province in its role as the lead in addressing homelessness. Regular meetings have occurred with provincial staff to better combine resources, clarify roles and responsibilities, and conduct joint planning. In early January 2022, municipal staff presented numbers and costs to provincial staff and requested that all individuals being supported in hotels via COPSO or direct municipal funding be transferred to a more stable funding source. Provincial staff have committed to reimbursing the municipality for most 2021/22 hotel costs as noted above and, as of March 31, all individuals in hotels will be transitioned to provincial programming and costs will be assumed by the province.

It is expected that homelessness will continue to be a significant social issue and the municipality will maintain some role in providing facilitation for those sleeping in parks and other locations and supporting the province in delivering on its mandate.

Meagher Park / Encampments

The municipality is updating its encampment protocol in anticipation of the closure of Meagher Park once appropriate housing alternatives for those currently encamped in the park are confirmed and offered. Concurrent with this activity is a review of short- and medium-term municipal responses to homelessness, particularly as relates to addressing new shelters and tent sites and options for temporary sheltering. Any short- and medium-term responses are meant as temporary measures while the municipality works towards more sustainable and suitable longer-term responses. A position has been retained for four months to help facilitate the closure of Meagher Park in the short-term and develop a go forward model in the medium-term that will define HRM's role and approach in relation to homelessness.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Of the \$5,105,601 approved by Regional Council, total actual and projected net expenditures as of the writing of this report were \$4,304,084, taking into account the reimbursement from the province for hotel costs. Most of this spending is for purchase and installation of the modular units, with some costs for security and supplies at Gray Arena during the period it was used as a temporary shelter. As indicated earlier in this report, the province has agreed to reimburse the municipality for all costs incurred through provision of hotel rooms.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the Province, staff have contact and/or meet regularly with several community-based service providers. COPSO agency members include: Adsum for Women and Children (Trustee), Coverdale Courtwork Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland NS, John Howard Society, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, North End Community Health Centre / MOSH Housing First, Out of the Cold Community Association, Phoenix Youth Programs, Shelter Nova Scotia, Welcome Housing, and the YWCA. Bryony House is not a member but refers people as needed. In addition, the Outreach Street Navigators and Mainline have been engaged as required.

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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