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Item No. 15.1.7
Halifax Regional Council
September 12, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 4, 2023

SUBJECT: Homelessness Strategy Update

ORIGIN

May 3, 2022, Halifax Regional Council Motion (Item No. 15.1.9):

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Stoddard

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to continue to support the Province and other partners to ensure individuals have safe, supportive and affordable housing,
5. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to negotiate and enter into a contribution agreement with the United Way to convene a lived experience committee to advise staff,
6. Direct the CAO to return to Council with a subsequent report with a subsequent report with a with additional analysis and recommendations for actions, including a timeline and plan for supporting the transition of people, education and implementation that is lead and delivered by civilian staff.
7. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a staff report on negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Province of Nova Scotia on supporting Unsheltered Residents of HRM. The report should include defining the roles of each order. of government and specific actions to support and prevent homelessness within the HRM.

MOTION AS AMENDED PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Stoddard

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

2. Direct the CAO to continue efforts to increase availability of affordable housing as described in the body of this report, and
4. Direct the CAO to continue to review options to add non-park sites to inventory of outdoor sites available for overnight sheltering,

Recommendation on pages 2 & 3

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Stoddard

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

3. Direct the CAO to formalize criteria and locations for the designation of overnight sheltering sites in parks consistent with the criteria and locations described in the body of the staff report dated April 28, 2022, with the removal of the one-night camping sites, and addition of those sites to the list of potential longer term camping sites if required and possible to ensure adequate supply to meet demands to be brought back to Council for consideration.

MOTION AS AMENDED PUT AND PASSED.

June 14, 2023 Halifax Regional Council Motion (15.1.5)

MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Austin

THAT Halifax Regional Council endorse the proposed criteria and locations in municipal parks for designated camping intended for those experiencing homelessness.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39

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

79A(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

- (a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality; ...

Halifax Regional Municipality By-law P-600 Respecting Municipal Parks

Camping

8. (1) Camping is prohibited in a park unless otherwise posted or by permission.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. direct the CAO to lease private property, if possible, as locations for persons experiencing homelessness to shelter.
2. endorse an exception to the June 14, 2022, criteria prohibiting the use of active sports fields for homeless encampments for use of the Halifax Common camping for the purpose of sheltering.
3. direct the CAO to establish additional encampments, temporary housing, or tiny home locations on all types of municipality-owned properties. Such sites may include rights of way, parking lots, and

surplus lands.

4. direct the CAO to write to the province requesting their immediate plans to create deeply affordable housing options in HRM.
5. direct the CAO to explore the options of the non-park property types outlined in this report, as well as campgrounds, and outdoor facilities, as locations for unhoused persons who are sheltering in a vehicle.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Regional Municipality is in the midst of a housing crisis.

Based on the 2018 PiT count¹, there were 18 people unsheltered in our community five years ago. Based on the July 2023 draft Sleeping Rough Survey (Appendix 1), there are 178 people unsheltered in urban and suburban HRM. This is more than double the number in November 2022². In addition, the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia's By Name List³ indicates as of August 29, 2023, there are 1012 people experiencing homelessness in HRM, almost a 60% increase since August 2022 and approximately 500% increase since 2018.

These surveys do not capture the total count of people experiencing homelessness as some sheltering in rural HRM are not counted, nor are those who are sleeping on a friend or family member's couch or floor. In addition, some people sheltering in their vehicles are not counted. This growth in homelessness has occurred while, during the past year, the Province of Nova Scotia has added 64 beds to the shelter system and opened 304 new supportive housing units. Without their efforts to address this issue, the number of people sheltering on the street could be more than double what the community is facing now.

In 2022, the municipality established five designated locations for people to shelter on. These locations were intended to offer space for 44 tents, and based on a count completed on August 14, 2023, over 90 people live in them. In addition to the designated locations, during the past year, 62 additional encampment sites have been set up by people experiencing homelessness. When drafting this report, approximately 30 of these non-designated locations are active. These range from large encampments such as Victoria Park, with almost 40 tents, or Grand Parade, with 17 tents, to small ones on large right of ways or in more isolated park spaces with 1 or 2 tents.

Unfortunately, the growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness is expected to continue. At the core of the housing crisis is a lack of affordable and deeply affordable housing, along with food insecurity, significant challenges accessing physical and mental health care, and insufficient income. CMHC, in their Spring 2023 Housing Market Outlook,⁴ stated, "Rents are expected to rise further over the forecast horizon, as vacancy rates are still low and operating costs for property managers continue to increase." CMHC also stated, "Property managers might also charge the maximum rent possible for newly built units in case further rent increases are limited by an extension of the rent cap legislation."

In September 2022, the Nova Scotia Finance and Treasury Board released Statistics Canada information on housing from the 2021 Census⁵. 42.5% of households in Halifax are renters. Of that number, 36.7% of these households are in core housing need, spending more than 30% of their income on housing. For homeowners, the number of households in HRM in core housing need is 10.6%. It is important to note that

¹ [2018+Halifax+Point+in+Time+Count+Report.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](#)

² [Nov 22 Navigator Survey.pdf \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](#)

³ [AHANS | HRM Homelessness Statistics](#)

⁴ [Housing Market Outlook - Spring 2023 \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](#)

⁵ [Nova Scotia Department of Finance - Statistics](#)

households in core housing need are more likely to face challenges maintaining their housing. Small adjustments in housing or other costs can create significant hardship for these individuals and families, leading to homelessness.

On January 1, 2024, the Provincial Rent Cap will allow property managers to increase rents by 5%. Based on the dramatic operating cost increases, many property owners are expected to raise their rents by this maximum amount. It is important to note that this increase is likely insufficient to cover increased operating costs faced by many property managers, leading to more affordable landlords leaving the market and ultimately losing this type of housing stock.

There are additional pressures on the affordable housing market in HRM. Recent media stories have covered the housing crisis faced by students. In 2022, the population of Halifax increased by 20,713 people⁶. The construction industry is not building sufficient housing to meet this level of growth, placing continued upward pressure on rents.

Halifax-based outreach workers have noted significant increases in the number of people experiencing homelessness who simply lack sufficient income to afford housing. They have also noted an increase in the number of seniors experiencing homelessness, many of them for the first time in their lives. This observation is supported by research, such as a recent study by the University of Pennsylvania that predicts senior homeless will nearly triple in the next 7 years.⁷

Ultimately, nothing in the market or sector suggests that the rapid growth in individuals and families facing precarious housing situations or experiencing homelessness will not continue for the foreseeable future. Without dramatic policy changes from other all orders of government around creating and supporting deeply affordable housing options, the municipality must accept that hundreds of people sheltering outside will continue for several years to come and plan accordingly.

DISCUSSION

As the number of homeless continues to grow in HRM, the need to provide housing will increase, and the number of people needing safe and supported sites for shelter will grow.

Designated Encampments

In June 2022, Regional Council endorsed the staff-recommended approach to providing places for people to shelter. Four park spaces were designated locations where unhoused persons could shelter, 2 in Halifax and 2 in Dartmouth. These locations included supports such as garbage collection and water delivery.

The approach included a process for adding designated locations if required.

"In the future, should the need for camping space exceed the capacity of these four locations, staff will consider adding designated locations in park spaces. Staff does not intend to return to Regional Council for feedback on additional locations but rather would apply the criteria indicated above and consult with the local Councillor. Additionally, the municipality will work with other levels of government to identify and request that provincially and federally owned spaces be made available where people could be permitted to shelter overnight."

This process was used to add a fifth designated location in Sackville as the need in that part of the

⁶ [Halifax Partnership | Halifax Index 2023 – People](#)

⁷ [New Report Predicts Aging Homeless Population Will Nearly Triple by 2030 - School of Social Policy & Practice \(upenn.edu\)](#)

community continued to grow.

Staff have requested assistance from the Provincial and Federal Governments for additional locations where unhoused persons could shelter. While the Province initially offered multiple sites for consideration, in the end, none were available to allow unhoused persons to seek shelter on them.

Considering the need for 178 people to shelter outside while waiting for suitable housing, and based on our current recommended encampment guidelines, as many as 18 – 20 municipal parks would need to be designated as sheltering locations to meet the immediate need. Considering that the number of unhoused members of our community will grow next year, that could require an additional 20+ parks designated as sheltering locations.

Staff felt it essential to return to Council to either seek direction to use other approaches to support the unhoused, reducing the loss of park space, or confirm this approach before removing this much park space on a medium to long-term basis.

Immediate response to create additional space

Staff recognizes the growing pressure in multiple locations due to overcrowding, including several designated locations where, in one case, more than 7x the recommended population is sheltering there, Grand Parade, Victoria Park, and others. While the following actions will not solve the issue and will, in fact, likely increase the overall pressure around homelessness, it will relieve some of the immediate concerns at several sites until other options can be advanced. It is important to note that these actions will only provide temporary relief if long-term housing options for people aren't created and made available, and the municipality cannot find enough locations to shelter the dramatically growing homeless population.

A new designated location will be set up on the Halifax Commons at North Park Street and Cogswell Street. This site will offer 20 spaces for tents and provide an opportunity to reduce overcrowding in both designated and undesignated locations. This site will regularly be monitored to ensure it doesn't expand into other areas of the Halifax Commons. In addition, the Grand Parade will become a designated location with a maximum number of tents. The southern end of Victoria Park will also become a designated location, moving tents from the walkway and event areas in the park over time. This designated location will have a maximum number of tents.

This, however, is insufficient to address the overcrowding at some locations, and at the end of the playing season (October 31), the two crusher dust ball diamonds at the North Side of the Common will be closed. That space will be converted into a larger homeless encampment. This site is close to a year-round public bathroom, providing residents sheltering outside with toilet facilities, running water, and power. It is also close to needed services. The intention is to provide additional onsite support to residents in this long-term encampment with additional outreach staff and supplies. In upcoming seasons, staff will attempt to redistribute traditional bookings from these diamonds to other locations, but it is anticipated that not all demand will be able to be met.

All of this will still leave many undesignated locations as sheltering options as it will not be enough to meet the total needs of people experiencing homelessness. In the coming months, additional park sites may need to be considered.

Impact of Homelessness

The impact of homelessness on the individual, their families, and the surrounding community is profound. There is ample research showing the health impact of homelessness on the unhoused. A 2019 Evidence Brief published by Public Health Ontario, 'Homelessness and Health Outcomes'⁸: What are the

⁸ [Homelessness and Health Outcomes: What are the associations? \(publichealthontario.ca\)](https://publichealthontario.ca)

associations', clearly outlines many of them from multiple sources. The impacts are broad, ranging from examples such as persons experiencing homelessness having higher rates of cognitive function impairment to physical issues such as foot problems. The experience of homelessness exacerbates general mental and physical health concerns. People experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable and susceptible to injuries while living outside. The Homelessness Hub further notes⁹ such impacts as an increased mortality rate, skin diseases, and cardio-respiratory disease. In addition, "Being unhoused makes it difficult, and in some cases impossible, to access general health care services."

Community members who are forced to live outside due to government and community decisions not to ensure a safe, stable, and supportive housing supply have impacts on the business community and other residents. People sheltering outside are forced to live in public. Such activities as keeping warm, preparing food, dealing with bullies and others who intend to harm them, and looking for necessities such as food, power, and water impact those around them.

A local business association has noted that some of the impacts on the business community include increased theft and security concerns, drops in consumer confidence, and willingness of customers to patronize businesses, especially at night. Staff feel unsafe in some situations, requiring businesses to hire additional staff or security or losing employees to other opportunities where they feel safer. A lack of public washrooms and safe potable water sources forces people to use the bathroom on the street, creates serious health risks for everyone, and increases the risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Other residents around homeless encampments also report theft and significant disruption to their lives. As many of these residents regularly note, these impacts result from people being forced to live their lives outside, with little privacy or dignity, of not having adequate food, water, and other necessities of life. Drug use is common within some of the encampment communities, and used and discarded needles pose a life-threatening danger to children and pets. Due to the need to house people in parks, residents reflect that the loss of those community spaces has impacted their quality of life and that of their family and friends. Space used to recreate, interact with families and neighbours, and generally enjoy their community is lost, often for extended periods of time, even after those experiencing homelessness have been offered and accepted other housing or sheltering options. Residents also note that criminal behaviour and other acts of violence around some locations have traumatized children, adults, and seniors and resulted in significant hardships for those living in the impacted area.

The United Nations has defined housing as a human right¹⁰. In 2019, Canada's National Housing Strategy Act (NHTA), the Canadian Government also included the right to housing. Without diminishing this right, it is also essential to recognize and mitigate as much as possible the impacts of forcing people to shelter outside on everyone in the community, both the unhoused and housed.

Sharing the Park Initiatives

Many of the spaces used by persons experiencing homelessness were initially designed for other purposes. For example, Victoria Park provided green space to 5,000 condominium and apartment residents in this area. The park was also used for events and various types of programming. Grand Parade is heavily used for significant and community celebratory events. In Victoria Park, all events and programming have been canceled. Similarly, some events in Grand Parade have been cancelled. Additionally, over the past several months in Grand Parade, incidents have occurred between community members sheltering there and those attending the events. Especially for the unhoused community members, there are also increased risks of criminalization. As new designated locations are created, staff intend to institute share the park initiatives, allowing the use of spaces for persons needing to shelter there and creating space for other users.

This approach will require additional signage, specific markers to designate locations for people to shelter,

⁹ [Health | The Homeless Hub](#)

¹⁰ [FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

additional maps and support materials, and additional staff support to maintain both the designated location and community space. Also, reducing the amount of space in these and other parks people can use for sheltering will require more space overall. While this will reduce pressures in some areas of HRM, it will increase them in others as new encampment sites are created in communities where homelessness is not as prevalent.

Use of non-park spaces

The loss of up to 40 park spaces over the next 12 – 18 months to provide sufficient sheltering space for unhoused community members will devastate the municipality's park, sports, recreation services, and many community groups. While the needs of unhoused citizens are of the utmost importance, the municipality should attempt to find solutions that minimize the loss of programs and services for other residents. As such, until sufficient affordable and suitable housing is available, the municipality should consider other options.

In addition to park spaces, staff wish to consider other options, where possible and practical, including:

- The use of parking lot spaces
- Leasing vacant privately held land
- The use of right of ways
- Use of other types of municipal property, including surplus lands

Other housing options

A lack of affordable and deeply affordable housing stock is at the core of the housing crisis. It is essential to recognize that the private developer and property management community will never be able to provide deeply affordable, geared-to-income housing without substantial government capital and/or operational support. Construction and financing costs make it impossible to offer, for example, a multi-bedroom unit for \$400.00, including utilities.

No one type of housing is required to address the collective housing needs of the population. A successful housing solution must include options such as emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, single-room occupancy, youth specific housing, family housing, and other options.

One type of housing inventory missing from Halifax's housing stock is tiny homes. There are multiple successful examples of this type in Canada and the United States. These are cost-effective housing units that can provide a stable living environment for individuals experiencing homelessness. They can be part of a transitional or permanent housing solution. These units can be built more cheaply than a traditional housing unit.

There are several other benefits of this type of housing, including that people with pets can remain with their animals and have an increased level of privacy as each unit is independent. Additionally, the option exists to designate some tiny home type communities for groups at higher risk, such as women, transgender, and gender diverse individuals. Depending on the needs of individuals housed supports may be required.

While a tiny homes community will take time to implement, an intermediary solution that would help would be a temporary housing option, such as Pallet Shelters¹¹ or similar structures. These prefab temporary housing shelters provide a better option than sleeping outside in a tent and are more stable and safer. They are insulated, heated, and could provide similar benefits in terms of supporting those with pets or other specific needs. These housing types are available from multiple sources and could be in place within a few months, at a much lower cost. As a long-term strategy temporary housing structures are highly portable

¹¹ [Pallet Shelter](#)

and over time they could be, in some cases, replaced by tiny homes, moving the temporary housing structures to a new location.

Community members living in their vehicles

While not as prevalent or as obvious as people sheltering in tents, there are many people in HRM sheltering in their vehicles, ranging from small cars to full-size recreational vehicles. In some cases, these are people with steady incomes who lost their housing due to affordability issues and they would rather sleep in their vehicle than in a tent. In a few cases, these are families who simply have nowhere else to go and do not want to enter the shelter system. It is generally believed that there are a significant number of people in rural parts of the municipality sheltering in this manner.

Many of these people have historically parked their vehicles in, the corner of large parking lots, a friend's driveway, a vacant piece of land, or simply on the street. With the number of people sleeping rough growing so quickly, so is the number of people sheltering in their vehicles. As some of the traditional long-term parking options are disappearing these community members are becoming more and more challenged to find a place to park their home.

The municipality must explore options to create safe places for this segment of the homeless population to shelter. There are a number of options including private and commercial properties, campgrounds, other outdoor facilities, and surplus lands. Currently, there is minimal support for many of the people sheltering in their vehicles, but as the numbers continue to grow additional resources will be required.

Impact of climate change

On October 21, 2022, Ian Fry, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, in a report to the General Assembly said that "Throughout the world, human rights are being negatively impacted and violated as a consequence of climate change. This includes the right to life, health, food, development, self-determination, water and sanitation, work, adequate housing and freedom from violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and slavery."¹² HRM has struggled in the past year with unprecedented wildfires, flooding, and other climate-based issues.

These types of events impact everyone in a community but have a disproportional impact on those with no other options but to shelter outside. During an extreme weather event there can be significant risks of injury or death. Post the event a person can have lost all of their sheltering supplies as well as any belongings they have. The physical health and safety risks are obviously significant but equally important are the mental health strains placed on someone who repeatedly has lost everything, is left with no food, no means to stay warm or dry, and any possessions have been lost.

Humanitarian aid and support to unhoused individuals during and after climate driven events takes enormous amounts of resources. It is likely as these events continue to grow in frequency and impact the strains on the municipality to meet these needs will increase. Priority must be placed on finding both better emergency responses to these situations as well as long-term permanent housing solutions.

The efforts of HalifACT will help in this work. HalifACT's work is equally about adaptation - preparing for impacts and building community resilience. They are doing this work through a lens of equity and giving priority to our most vulnerable. Building resilience is a slow but critical process that requires effort across the organization and with external partners. We simultaneously need to improve emergency response plans and protocols to increase our ability to respond and rebound from these impacts.

¹² [Climate change the greatest threat the world has ever faced, UN expert warns | OHCHR](#)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Designated locations require weekly garbage service and water delivery. These costs can exceed \$30,000/year for a large encampment location. The increased distribution of homeless encampments throughout the municipality will increase these costs. Adding power requires an investment of \$50,000 - \$60,000 and ongoing utility costs. With the increased time required to do the regular serving of parks and anticipated revenue loss, there is increased pressure on Parks' and Recreation budget as well. Finally, increased support and supervision of encampment sites will require an investment of additional resources including site and washroom maintenance for the Halifax Commons location.

Municipal expenditures in response to homelessness are increasing and will exceed the budget for this year. Staff will continue to seek funding from other levels of government and clarification of roles and responsibilities. As homelessness becomes more acute and knowledge and experience increase within government and not-for-profit service providers, a shift toward a more integrated and collaborative approach is beginning and should be encouraged.

It is impossible at this time to estimate costs for temporary housing villages or tiny homes communities. The scope of projects, as determined by potential future negotiations with the Province of Nova Scotia, will determine these costs. Staff will return to Regional Council at a future date with more information.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Unhoused community members must have a place to live. If there are insufficient suitable and acceptable designated places for unhoused community members to shelter within the municipality, they must shelter in other municipal parks and overcrowded designated and non-designated locations. Currently, the unhoused population requires 200+ spaces, which is expected to increase in 2024 and beyond. The growing numbers of unhoused community members will require the continual designation of space for them to live. Without an increased rate of housing development for this population, the numbers and pressures of encampments will continue to increase and require ever-increasing financial, human, and land resources.

The approach to lease private land spaces for sheltering locations is based on the willingness of private landowners to participate in this initiative. If approved, there is a risk that landowners will choose not to participate, forcing the municipality to only use municipal properties.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Homeless encampments do not have features such as storage for personal belongings, running water, a consistent and safe form of heating and cooling, places to prepare and store food, and indoor hygiene facilities, so they produce considerable waste. Additionally, most encampments are set up on grounds that are not suitably prepared for this type of long-term habitation. As such, encampments need extensive cleaning and maintenance support, and once housing is provided to those living there, the site requires extensive remediation to return it to its original purpose. It is also important to note that waste does not just impact municipal properties. Private businesses and property owners are impacted by waste and often have to address it themselves, at their own cost.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council could choose to:

1. direct the CAO to support the status quo, not adding more encampment spaces and leaving the majority of persons experiencing homelessness concentrated in existing designated locations,

Victoria Park, & Grand Parade.

2. not support efforts to create additional housing options, such as temporary shelters or tiny homes.
3. not approve the direction to allow the potential use of privately owned and non-park lands for encampment or other housing options and to continue to use only municipal park space to support those sheltering outside.
4. provide direction to explore other approaches or options to address the growing homelessness crisis.

ATTACHMENTS

July 2023 Draft Sleeping Rough Survey

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.

Report Prepared by: Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homelessness, Community Safety 902.456.7420

July 2023 Sleeping Rough Survey Preliminary Results

Introduction:

Government and service providers within the housing and homelessness sector who work within the Halifax Regional Municipality are all committed to evidence-based decision-making. One of the key metrics in this work is the number of people sleeping outside. This is the fifth time a semi-annual survey of those sleeping rough has been conducted by service providers in HRM.

On July 11th, 2023, a group of 23 people set out to survey individuals sleeping rough throughout HRM. Teams canvased Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford, and Sackville. This survey is designed to highlight how many individuals are sleeping outside, capturing data on housing lost due to reno-victions/fixed term leases, data related to pets, and if any of those sleeping outside were involved with CPS as a child/youth.

Acknowledgments:

This survey was conducted in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Indigenous peoples continue to be overrepresented in the homeless population. Both government and the homeless serving sector need to improve how we support and advocate for those who are Indigenous; we need to listen more and better to Indigenous individuals and communities.

This survey would not have been possible without the time and information provided to us by those sleeping rough throughout HRM. We cannot thank you enough for your contributions, time, and patience as we asked you question after question.

Thank you to Welcome Housing, Adsum for Women and Children, North End Community Health Centre, Shelter Nova Scotia, Sackville Warming Centre, Brunswick Street Mission, Phoenix for Youth, and Halifax Regional Municipality for your dedication and hard work; as the rain poured you remained focused and determined to ensure we surveyed as many folks as possible.

Thank you to Halifax Regional Municipality and the Department of Community Services, Province of Nova Scotia, for funding the survey.

Many thanks to Ashton Stephenson, Manager of Harm Reduction with the North End Community Health Centre, for providing not just staff for the survey but access to the Managed Alcohol Program vehicle Vegas to ensure two teams were able to reach as many folks as possible in North End and Downtown Halifax.

A shout-out to Eric Jonsson, who has led this survey for the past 2 years. Thank you for your advice and guidance in the weeks leading up to survey day; you were sorely missed survey day, and in general, you have left a positive mark during your time as the Downtown Halifax Street Navigator and have been a mentor to many of us new to this field.

Methodology:

July 11th was humid, with little breaks from the rain. Cheques for income assistance had been issued 2 weeks before. Part of the survey process was a commitment to compensating participants for their time and expertise. Participants were provided \$40, issued upon completing the survey. Respondents appreciated these funds, and they reported that this money provided some relief for those who only receive IA/CPP/OAS as their source of income.

Interviewers were able to identify eligible participants due to knowledge from outreach workers and housing support workers; and, of course, through conversation with people at libraries, drop-in centres, parks, and other locations persons experiencing homelessness visit.

Starting at 7:15 am, 10 teams of 2 headed out to parks and encampments to meet folks where they were sheltering. In addition, interviewers interviewed people at Brunswick Street Mission, Phoenix Centre for Youth, and the Housing Hub. Due to the non-stop rain, which was heavy at times, teams headed to survey folks who headed to libraries to escape the rain.

The survey consisted of 19 questions, many one-word answers, which made for easy tallying. The open-ended questions yield more sporadic answers, making it harder to tally but providing a deeper understanding of the situations and challenges of persons sheltering outside. Included in the report is a copy of the survey.

While the number of people sheltering outside is growing dramatically, there are more who are not counted in this survey, as they are not accessing resources or not sleeping outside in known or easily accessible locations. As a core principle of our work, we respect the privacy and autonomy of these individuals by not encroaching on their spaces and accept we may never know the numbers for folks sleeping in secluded woods and other spaces, nor do we have the right to know their histories and stories if they do not wish to share them.

We removed “What caused you to lose your housing?” as this question unfairly puts the onus on the individual and ignores elements such as policy, legislation, capitalism, and colonization as being the true reasons why homelessness exists in HRM and other communities.

Quick Figures:

- 178 individuals were surveyed compared to 85 in the November 2022 Sleeping Rough Survey and 59 for PiT count conducted in Fall 2022.
- 71.9% identified as male, 24.7% as female, and 1.7% as non-binary.
- Roughly 50% of individuals surveyed shelter in Halifax, 22% in Dartmouth, 19% in Sackville, and 3% in Spryfield.
- 32% identified as Indigenous, compared to 3.8% of the overall HRM population.
- 10.1% identified as Black and/or person of African Descent.
- 2.2% identified as a Person of Colour.
- 31.5% of those surveyed had been involved with CPS as a child and/or youth.
- The average age of those surveyed is 40 years of age. 13.5% of those surveyed are seniors (aged 58+), and 10.2% surveyed are youth (aged 16 – 24).
- 15.2% identified as LGBTQ2S+.
- 19% of individuals surveyed have pets.
- 24% of individuals surveyed are on housing waiting lists.
- List of sleeping locations: Tent 61%, Bench 6.2%, car 4.5%, abandoned building 1.7%, Tyvek shelter 1.7%, stairs 1%, ATM 1%
- 28% of individuals surveyed have been told to move along. Of those individuals, 64% were asked to move on by HRP and/or RCMP, members of the public 34%, and uniformed security 8%
- 22.5% identified losing their housing to a fixed-term lease or reno-viction.
- Respondents reported their primary sources of income as Income Assistance 36%, CPP 6.8%, 7% are employed, Worker's Compensation 1.7%, EI 1%, and 26% reported no source of income.
- The average length of homelessness was 30 months (about 2 and a half years).

Wish List:

We asked people sleeping outside how they cope with the current heat and challenging weather conditions and what items would make life a little easier. The feedback received was for items such as Gatorade, water, battery-operated fans, ice bags, coolers for perishable food items, camping stoves, butane, propane, light clothing, hats, sunscreen, tick spray, and bug spray. Many individuals seek relief from the heat at drop-in spaces like the Housing Hub, Brunswick Street Mission, libraries, and mall food courts.

Observations:

Reno-victions and fixed-term leases contribute to those newly homeless in HRM, especially in Sackville-Bedford.

Despite the opening of both the Overlook and The Bridge Shelter, numbers have doubled since the last sleeping rough survey in November 2022. This increase proves more needs to be done, with both the construction and provision of deeply affordable housing, and governments needing to look at implementing more homelessness prevention measures, i.e., increasing diversion funds for housing NGOs, moving from minimum wage to living wage legislation, and increases to CPP, OAS, IA, CCTB.

With inflation, landlords using fixed-term leases to bypass the rent cap, and 178 individuals sleeping rough is not shocking. This proves we need stronger legislation to protect low-income tenants and to abolish the practice of fixed-term leases.

Income is a persistent factor in why those chronically unhoused are forced to live outside. General increases in income, such as wages, CPP, OAS, and ESIA rates, continue not to match the growth in inflation. Additionally, increases in average rents in HRM continue to grow faster than personal and family income.

With 31.5% of those surveyed having been involved with CPS as a child/youth, we must advocate for better support and resources for those exiting the foster care system.

If you have questions, please reach out to:

Gayle Collicutt (She/her)

Housing Support Coordinator

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]