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Item No. 15.1.5
Halifax Regional Council
February 21, 2023

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 15, 2023

SUBJECT: Framework for Addressing Homelessness

ORIGIN

May 3, 2022 Halifax Regional Council motion (item 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 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

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Stoddard THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. 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 MOTION PUT AND PASSED

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

November 22, 2022, Regional Council motion (item #15.1.9) MOVED by Councillor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to:

1. Continue to seek lived experience expertise from those living in encampments to guide municipal work to address homelessness and its impacts; and
2. Respond to the recommendations of the HRM Lived Experience Consultation Report with additional analysis as part of the broader report on HRM's approach to homelessness which staff are preparing.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

December 13, 2021, Executive Standing Committee (item #12.2.1) MOVED by Deputy Mayor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Morse

THAT the Executive Standing Committee:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report about the use of an intersectional gender lens on housing and homelessness initiatives within the mandate of the Halifax Regional Municipality; and
2. Review the recommendations emerging from the Home for Good research project attached in the December 2, 2021 Request for Women's Advisory Committee Consideration form.

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;...

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Regional Council

- 1) approve *A Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality* (Attachment A) as a document to guide the municipality's activities in the area of homelessness;
- 2) direct funding in the amount of \$334,800 to maintain the current level of services as identified in Table 1 in the financial implications section be added to the 2023/24 Budget Adjustment List; and
- 3) direct funding in the amount of up to \$798,000 for Proposed initiatives as identified in Table 2 in the financial implications section be added to the 2023/24 Budget Adjustment List, conditional on the cost for the daytime drop-in centre being shared equally with the Province of Nova Scotia such that HRM's share not exceed an annual cost of \$744,000.

BACKGROUND

This report responds to several of the components of the May 3, 2022 motion of Regional Council, particularly numbers 1, 6 & 7 as well as other Regional Council motions, as noted in the origin section.

There is a homelessness and affordable housing crisis in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The municipality has recently recorded the highest number of people in need of housing and the highest number of people sheltering outside since the Halifax Explosion in 1917.

Based on the November 2022 *Semi Annual Count of People Sleeping Outside in HRM*, sponsored by the Downtown Halifax Business Commission and Spring Garden Area Business Association, at least 85 people are sleeping outside though the actual number was estimated to be as high as 110. This is a 44 per cent increase since the 2022 Point In Time Count completed on April 7, 2022. Due to increases in the cost of living, and the potential expiration of the rent cap in 2023, the number of people sheltering outside could grow significantly in 2023 and 2024.

While the provision of housing and social supports are provincial responsibilities, the municipality is significantly impacted by homelessness. Due to insufficient housing, as well as the lack of indoor sheltering options and associated supports or wrap around services, there are people forced to shelter outside, many who do so in municipal parks. Some shelter in other locations or live in their vehicle.

Individuals sheltering outside frequently suffer from abuse, social isolation, food insecurity, severe stress, poor physical and mental health, and violence. The municipality has taken several actions to help address the crisis. These actions include:

- Removing barriers in land use by-laws for affordable housing types (secondary and backyard suites and shared housing);
- Waiving the majority of municipal related fees associated with the development or renovation of units owned by the non-profit sector;
- Updating the municipal tax relief program to create a more streamlined and predictable approval process;
- Development of an [Affordable Housing Grant Program](#) and surplus land category for affordable housing;
- Distribution of federal funds to create affordable and supportive housing through [the Rapid Housing Initiative](#);
- Construction of 68 units in two modular housing sites;
- Direct provision of street navigator services & support to external providers;
- Distribution of survival supplies to residents sheltering outside;
- Support to the operation of emergency shelters.

Facing an increasing number of people experiencing homelessness in the coming years, further municipal support may be required to support some of the most vulnerable in our community.

DISCUSSION

The Halifax Regional Municipality is in the midst of an affordable housing and homelessness crisis. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of people who are homeless has more than doubled. As of January 19, 2023, based on the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia *By Name List*, there are 790 persons experiencing homelessness in HRM. This includes people sleeping in shelters, in other non-permanent housing situations, and outside. The number of people forced to shelter outside, many in municipal parks, has increased 500% between 2018 and 2022. It is important to note that represented in the number of persons experiencing homeless are a disproportionate number of people who identify as Indigenous, black and have a disability or mental health challenges.

The rise in homelessness is driven by several factors, however the primary factor is the lack of affordable, stable, and supportive housing. The vacancy rate in the municipality is less than 1 per cent, driving rental costs higher. The rising cost of living also impacts the housing crisis by reducing available income to put to housing. 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 per cent of their income on shelter. Those that spend 50 per cent 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 outdoors in the municipality, the state of homelessness and lack of affordable housing have an impact on the municipality. Some of the municipality's most vulnerable citizens have no choice but to sleep outside in tents and have insufficient access to food, supplies, or critical care.

The purpose of the attached proposed framework is to define what the municipality can do within its capacity and scope, and how it can support other orders of government and community service providers to better support those experiencing homelessness in Halifax. The framework sets out roles to ensure the municipality is doing those things that it is uniquely positioned to do but not duplicating efforts in areas where others are better positioned or responsible. Staff have identified four key roles within its mandate that 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

The framework also incorporates and addresses feedback from the lived experience consultations to date including:

- The consideration of a tiny homes community. The number one concern of people experiencing homelessness is a lack of suitable housing for people. A tiny homes project would increase the supply of deeply affordable housing in HRM
- The access to basic services through the launch of a daytime support centre, additional navigator support, exploring options to increase shower access, electricity and running water at designated sheltering locations, and additional monies for necessary supplies
- Further support for public education to address the significant stigma faced by people experiencing homelessness
- The commitment to a civilian-led response to issues facing and involving persons experiencing homelessness.

Framework Recommendations

The framework is based on the assumption that HRM will continue to provide the existing operational initiatives & supports to both service providers and directly to those experiencing homelessness. These include but are not limited to:

- Outreach support and provision of survival supplies;
- Maintenance of and clean up at encampment sites on municipal land along with compliance support;
- The continuation of the designated sheltering locations with the provided services such as toilets, garbage collection, etc.;
- Funding and other supports towards the operation of emergency shelters;
- Service supports (garbage, maintenance, etc.) at the modular units; and
- Coordination and facilitation support between and among service providers and all orders of government

While this support from HRM has helped mitigate some of the homelessness challenges, as the framework highlights, the situation has gotten worse and is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. As a result, the framework outlines a number of additional and proposed initiatives.

Some highlights of proposed new or enhanced initiatives in the framework include:

- Providing support to those organizations working on diversion.
- Providing power and running water to designated sheltering sites.
- Hiring an additional Street Navigator & associated supports along with a recommendation to review the navigator program provided to the Business Improvement Districts along with the supports provided directly by HRM to improve efficiencies and effectiveness.
- Committing to work with service providers and other stakeholders to support activities and policies that address the over-representation of various populations within the those experiencing homelessness.
- Applying a gender lens to policies and practices as there are specific challenges for women, transgender, and non-binary individuals who are precariously housed and unhoused.
- Supporting, in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia and one or more service providers, a new full time daytime support centre. Such a centre would provide a place for persons experiencing homelessness to go during the day, to escape cold, hot or inclement weather, to remain dry, have timely access to showers, use washers and dryers, access and meet with service providers, access other supports including phone and internet, and have daily meals. Estimated costs are outlined in the financial implications section, prorated to a summer start and are predicated on working with the province and building on existing supports in the community.
- Considering new projects such as a tiny homes project and support for more “to code” shelters. While a tiny home project is not the ultimate solution to the housing crisis, it is a housing option for people that can be better than living in a tent, shed or shelter. It is also a project that can be relatively quickly. Projects in Canada, such as [12 Neighbours](#) in Fredericton or the [Astum Api Niikinaahk](#) project in Winnipeg, ones throughout the United States and other countries have shown these communities address a need and provide a stable dignified housing option for a portion of the population that is not currently well serviced in Halifax.

Funding Requirements

Costs associated with the above noted initiatives are included in the financial implications section. A number of the recommendations in the framework are a continuation of existing work or would not involve a direct financial commitment from HRM. However, there are some that would result in financial impacts to HRM.

Existing Supports

Currently, the supports provided by HRM are covered by existing staff and funding. The direct costs allocated in the Parks & Recreation operating budget include staff wages of \$245,000 along with non-compensation expenses of \$247,700. With the increased expectations and demand caused by the increase in the number of homeless, the current supports provided by HRM cannot be maintained under the current funding amounts. Additional funding of \$334,800 would be required to maintain the existing supports, as outlined in the financial implications section.

Proposed Operational Initiatives and Supports

In addition, there are proposed initiatives in the framework which would be new supports and actions for HRM. Of those initiatives, some would involve providing funding to support others in the provision of their services, such as organizations carrying out diversion support.

Two of the initiatives would enhance the designated sites through the provision of power and running water.

One of the key recommendations which responds to a need highlighted by service providers is the need for a full time, daily drop-in centre. While some service providers offer some daytime drop-in service, there is currently no full time, daily, year-round service. It is estimated that this type of service would cost approximately \$1,486,000 annually. As the framework notes, it is recommended that HRM champion and work with the province and other service providers to explore a daily drop-in service. There would be a

significant benefit to unhoused individuals as well as the broader HRM community, However, it is important that HRM be a partner in provision of this service, not sole funder. Therefore, any funding provided for this service, is recommended to be conditional on an equal cost sharing by the province. For the first year, the costs would be prorated based on the time to set up and operationalize the service.

Proposed Major Initiatives

The tiny homes project and support for “to code” shelters outlined in the framework would be considered major initiatives and as a result should require partnerships with others in order to proceed. The estimated costs for those are noted in the financial implications section, however it is not recommended that HRM proceed unless partners could be confirmed. HRM staff would explore opportunities for partnerships for these initiatives and if successful, return to Regional Council with details and potential funding requests for Council’s consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Current core HRM costs related to supporting those experiencing homelessness include administrative support, a director, a navigator with a support budget to assist people experiencing homelessness, a coordinator to support encampment sites and compliance officers. The costs outlined below are for the additional services proposed in the strategic framework. Furthermore, the proposed response and associated financial implications are predicated on the level of homelessness remaining relatively stable.

2023-24 funding included in the Parks & Recreation budget target includes staff wages of \$245,400 and other non compensation expenses \$247,700. Wages for compliance officer positions approved by Council in June 2022 are included separately in the Parks & Recreation budget as the function provides compliance support to a variety of issues, not just homelessness.

However, with the increased demand for support from HRM, caused by the increase in the number of people sleeping rough, the municipality does not have the capacity to maintain current service levels within the existing budget envelope let alone address the increasing service needs.

To **maintain current levels of service and support** (Table 1 below), and assuming no substantive increase in the number of homeless, or a desire for improved services and response, additional funding of \$334,800¹ would be required.

Existing Operational Initiatives & Supports (Table 1)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Maintenance, garbage, and waste management – encampments	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
Training & education	\$14,500	\$14,500	\$14,500
Portable toilets	\$18,000	\$18,000	\$18,000
Water delivery ²	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
Outreach support	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Emergency shelter support (est. three events/year)	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Administrative Support/Office Expenses	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000
Public Education	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Point in time counts and data collection	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Lived experience committee	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Survival supplies	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Total	\$582,500	\$582,500	\$582,500

¹ \$582,500 is needed to fund the existing operational initiative. There are existing resources of \$247,700 in the 2023-2024 budget so the specific additional funding is \$582,500 less \$247,700 = \$334,800

² Bottled water delivery to a designated location would not be required if running water was available

To explore **new operational initiatives & support** (Table 2 below), additional funding of \$798,000 (2023/24), \$944,000 (2024/25) and \$964,000 (2025/26) would be required in addition to the \$334,800 in maintaining the current level of service and support.

New Operational Initiatives & Supports (Table 2)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Diversion Support	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Provision of power to designated locations	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$90,000
Provision of running water to designated locations ³	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Additional Navigator - Funding for this position is included in the pending Navigator Expansion Report	–	–	–
Supports for Additional Navigator	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
HRMs contribution to a Day time support centre – 365 days/year – in 2023-2024 starts July 1 st	\$598,000	\$744,000	\$744,000
Total	\$798,000	\$944,000	\$964,000

Options for major new initiatives (Table 3 below), additional funding of \$1,668,000 (2023/24), and \$1,000,000 (2024/25) would be required in addition to the extra funding requirement from maintaining current level of service (Table 1) and new recommended operational initiatives (Table 2).

Options for Major New Initiatives (Table 3)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Tiny home project	\$1,500,000	\$1,000,000	
"To-code" Shelters	\$168,000		
Total	\$1,668,000	\$1,000,000	

RISK CONSIDERATION

There is a risk of homelessness increasing at a faster rate than the proposed recommendations can help support and that the identified financial commitment will be insufficient even to maintain current service levels. There are risks associated with the daytime support centre with respect to identifying an appropriate available space, level of support from the Provincial government and timing. There is significant risk that the level of homeless in the municipality may rise significantly in 2023/24 and in 2024/25.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This report was developed with input from service providers through the Service Provider Task Force. This task force includes representatives from Dalhousie Legal Aid Service, Elizabeth Fry Society, the Halifax Regional Municipality, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, North End Community Health Centre, Out of the Cold, Permanent, Accessible, Dignified and Safe (PADS) housing, United Way Halifax, and YWCA of Halifax. The input provided by members of the task force and other service providers is attached as an appendix (Attachment 2).

³ This is the provision of water for 3 seasons. Water in winter requires a large structure and should include bathrooms and showers, approx. cost \$1,000,000/structure.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

If the municipality chooses not to support residents and encampments, there will be significant increases in waste in these sites. This will attract rats and other vermin into these locations, make them unusable for sheltering or other purposes, force people to move to other locations, and increase the impact of homelessness on resident and business neighbours.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council may choose to:

1. Decline to approve the framework or direct the CAO to amend the framework and return to Regional Council with a revised report and recommendation.
2. Direct the CAO not to include funding for any of the recommended initiatives identified in the report in the 2023/24 BAL.
3. Direct the CAO to include only the additional funding for existing initiatives in the 2023/24 BAL.
4. Direct the CAO to include in the 2023/24 BAL funding for existing initiatives and full funding for new operational initiatives without the condition of cost sharing from Province of Nova Scotia.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – A Framework To Address Homelessness In Halifax Regional Municipality.

Attachment 2 – Service Provider Task Force Input into the Framework

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 902.456-7420

A Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality

Prepared by:

Name: Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homelessness

Department Name: Parks and Recreation

Date: February 2023

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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 2022¹, 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 Count².

The following table shows the numbers from the 2018³ and 2022 Point in Time Counts.

	2018 ⁴	2022 ^{4 5}	% 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 ⁶	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.⁷

¹ [Nov 22 Navigator Survey.pdf \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](#)

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

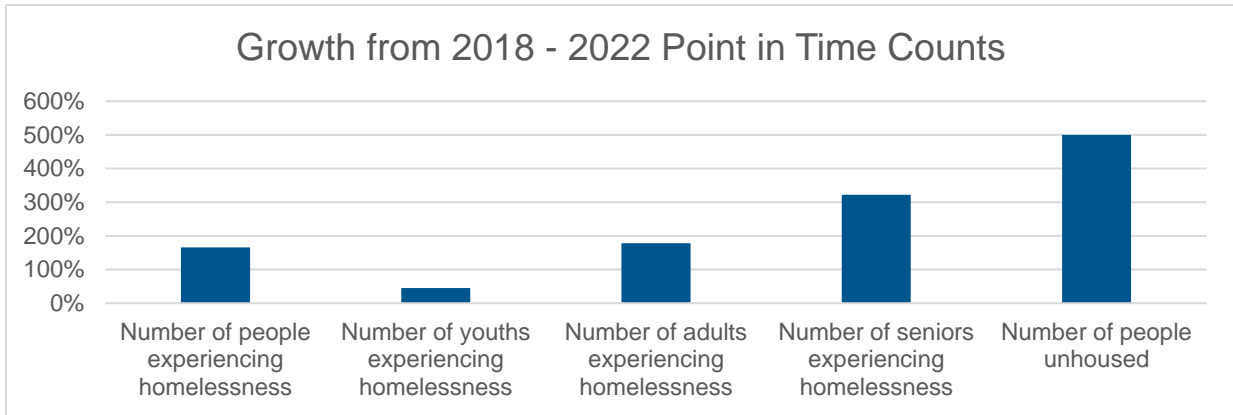
³ [2018+Halifax+Point+in+Time+Count+Report.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](#)

⁴ Numbers based on the percentages reported in the Point In Time Count

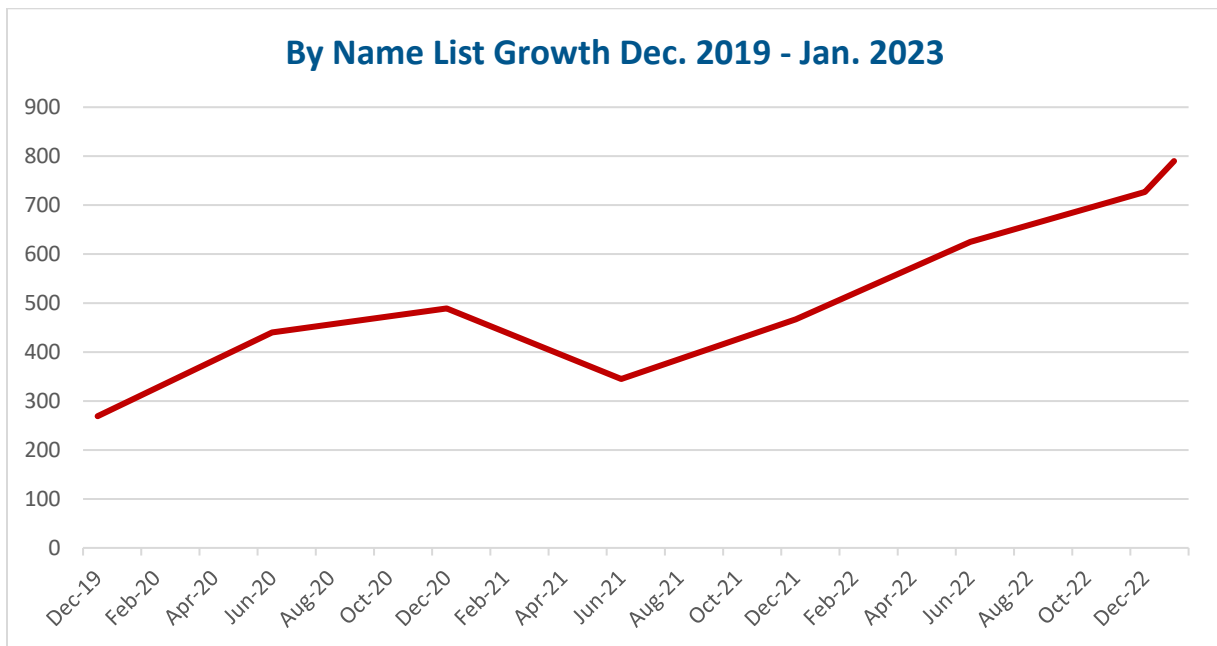
⁵ Some persons surveyed declined to answer this question

⁶ Number of people sleeping outside is included in the number of people experiencing homelessness

⁷ 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 list⁸, 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 data⁹, 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

⁸ [AHANS | HRM Homelessness Statistics](#)

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

0.2 per cent.

Average rents in 2022¹⁰ 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 \$2,453¹¹.

Statistics Canada defines someone in core housing need¹² 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 Census¹³, 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 Index¹⁴, 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 2022¹⁵, 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 Cap¹⁶

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

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

¹¹ [Rentals.ca October 2022 Rent Report](#)

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

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

¹⁴ [Nova Scotia Department of Finance - Statistics](#)

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

¹⁶ [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.¹⁷
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."¹⁸
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

¹⁷ [FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁸ [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* approach¹⁹ 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 problems²⁰, 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.

¹⁹ [Housing First | The Homeless Hub](#)

²⁰ [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 populations²¹ 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 population²²), 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.

²¹ [2022 Point-in-Time Count for Halifax Regional Municipality | DHBC \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](https://downtownhalifax.ca/2022-Point-in-Time-Count-for-Halifax-Regional-Municipality-DHBC)

²² [LGBTQ2+ community in Canada: A demographic snapshot \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://statcan.gc.ca/lgbtq2-community-in-canada-demographic-snapshot)

Section 4.2: Supporting precariously housed²³ 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.

²³ [COHhomelessdefinition.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](https://www.homelesshub.ca/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf)

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 Initiative²⁴.
- 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.

²⁴ [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.

Service Provider Task Force

Input for the Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality

Prepared by:

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Parks and Recreation
January 17, 2023

Background

The Housing and Homelessness division of Parks & Recreation has been developing a strategic framework to guide the municipality in how to address homelessness within the municipality. This framework is required due to the growing number of persons experiencing homelessness in the city. As of January 2023, based on the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia's By Name list, there are 790 people experiencing homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Of these people, service providers estimate as many as 110 people are sheltering outside. There are 170 percent more homeless individuals than there were 2 years ago, and the number is expected to continue to grow.

The Province of Nova Scotia has the responsibility for housing and social services. However, when dozens of people are forced to camp in municipal parks as no housing options are available, the municipality must respond and help address the situation. A large number of service providers in the municipality are trying to help persons experiencing homelessness, but there is still a lot more that needs to be done. The most efficient and effective way for the municipality to help in these situations is to partner with service providers who already have strong relationships with people experiencing homelessness, the expertise and the systems to work with this population.

The municipality and service providers formed a Task Force to facilitate this collaboration to provide advice and recommendations to municipal staff. The active membership on this task force includes representatives from the Halifax Regional Municipality, Dalhousie Legal Aid Service, Elizabeth Fry Society, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, North End Community Health Centre, Out of the Cold, Permanent, Accessible, Dignified and Safe (PADS) housing, United Way Halifax, YWCA of Halifax, and the Province of Nova Scotia. In preparing the Framework to Address Homelessness Within The Halifax Regional Municipality, municipal staff developed a presentation of potential priorities and tactics. This was shared with members of the task force, and members could provide input through a survey. Members of the task force also distributed the survey to other service providers in their network. A total of seven out of the over 30 organizations who received the survey responded.

Suggestions and recommendations

Section 1: Respondents were asked to rate the priority of the following four potential municipal roles in addressing homelessness.

These are listed in order of priority:

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

Section 2: Respondents were asked to consider which potential priorities should HRM take a leadership role.

These are listed in order of priority in terms of areas where the municipality should take a leadership role:

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

Section 3: Within each of the four possible priorities, respondents were asked to consider several potential tactics.

The responses have been sorted from the activities respondents felt were most important (4) to the ones they felt were least important (1).

Supporting residents sheltering outside

Potential Tactic	Response
Support encampment sites with power, water, storage, garbage collections, food storage or prep areas, and access to showers	4.00
Provide garbage and water management associated with encampment sites	3.86
Create a defined encampment strategy based on best practices that include how municipal staff will interact with residents in encampments and how persons sheltering in unacceptable locations be addressed (schools, cemeteries, active sports fields, etc.)	3.71
Build public washrooms and water sources in busy locations, such as Spring Garden Road	3.71
Provide transit passes to those currently not eligible to receive them through existing programs and systems	3.57
Launch a 24/7 - 365 days/year drop in respite centre (warming and cooling)	3.57
Redefine the relationship and role of Halifax Regional Police and the RCMP in addressing the needs of persons experiencing homelessness	3.57
Provide sheltering and survival supplies to persons sheltering outside	3.43
Replace the existing Halifax Mutual Aid temporary shelters with ones that meet fire and safety regulations	3.33
Develop a civilian-led response team to address needs in homeless encampments	3.14
Support the creation of an outreach or navigator position that provides evening and weekend support	2.43

Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

Potential Tactic	Response
Support the development of deeply affordable housing stock	3.86
Ensure that housing options are highly accessible to all persons	3.86
Further streamlining zoning, bylaws, and permitting	3.43
Addressing the issues created by vacation rental systems	3.43
Support land bank initiatives within the municipality	3.33
Support a tiny homes project	2.86
Distribute federal funding for community-based projects	2.86

Supporting precariously housed persons and families to stay housed

Potential Tactic	Response
Advocate and support living wage policies	3.71
Participate in conversations around rent control, income, and healthcare access	3.57
As a funding partner, support service providers and their existing diversion activities	3.29
Promote and support skill development opportunities	2.71

Supporting public education efforts

Potential Tactic	Response
Support the Point in Time Count and other research activities	3.14
Reinstate the municipal Housing and Homelessness Report Card	3.14
Promote an understanding of critical issues such as the definition of and need for deeply affordable housing	3.14
Addressing myths about homelessness that impact people's actions and reactions	2.86
Provide referrals and direction to those looking for help with housing	2.57

Section 4: Additional Comments

Respondents provided the following additional comments:

- Police should be instructed to leave unhoused persons alone.
- The (provincial) rent supplement program needs to be based on income and actual market rents.
- The municipality has a role in regulating short-term rentals, inclusionary zoning, training and using police to protect the homeless from further harm, and surplus land use.
- The municipality should coordinate outreach efforts in the community.
- The province needs a homeless reduction strategy.
- The municipality should provide a right of first refusal to purchase surplus municipal property to indigenous and not-for-profit groups.
- The challenges of preventing people from becoming homeless are large and complex. Supporting precariously housed persons and families to stay housed should not be a priority for the municipality
- Landlords who do not maintain affordable properties should be held accountable.
- Referrals are great, but there is no place for people to go.
- We have lots of research, the priority and focus needs to be on action.
- Keep the conversations going with service providers.
- Keep working with the province and service providers without duplicating services.