

# A Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality

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## Section 1: Executive Summary

The Halifax Regional Municipality is in an affordable housing and homelessness crisis. Since 2018 the number of people who are recorded as homeless has more than doubled. As of January 19, 2023, there are 790 experiencing homelessness in locations across the municipality. The number of people forced to shelter outside, many in municipal parks, some in other locations or sleeping in their vehicle, has increased 500 per cent, from 18 in 2019 to 108 today.

The rise in homelessness is driven by a number of factors, the largest being the lack of affordable, stable and supportive housing. The vacancy rate in the municipality is less than 1 per cent and as low as 0.2 per cent in some communities driving rental costs higher. The rising cost of living also impacts the housing crisis as people can not afford a place to live. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) reported in January 2023 that over the past year rent has increased 8.9 per cent. This is four times the average historical growth rate. More than 12 per cent of the residents in the municipality are in core housing need. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defines core housing need as households that spend more than 30% of their income on shelter. Those that spend 50% or more on shelter are in severe housing need.

While the provision of housing, social supports, and health care are responsibilities of the Province of Nova Scotia, with up to 110 people currently sheltering outside, most in municipal parks, the municipality has a stake in the state of homelessness and lack of affordable housing. Some of the municipality's most vulnerable citizens have no choice but to sleep outside in tents. They do not have enough food, supplies, or access to critical care. They are stigmatized, faced with increased risk of violence, and little hope. The challenge facing the municipality is what can it do to help and how does it support other orders of government and the many community service providers supporting those experiencing homelessness. This framework identifies those things the municipality is uniquely positioned to do and gaps that it can fill in order not to duplicate the efforts of others. There are four key roles the municipality can undertake to help address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis. These roles are:

1. Supporting residents sheltering outside
2. Supporting precariously housed persons and families to stay housed
3. Supporting public education efforts
4. Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

In partnership with other orders of government and the community the municipality can help those citizens experiencing homelessness and change their circumstances. This framework provides a road map of activities the municipality should consider pursuing.

## Section 2: Background

### Affordable Housing and Homelessness

There is an affordable housing and homelessness crisis in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The municipality has recently recorded the largest number of people needing housing and the most people sheltering outside in its history, other than after the Halifax Explosion in 1917.

Based on a count of people sheltering outside completed by a team of service providers in November 2022<sup>1</sup>, at least 85 people are sleeping outside, the majority in tents pitched in the municipality's parks. Local service providers' estimates suggest that this number could be as high as 110 as they could not connect with all the residents they know are sleeping outside. This is a 44 per cent increase in the number of people sheltering outside from the Spring 2022 Point in Time Count<sup>2</sup>.

The following table shows the numbers from the 2018<sup>3</sup> and 2022 Point in Time Counts.

	2018 <sup>4</sup>	2022 <sup>4 5</sup>	% Growth
Number of people experiencing homelessness	220	586	166%
Number of youths experiencing homelessness	44	64	45%
Number of adults experiencing homelessness	158	439	178%
Number of seniors experiencing homelessness	18	76	322%
Number of people sleeping outside <sup>6</sup>	18	108	500%

It is important to note that everyone experiencing homelessness is not sleeping outside. Some are in shelters, some in precarious housing situations, and some in vehicles. Additionally, people experiencing homeless are not a homogenous group. Each person has their own strengths and story, opportunities for support and practical needs. One size will not fit all when it comes to meeting service needs. It is recognized that each person sheltering outside benefits from an individualized, person-centred plan of supports dedicated to assisting them to move from sheltering outside to safe and appropriate alternatives. However, the exploration of these options happens with people, not to people or for people. Culture, gender and history of each individual must be considered in the process of providing such alternatives. People should be empowered to make decisions on appropriate alternatives but cannot be forced to take alternatives to sheltering outside in a designated or other suitable location.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Nov 22 Navigator Survey.pdf \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2022 Point-in-time count \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](#)

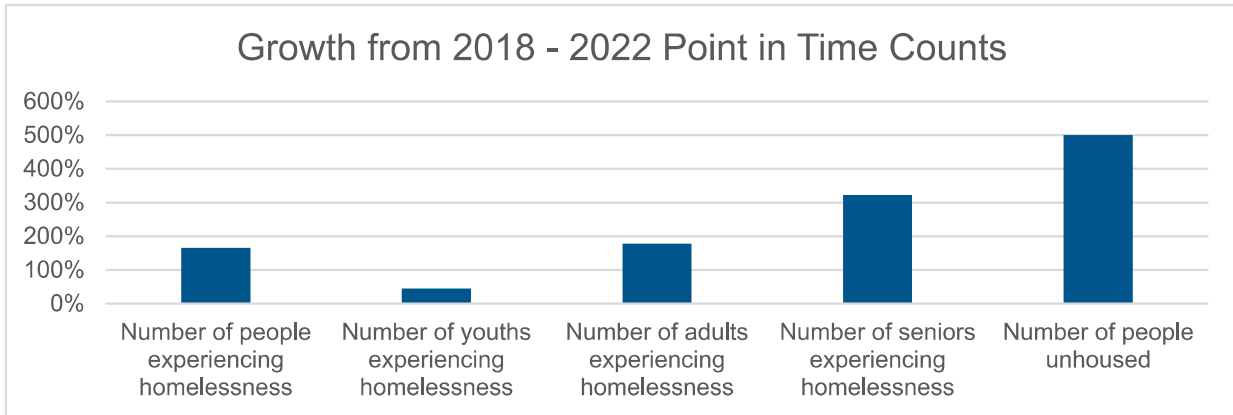
<sup>3</sup> [2018+Halifax+Point+in+Time+Count+Report.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Numbers based on the percentages reported in the Point In Time Count

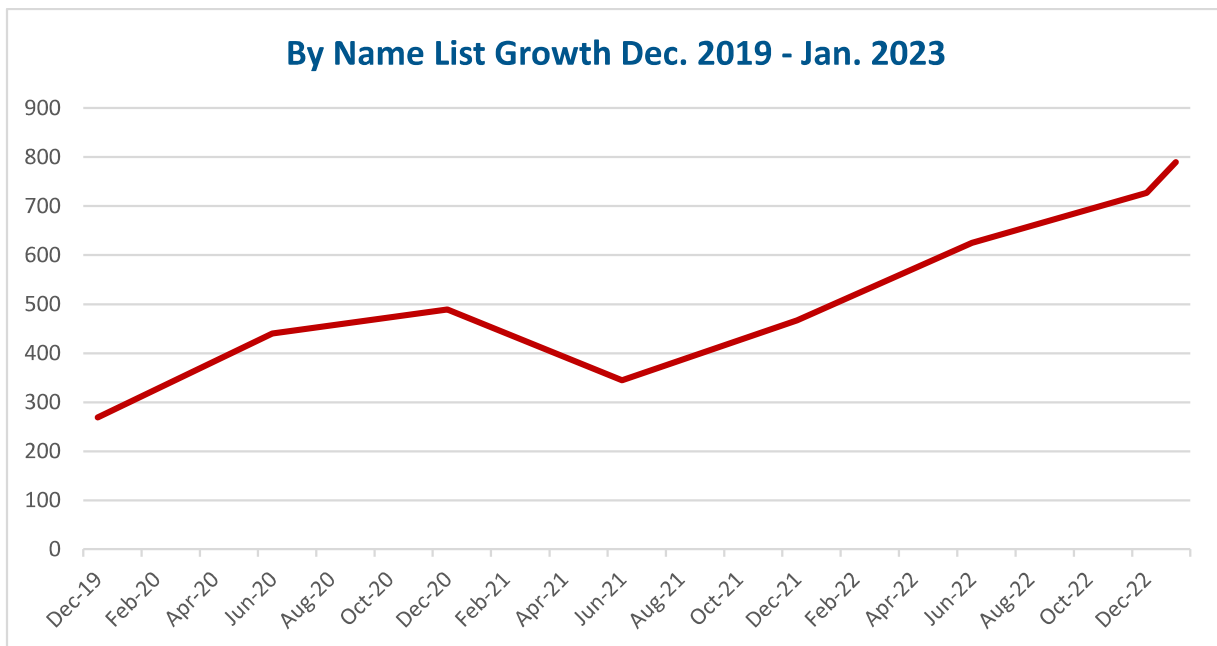
<sup>5</sup> Some persons surveyed declined to answer this question

<sup>6</sup> Number of people sleeping outside is included in the number of people experiencing homelessness

<sup>7</sup> There may be instances where the municipality will require someone to relocate based on their personal circumstances or other concerns that may make a location unsuitable.



As of January 3, 2023, there are 769 people on the By Name list<sup>8</sup>, a list of people experiencing homelessness maintained by the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia. In two weeks, that number grew to 790 on January 17, 2023. This is an increase of 63 people since December 2022. The By Name list grew by 55 per cent between December 2022 and 2021 and 170 per cent since December 2019. Even with significant investments in support from all three orders of government, the number of people in need of housing is growing faster than options are being created.



### The Cost of Housing

According to CMHC data<sup>9</sup>, the vacancy rate for apartments in the Halifax Regional Municipality dropped as low as 1 per cent in 2022, the lowest it has been in 30 years. In some areas of the municipality, such as North Dartmouth where more relatively affordable housing is often found, the vacancy rate is as low at

<sup>8</sup> [AHANS | HRM Homelessness Statistics](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Rental Market Report | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](#)

0.2 per cent.

Average rents in 2022<sup>10</sup> were:

Type of apartment	Average rent
Bachelor	\$990
One-bedroom	\$1,157
Two-bedroom	\$1,449
Three-bedroom	\$1,690

Average rents show an 8.9 per cent increase between January 2022 and 2023. The increase from 2020 to 2021 was 5.1 per cent. Based on the 2022 CMHC data the average rent in some areas of the municipality was as high as \$1,396 for a one-bedroom and \$1,897 for a two-bedroom apartment. Rental.ca reported in October 2022 the average rental cost for available apartments in some parts of the municipality was \$2,453<sup>11</sup>.

Statistics Canada defines someone in core housing need<sup>12</sup> if a household spends 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter, living in a home needing major repairs, or living in unsuitable housing. If one or more of these criteria are met, and the household would not be able to find affordable, suitable, or adequate housing in their area, they are in core housing need. Based on the 2021 Census<sup>13</sup>, the average core housing need in HRM was 12.2 per cent. Within the municipality, the highest level of core housing need is in North Dartmouth at 30.4 per cent, and the lowest rate of core housing need is in Cole Harbour at 1.7 per cent.

Not only did the costs of apartments rise but the price of other goods and services has increased as well. Based on the Consumer Price Index<sup>14</sup>, inflation in Nova Scotia peaked in 2022 at 9.3 per cent. Current economic predictions suggest that financial pressures will continue into 2023. There continues to be high demand for rental housing, which is expected to keep prices high. In a statement released in October 2022<sup>15</sup>, the Royal Bank of Canada also stated: "In previous work, we projected a moderate recession for Canada's economy in 2023. We now believe this downturn will arrive as early as the first quarter of next year. Higher prices and interest rates will shave \$3,000 off the average household's purchasing power, weighing on goods purchases". These trends, and the number of people already in core housing need, suggest that more people will be forced into homelessness in the foreseeable future.

### The End of the Provincial Rent Cap<sup>16</sup>

In Nova Scotia, amid housing affordability concerns exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a greater emphasis was placed on the role of rent control in addressing housing affordability issues. Several factors are influencing the rental market, such as rental construction, employment, migration, owning vs. renting, and secondary rental markets like Airbnb. While housing affordability was a growing issue prior to COVID-19, the rental market was further complicated by uncertainty caused by the pandemic. To help mitigate the impacts caused by COVID-19, the Province of Nova Scotia announced immediate protections ordered

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<sup>10</sup> [Rental Market Survey Data Tables | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Rentals.ca October 2022 Rent Report](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Core housing need of private household \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada, 2021 Census – Indigenous people & Housing, released 2022-09-21

<sup>14</sup> [Nova Scotia Department of Finance - Statistics](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Canada's recession to arrive earlier than expected \(rbc.com\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Residential Tenancies Program: legislative changes - Government of Nova Scotia](#)

under the Emergency Management Act:

- Rents cannot increase by more than two per cent per year for existing tenants
- Landlords will not be able to get an eviction order for renovations

In October 2021, the government extended these protections until December 31, 2023.

According to 2021 Canadian census data, 43 per cent of households were renting. Of those living in Halifax, those living downtown had the highest rates of unaffordable housing at 54.3 per cent. However, high rates were also found in all of the Regional Centre, as well as in neighboring communities. If rent control is removed at the end of 2023, and supply remains low, Halifax is likely to face an increase in housing insecurity, especially for those already living in unaffordable housing in the regional centre.

Significantly rising costs have also affected the viability of the landlord, especially the small landlord, charging relatively modest rents. With costs driven by inflation and other factors and a cap on rent, some of these owners have been left with no option but to sell their units, in many cases, resulting in the loss of affordable housing. For most property owners, once the rent cap is lifted, it stands to reason they will raise rents to begin addressing the dramatic rise in operating costs that they have not fully recovered for three years.

### **Housing is a Provincial Responsibility**

Social housing and shelter are provincial responsibilities. Between 1995 and 1996, a service exchange process transferred various roles and responsibilities between municipalities and the Province of Nova Scotia. The province assumed responsibility for social services, including affordable housing and child welfare, nursing homes, and homes for the elderly. Municipalities, in turn, were required to contribute financially to the province towards education, social housing, and corrections. With this transition, municipalities no longer had resources assigned to or a direct role in the services related to social housing and homelessness.

At the core of our community's homelessness crisis are issues such as the lack of affordable and supportive housing stock and wrap-around services: provincial responsibilities to address.

### **Sector Capacity**

The housing and homelessness sector is made up of over 30 different service providers or advocacy groups and all orders of government. Many of these service providers are contracted by the province to offer shelter services, housing, and community outreach. Considering the support of ancillary services to people experiencing homelessness, the number of service providers is over 100. The vast majority of these service providers are working at or beyond their capacity and have been doing so for a long time. In discussions with the service provider community, the majority of them have shared that their staff are tired and, in some cases, burned out, they are under resourced and unable to meet the needs of the community they serve, do not have the capacity to take on more work, and are, at times, forced to compete with each other for resources. As with most sectors they face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers. As the municipality hopes to see improvements in the response and support to the growing homeless population, the capacity of the sector is critical to any effort. The municipality, other orders of government, and service providers must look for opportunities to increase sector capacity.

### **More Market Value Housing Stock Will Not Address The Housing Crisis**

Commercial builders and developers have a role in addressing the municipality's affordable housing and homelessness crisis. The solution to this crisis lies in creating housing stock including affordable options that are available to persons with low-income levels. Many in the community are looking for the commercial building and development sector, through the construction of more housing, to address all the



needs in the community. While this will increase the overall stock of housing, it will not provide all housing options, such as social and supportive housing.

At a recent Halifax Chamber of Commerce luncheon, a local developer underscored government's role in this, indicating that the commercial builder, developer, and property owner cannot financially build housing and make it available at deeply affordable rates. Considering the rapidly rising cost of real estate and construction, it is not feasible for the commercial market, without substantial support, to build, offer, and maintain deeply affordable housing.

Commercial builders and developers can build housing, but it must be provided to government or the not-for-profit community, supported by government, to manage and run without the burden of capital costs. Alternatively, if there is to be more affordable housing offered by the commercial building and development sector, substantially more capital and operating cost support must be provided to the commercial builder, developer, and property owners.

### **Municipal actions to address the affordable housing and homelessness**

The municipality continues to take a number of steps to help encourage the development of affordable housing. Highlights of some recent steps taken to date include:

- Adoption of Administrative Order 2020-008 – ADM, Respecting Grants for Affordable Housing, to facilitate grants for affordable housing
- Adoption of amendments to bylaw M-201, Respecting Standards for Residential Occupancies, to require registration of residential rental accommodations
- Policy and bylaw amendments to waive municipal-related construction fees for non-profit housing developments
- Amendments to Administrative Order 50, Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property, to create a surplus land category for properties for affordable housing purposes
- Amendments to AO 2014-001-ADM, Respecting Tax Relief To Non-Profit Organizations, were made in 2020 (effective April 1, 2021) to provide streamlined and predictable property tax relief for registered charitable or non-profit groups
- Less-than-market value sale of surplus municipal properties to facilitate the development of affordable housing projects
- Removal of land use planning barriers to housing that is considered more affordable such as secondary and backyard suites, shared housing, tiny homes and mobile homes

In 2021 and 2022, the municipality has committed significant resources to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. These efforts include:

- Constructing two modular housing sites, one in Halifax and one in Dartmouth, providing shelter for 64 individuals
- Providing additional support for street navigators and outreach workers
- Designation of locations where camping is permitted in parks within the municipality, along with supports such as water delivery, portable toilets, and garbage collection
- Provision of survival supplies such as tents, sleeping bags, insulated tarps, food, health, and personal care products to persons who have become homeless
- Support for a 24-hour emergency all gender shelter in peninsular Halifax
- Support for the operation of emergency shelter space during extreme weather events

### **Conclusion**

The affordable housing and homelessness crisis in the municipality continues to grow. Without significant changes in the current approach to housing, the number of people experiencing homelessness in the

near future could grow significantly. While the province and service providers continue to work to create more affordable and deeply affordable housing, the municipality will continue to face a significant number of residents forced to sleep outside. As such, the municipality needs to continue efforts to support suitable housing development and support those residents who have no other option than to pitch a tent in a park or other piece of land. The municipality also must consider how it will respond to a situation where hundreds could be homeless on its streets in the next 18 months if the rental cap is removed.

This framework outlines a recommended approach for the municipality to take to help address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in the community with a focus on those areas where the municipality is uniquely positioned to do and gaps that it can fill in order not to duplicate the efforts of others.

## Section 3: Framework

### 3.1: Vision

That every resident of the Halifax Regional Municipality has a safe, supportive, and sustainable home and that all homes are purposely constructed for long-term human habitation, built to safety codes and standards, and in a suitable location based on access to transportation and amenities and municipal planning strategies.

### 3.2: Municipality's Role

The Province of Nova Scotia holds the formal responsibilities for social services, health care, and housing. People experiencing homelessness who are unable or unwilling to go to a shelter or other available emergency or transitional housing option are left with no choice but to shelter outside. Many of these residents end up sheltering in a municipal park, on a right of way or other empty space, or private property. For this reason, and a humanitarian commitment to try and help those marginalized in our community, the municipality has a role to play in supporting residents who are experiencing homelessness.:

The municipality supports people sheltering outside while they wait for suitable housing to be available. The municipality focuses on four key roles.

1. Supporting residents sheltering outside
2. Supporting precariously housed persons and families to stay housed
3. Supporting public education efforts
4. Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

### 3.3. Principles

The following principles are used to guide this work. These principles continue to evolve as the municipality's understanding of the needs of the community changes, as more is learned from persons with lived experience in the community and incorporate emerging best and promising practices into this work.

1. HUMAN RIGHT  
The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes adequate housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living.<sup>17</sup>
2. PARTICIPATION:  
The persons whose decisions and actions will impact must be involved in developing policies and work plans. We support the mantra of "Nothing About Us Without Us."<sup>18</sup>
3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW  
The municipality administers and enforces the laws, regulations, and bylaws enacted by Regional Council, the Province of Nova Scotia, and the Government of Canada. This includes building, general safety, and fire codes. The municipality expects all its partners and citizens to comply with the law.
4. PERSON-CENTERED

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<sup>17</sup> [FS21\\_rev\\_1\\_Housing\\_en.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Nothing about us without us - Wikipedia](#)

Ensure that people's preferences, needs, and values guide clinical decisions, providing care and support that is respectful of and responsive to them. It is important to remember people who shelter outside have strengths, and those must be recognized, respected, and leveraged.

5. HOUSING FIRST

A *Housing First* approach<sup>19</sup> focuses on moving people experiencing homelessness quickly from a shelter or sleeping rough to safe, sustainable, and supportive housing. Stable housing is essential to deliver services successfully and supports to persons experiencing homelessness.

6. RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship building, learning, education, and voluntary compliance are always preferred over involuntary compliance action.

7. TRANSPARENCY

Transparency and ongoing communication are essential for the development of trust. Strong, productive relationships between all levels of government, service providers, and the community cannot exist without trust and transparency.

8. COOPERATION

Housing and homelessness are complex problems<sup>20</sup>, with no order of government nor single community agency able to solve them independently. The municipality is committed to working in close partnership with others to reduce homelessness and increase the availability of affordable and deeply affordable housing.

Whenever possible, the municipality should avoid duplicating the work of service providers and other levels of government and instead support them in their efforts to serve all residents better.

9. CIVILIAN LED RESPONSE

Responses to homelessness issues should, whenever possible, be led by a coalition of Street Navigators, service providers, and health professionals. Halifax Regional Police (HRP) or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) primarily focus on the prevention and resolution of crime and will be involved when / as required.

10. TRAUMA-INFORMED

Trauma is often closely tied to substance use, mental illness, stigma, healthcare access barriers, and other challenges. Trauma-informed practice means recognizing this link and ensuring that people feel safe and are not re-traumatized by their current experiences.

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<sup>19</sup> [Housing First | The Homeless Hub](#)

<sup>20</sup> [The Critical Difference Between Complex and Complicated \(mit.edu\)](#)

## Section 4: Strategic Priorities

### Section 4.1: Supporting residents sheltering outside

A count of the number of people sleeping outside was completed in November 2022 by street navigators and outreach workers. During this count, researchers were able to connect with 85 people sleeping outside. They know of others they could not speak with during this count and estimate the total number of people sleeping outside to be at least 110 individuals. This is a dramatic increase from 18 people identified in the 2018 Point In Time Count. Even over the past few months, between the Point In Time Count completed in April 2022 and the count in November 2022, there has been more than a 44 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping outside.

All of these counts show that there is also a much higher rate of homelessness within some of the marginalized populations in the municipality than in the general population. For example, in the 2022 Point In Time Count, 22 per cent of people self-identified as First Nations, Metis, Inuit or of Indigenous ancestry. This compares to 4 per cent of the overall population of the Halifax region. Similarly, 15 per cent self-identified as African Nova Scotia, Black, Caribbean, or of African descent compared to 3.8 per cent of the municipality's total population. The municipality, the province, and service providers must work together to develop strategies to address these and other inequities.

The Province of Nova Scotia is responsible for providing housing for persons experiencing homelessness. While the province works to build and acquire suitable housing stock, in the interim, these residents are left to access a temporary housing option, if available. Without a place to go, many residents are left with no other option but to shelter outside, with many locating in municipal parks. Residents sometimes shelter in other locations, such as adjacent to schools or daycares, in cemeteries, other vacant lands, on active sport fields, or in their vehicle.

Residents need supplies and support to survive outside while they wait for housing. Typical supports include everything from tents and sleeping bags to food and water to personal supplies and clothing.

Residents sheltering outside often do not disturb their neighbours and are active community members. There are times, however, when homeless encampments negatively impact the surrounding community. In addition to reporting homeless encampments themselves, garbage and waste are the most common complaints the municipality receives. Garbage and waste can lead to severe rodent and other pest issues. Instances of illegal activity and violence can also create difficult situations for the community.

***The municipality will help to support individuals experiencing homelessness that have no option but to shelter outside.***

#### Outcomes

- Improved quality of life and general health for those forced to shelter outside.
- A reduction in harmful behaviours committed against persons experiencing homelessness.
- A decrease in the negative impacts of people being forced to shelter outside.

#### Tactics

- 4.1.1 The municipality will update protocol for homeless encampments, including rapid response to high-priority areas such as near schools, playgrounds and cemeteries.
- 4.1.2 The municipality will continue to designate locations where people can camp in parks intended for people experiencing homelessness. The municipality will provide potable water, garbage collection, storage boxes, and toilet options at these sites. The municipality will also strive to find

options to offer power and running water at these sites. The municipality will continue to seek support from other orders of government to provide suitable additional spaces for residents needing to shelter outside and applicable services.

- 4.1.3 In addition to regular garbage collection at designated locations, the municipality will continue cleaning up abandoned items at encampment sites on municipal land
- 4.1.4 The municipality will continue create opportunities to increase the number of public bathrooms and sources of potable water available throughout the municipality.
- 4.1.5 The municipality will work with stakeholders to develop a civilian-led primary response team to respond to situations that occur in encampments or with persons experiencing homelessness in various community situations.
- 4.1.6 In support of the Province of Nova Scotia, the municipality will support the operation of emergency extreme weather shelters. Typical supports include planning, transportation, communication, and supplies.
- 4.1.7 In partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia and service providers, the municipality will champion the establishment of a daily drop-in centre for persons experiencing homelessness.
- 4.1.8 The municipality will continue to support the existing Street Navigator programs and work to expand navigator or outreach support on evenings and weekends, as well as in the more rural areas of the municipality.
- 4.1.9 The municipality will review the roles of municipal supported Street Navigators within the Business Improvement Districts and look for opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of outreach activities.
- 4.1.10 In partnership with others, the municipality will supply emergency supplies and support to persons experiencing homelessness and sheltering outside.
- 4.1.11 The municipality will explore opportunities to use multi-district recreation facilities, smaller facilities, and other municipally owned properties to provide increased services, such as showers, to support residents who are experiencing homelessness.
- 4.1.12 The municipality will support the province, private property owners and other stakeholders to identify sites where people sheltering in a vehicle can park, and in extreme weather, idle their car for prolonged periods of time to stay warm.
- 4.1.13 The municipality will consider supporting expanded use of safe, built-to-code shelters, and their placement in an appropriate location(s) conforming to municipality zoning.
- 4.1.14 As opportunities arise, or as replaced by “to-code” shelters, the municipality will remove the unsafe Tyvek small temporary shelters placed in the community by volunteers.
- 4.1.14 The municipality will support and learn from the expertise of those with lived experience. The information provided will inform and guide the development of policies and practices within the municipality. The municipality will share this research with other stakeholders where possible and appropriate.

- 4.1.15 The municipality will work with service providers and other stakeholders to support activities and policies that address the over-representation of various populations<sup>21</sup> within those experiencing homelessness. These populations would include persons who are Indigenous (22 per cent vs 4 per cent in the overall population of the municipality), black (15 per cent versus 3.8 per cent), LGBTQ2S+ (15 per cent versus 4 per cent of the Canadian population<sup>22</sup>), persons with a disability, and former children in care of the province. Additionally, policies and practices also need to be considered through a gender lens as there are specific challenges for women, transgender, and non-binary individuals who are precariously housed and unhoused.
- 4.1.16 The municipality will support the yearly Point in Time count and other quantitative research efforts to better understand the true number of individuals and households experiencing homelessness.
- 4.1.17 The municipality will work with stakeholders to develop an annual housing and homelessness report card.
- 4.1.18 Working with the Province of Nova Scotia and service providers, the municipality will help develop a response plan to a rapid increase (500 – 1000 people) in the number of people experiencing homelessness if the provincial rent cap is removed without other measures in place to ensure affordability.

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<sup>21</sup> [2022 Point-in-Time Count for Halifax Regional Municipality | DHBC \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](https://downtownhalifax.ca/2022-point-in-time-count-for-halifax-regional-municipality/)

<sup>22</sup> [LGBTQ2+ community in Canada: A demographic snapshot \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-627-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm)

## Section 4.2: Supporting precariously housed<sup>23</sup> persons and families to stay housed

The impact of being forced to shelter outside is dramatic. Deterioration in physical and mental health is well documented. Residents living outside suffer more violence than those living in suitable housing. The importance of ensuring that no one is forced to shelter outside is clear. While the obvious answer to address this problem is the creation of more housing, another priority needs to be, where possible, preventing someone from becoming homeless.

Efforts to prevent someone from becoming homeless are generally called diversion. Typical diversion activities include paying a damage deposit, paying rental or storage arrears, or completing minor repairs in someone's apartment. Several diversion efforts are underway by service providers and the Province of Nova Scotia.

***Based on the principle of cooperation, the municipality does not have a unique role in this area and, therefore, will not launch its own diversion activities but rather support the existing efforts of other orders of government and service providers.***

### Outcomes

- A reduction in the number of new people experiencing homelessness and the number of chronically homeless.

### Tactics

- 4.2.1 The municipality will participate in consultations and conversations around rent control, income, housing, homelessness, health care, and associated topics relating to residents at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.
- 4.2.2 The municipality will consider partnering with agencies and organizations providing diversion activities and support them where appropriate and possible. That support could include financial contributions or assistance from HRM staff. The municipality will specifically look to support unmet needs of the current diversion efforts that align with municipal interests.
- 4.2.3 The municipality will explore opportunities such as no net loss policies requiring the preservation of existing affordable housing stock.

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<sup>23</sup> [COHhomelessdefinition.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](#)



### Section 4.3: Supporting public education efforts

The impact of stigma on persons experiencing homelessness, and those that support them, is profound. Stigma leads to increased discrimination, isolation, vulnerability, and pressures on mental health. This places even more barriers in front of someone trying to find suitable and stable housing. A holistic approach to addressing homelessness must include addressing stigma and its impacts.

Many people in the community want to help persons experiencing homelessness. However, many don't know what to do and, in an attempt to do something, cause harm. For example, people leaving food at an encampment can lead to severe rodent infestation. The waste wood left for fires in some places is heavily treated with chemicals and is dangerous for individuals in and around encampments.

Public education efforts could take many forms, including social media, radio advertising, public service announcements, and bus or billboard signage. The municipality does not propose to take a leadership role in these efforts but acts as a partner and supports experts' work to address the community's public education needs.

***As part of its approach to assisting people experiencing homelessness, the municipality, based on the principle of cooperation, will partner and support experts' work to educate the public about the issues and how they can help.***

#### Outcomes

- A reduction in harmful behaviours committed against persons experiencing homelessness.
- An increase in appropriate community support for persons experiencing homelessness.
- A reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

#### Tactics

- 4.3.1 The municipality will partner with service providers and the Province of Nova Scotia to support a public education campaign that addresses misconceptions about persons experiencing homelessness and provides practical steps someone can take who wishes to support those individuals.
- 4.3.2 The municipality will support and participate in community discussions that aim to understand and address the issues and impact of the homelessness crisis. The municipality believes that acting together, government and community, can have a much more significant impact than working in isolation.
- 4.3.3 The municipality will ensure people reaching out to the municipality with questions, suggestions, and complaints about homelessness are provided answers and information promptly.

## Section 4.4: Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

The root of the current housing crisis is the lack of suitable housing stock. The long-term solution must include the construction of new housing stock, with suitable support to help people successfully stay housed, that can be made available to persons at a rent they can afford. The municipality has development and regulatory tools that it can use to support the goal of building new housing stock and maintaining existing affordable and deeply affordable stock.

***The municipality is already active in this work through initiatives such as zoning changes that allow backyard and secondary suites. Efforts will continue to support the development of homes people can afford based on their income.***

### Outcomes

- An increase in the number of affordable and deeply affordable housing units available for rent in the municipality.
- A reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

### Tactics

- 4.4.1 The municipality will explore opportunities to provide surplus land to the not-for-profit sector.
- 4.4.2 The municipality will continue to participate in funding affordable housing projects through the Affordable Housing Grant Program and Community Grant Program and support programs offered by other levels of government, including accepting and distributing funds such as the Rapid Housing Initiative<sup>24</sup>.
- 4.4.3 The municipality will continue to streamline zoning, bylaws, and permitting processes to support various forms of affordable housing.
- 4.4.4 The municipality continues to explore how to financially support the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing.
- 4.4.5 The municipality will explore and use tools to support the creation and retention of affordable housing through development approvals, such as but not limited to inclusionary zoning, density bonusing, and policies requiring no net loss of existing affordable housing.
- 4.4.6 The municipality will explore opportunities to incentivise the development of housing projects on vacant property.
- 4.4.7 The municipality will support the Province of Nova Scotia, other orders of government, and other service providers to support the launch of a tiny homes project.
- 4.4.8 The municipality will explore the role that a municipal housing corporation could play in addressing affordable housing needs.
- 4.4.9 The municipality will explore opportunities to allow the conversion of non-residential buildings to create new residential units.

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<sup>24</sup> [Rapid Housing Initiative | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca)

## Section 5: Performance Indicators

### Indicators around the municipality's efforts to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing

1. The number of tents and other supplies provided to residents.
2. Support provided to emergency event shelters.
3. Ongoing feedback from persons with lived experience.
4. The number and diversity of individuals with lived experience expertise consulted.
5. Feedback generated through calls to 311. Tracking calls and service requests initiated, addressed, and closed out.
6. The number of visitors to the drop-in centre.
7. Participation in consultations and conversations around rent control, income, housing, homelessness, health care, and associated topics relating to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
8. In-kind land provided or reduced or waived fees to support the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing.
9. Funds distributed by the municipality from federal or provincial initiatives to support people experiencing homelessness or build or maintain affordable and deeply affordable housing.
10. Permits issued for new units owned by the non-profit sector.
11. Number of housing units built with municipal support through funding or collaboration with other orders of government.

### Indicators around collective efforts to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing within the municipality but not managed by the municipality

1. The volume of available and occupied units of affordable and deeply affordable housing in the municipality.
2. The number of people who experience homelessness and sheltering outside, measured through the Point in Time and other counts, including demographic data such as background and gender.
3. Growth of new persons experiencing homelessness and looking for housing as reported through registration on the By Name list or similar tool.
4. The number of individuals housed or sheltered by various initiatives within the municipality.
5. The number of people who engage with public education messages as tracked through website clicks or similar tools.

This data would be captured in a yearly homelessness and housing report card delivered to Regional Council. Annual report cards are an increasingly common tool through which municipalities are evaluating the impacts that interventions have on the experiences of unhoused individuals as well the demographic data that provides an intersectional understanding of who is experiencing homelessness. Historically there have been annual report cards on housing and homelessness in Halifax and by reinitiating this process staff will be able to provide regular updates to council and the public. While not all data points tracked within the report card are within the municipality's scope of influence, having a complete picture prepared on, at minimum, an annual basis will support evidence-based decision making for municipal interventions. We are currently conducting lived experience surveys and the proposed budget includes funding for this process to continue.