

HALIFAX

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Item No. 4
Halifax Regional Council
October 26, 2021

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: October 21, 2021

SUBJECT: Emergency Supportive Housing and Shelter Accommodation update –
October 2021

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.

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

As noted in the above motion, 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.

The number of people sleeping rough in Halifax has more than doubled in the past year. According to the Affordable Housing Association, as of August 10, 2021, 400 people are homeless in the municipality. 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 second monthly update report requested by Council and covers the period up to and including October 21, 2021.

DISCUSSION

Housing and Homelessness is not a core municipal mandate, so the municipality does not have existing resources or staff expertise in this area. Therefore, relationships with the Province and community partners are essential in working to determine the best use of available resources in addressing the issue of homelessness.

In the past 30 days, staff have been working to identify appropriate land for installation of modular units. The municipality is finalizing a Dartmouth location that could accommodate up to 30 clients of the Out of the Cold shelter, as well as other individuals sleeping in HRM parks. The Province of Nova Scotia and Out of the Cold are working to secure funding to deliver the services required for the clientele moving from Gray Arena to the Dartmouth site. In addition, staff are working to identify and secure a Halifax site to install modular units, with confirmation of the location and number of units able to be placed yet to be determined. Rehabilitation of the modular units to prepare them for placement is ongoing and the total cost of that work is still being assessed.

The ongoing priority has been to work with those sleeping on HRM park lands to identify suitable temporary housing options. In coordination with multiple service providers, hotel rooms and shelter placement has been occurring daily. Due to population growth in the municipality, it is expected that homelessness will continue to be a significant social issue and a gap analysis has shown that HRM will continue to require facilitation for those sleeping in parks and other locations. Therefore, a hiring process is underway for a full time Housing and Homelessness Coordinator for a term of 12 months. A review will be conducted prior to the end of the term to evaluate the success of the position in helping to house those experiencing homelessness, in coordination with community service providers.

HRM is completing an agreement with 11 community service providers to provide \$60,000 in emergency funding for a period of 8 weeks, as well as an additional \$10,000 to fund an administrator to coordinate referral of those experiencing homelessness to the appropriate service provider for possible placement in a shelter or a hotel.

Meagher Park

On September 18, the municipality was notified by volunteers and service providers of potential health and safety issues at the park and immediately relocated some of the residents to Gray Arena, which was set up as an emergency short-term housing option. Shortly after the emergency set up, the Province requested that HRM support Out of the Cold in securing a location to place clients. Therefore, Gray Arena has been made available for the past four weeks and Out of the Cold will move from the arena once the modular units are available in the Dartmouth location.

Meagher Park continues to pose health and safety concerns and cause issues with residents. For example, a significant increase in illegal drug use has been reported. Several individuals have moved from the park to other housing options but the situation is fluid and dynamics at the park change often. Staff will continue to monitor Meagher Park and react as necessary. With the hiring of the HRM Navigator/Coordinator, daily coordination will occur at this site, as well as continued collaboration with the service providers with a focus on harm reduction strategies and placements with appropriate service providers.

Other Encampments

Staff are monitoring and working on tent encampments at other sites including: Victoria Park, Beaumont and South St, First Lake, Graham's Cove, Geary St, and Cogswell St. In working with the Outreach Street Navigator, staff have had some success relocating residents of the Victoria Park site to other housing options. As noted above, staff will continue to monitor encampment sites and react as capable with existing resources.

Data Collection

For the period 19 August to 20 October 2021, 311 has received 376 complaints regarding encampments. In addition, data is being collated from HRP, EHS, IES and Parks and Recreation on site specific issues.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Of the \$500,000 approved by Regional Council, total expenditures as of October 21 are \$144,746. The majority of expenses are for hotel rooms. Additional costs are for security and supplies to Gray Arena. To continue the rehabilitation of the modular units and prepare for placement, it is anticipated that further funding of \$ 500,000 may be required.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the Province, staff have had contact to varying degrees with a number of community-based service providers. These include: Adsum for Women and Children, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, North End Community Health Centre / MOSH Housing First, Out of the Cold Community Association, Phoenix Youth Programs, Welcome Housing, YWCA Halifax, Elizabeth Fry Society, Coverdale Courtwork Society, the John Howard Society, Shelter Nova Scotia, Outreach Street Navigators, and Mainline.

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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