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Item No. 5
Halifax Regional Council
March 1, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 21, 2022

SUBJECT: Emergency Supportive Housing and Shelter Accommodation update –
February 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 (Item 15.1.9)

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.

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 federal and provincial governments 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. The majority of this additional \$4.4 million 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 sixth monthly update report requested by Council and covers the period up to and including February 21, 2022.

DISCUSSION

Modular Units

Work on the location at Flotilla Lane / Alderney Drive / Church Street in Dartmouth for modular units to accommodate clients of the Out of the Cold shelter has been substantially completed. Occupancy permits were received for the 4 modular sleeping units (total capacity 24 persons) on January 13 and residents moved in on January 16. Construction and modification of the modular unit to accommodate the two barrier-free bedrooms (with total capacity for two individuals) and single washroom has been completed and the unit was turned over to the service provider on February 8. Modification of the modular unit to accommodate the commercial kitchen has been impacted by supply chain issues and completion of this work is expected by late March. Out of the Cold staff are using alternative solutions until the full kitchen is available.

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. Most individuals who have been residing at the Gray Arena, which was being used as a temporary shelter, have moved to the Dartmouth modular site. Alternate accommodations have been provided by the province to those individuals at the arena who did not relocate to a modular unit. The arena is again accepting bookings from the public.

Once the Dartmouth site was completed, the municipality shifted focus to completing the Halifax modular site, which is on a portion of the parking area of the Centennial Pool accessed from Cogswell Street. Key factors in helping choose this location include but are not limited to the property being owned by the municipality, meeting the applicable zoning requirements, and being located within reasonable proximity to important supports and services that occupants may need, including transit. Six modular units, an accessible unit, and support units (for a total of nine units) are being installed at this site. The units are expected to accommodate 38 individuals, based on single occupancy.

As of the writing of this report, the surveyed layout and construction of the structural support system for the Halifax modular units is ongoing. The civil site work (i.e. installation of water, sanitary and electrical infrastructure) within Cogswell Street and on site is expected to be completed by the end of February. All construction permits have been received. Seven modular units have been delivered and stored at Bird Construction's equipment yard and the two remaining units will be delivered to the site at the time of installation. 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 a contracted service provider.

Estimated costs to purchase, install and maintain the modular units to the end of the 2021/22 fiscal year are as follows:

- Dartmouth site purchase and installation is estimated at \$1,774,356;
- Halifax site purchase and installation is estimated at \$2,206,937;
- Anticipated operating costs for utilities and maintenance at both sites is estimated at \$15,000.

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 has 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 is also directly covering the cost of hotel rooms for some individuals. This funding has 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 enables broad access to support from across the system (youth, families, men, women, domestic violence survivors, etc.). Agencies can refer clients to the COPSO funding as a last resort and each person referred must be attached to a support worker as a condition of acceptance. Currently, these agencies are providing support to people staying in hotels at no additional cost.

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 133 people experiencing homelessness. **This activity has added 4153 shelter bed nights to the system, the equivalent of 27 shelter beds nightly.**

As of the writing of this report, there are 49 people in 41 hotel rooms being paid for by the municipality, either directly or through COPSO funding. If all 41 rooms remain occupied, the projected 2021/22 municipal cost for hotel rooms will be approximately \$900,000.

Municipal staff are working closely with provincial colleagues to support the province in its role as the lead in addressing homelessness. Regular meetings are occurring 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 indicated that they are working on a response to the request but, as of the writing of this report, no additional detail has been provided.

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.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Of the \$4,900,000 approved by Regional Council, total expenditures as of February 21 were \$2,921,952. Most of this spending is for purchase and installation of the modular units. Additional costs include the funding provided to COPSO, costs for short-term hotel stays funded directly by the municipality, and security and supplies at Gray Arena during the period it was used as a temporary shelter.

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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