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**Item No. Info Item 2**  
**The Executive Standing Committee**  
**September 25, 2023**

**TO:** Chair and Members of (Name of Community Council or Board)

**SUBMITTED BY:**



Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** September 20, 2023

**SUBJECT:** An Intersectional Gender Lens on Housing and Homelessness

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**INFORMATION REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

December 13, 2021 Executive Committee Motion (Item 12.2.1 recommendation report from Women's Advisory Committee dated December 2, 2021)

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Morse

THAT 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**

Administrative Order Number 2019-004-GOV, Respecting the Women's Advisory Committee in the Halifax Regional Municipality, sections 6 (d) and (e) provide:

6. The Committee shall advise Council, through the Executive Standing Committee, on matters related to women as follows:

(d) provide information and resources about women's gender-based issues to Council, including the use of Gender-Based Analysis Plus; and

(e) advise and make recommendations about strategies designed to achieve the objectives of the committee.

## **BACKGROUND**

On December 2, 2021, the Women's Advisory Committee (WACH) discussed the impact of the rise in homelessness on women and gender diverse individuals and recommended to the Executive Standing Committee that staff return with a report that considers the current state through an intersectional gender lens as well as the recommendations in the *Home for Good* report.

The final report from YWCA Halifax *Home for Good* and *When the Roof Falls In* research projects, authored in partnership with Alice House, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, and The Marguerite Centre, provides various recommendations to address the barriers faced by women experiencing violence and housing insecurity on individual, community, and systems levels.

The recommendations specific to applying an intersectional gender analysis to housing programs are as follows:

1. Gender-based, intersectional analysis of housing data that considers gender and race as they are related to specific barriers and challenges accessing housing.
2. Prioritization of housing subsidies which considers housing barriers related to gender, race and history of violence and trauma.
3. Adjudication of housing applications which considers the intersectional barriers to housing.

The Municipality's mandate does currently not intersect with recommendations two and three, however the Municipality does support the collection of disaggregated data for those experiencing homelessness through the Point In Time (PIT) count, Sheltering Rough Survey, and other case management and data tools.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Applying an Intersectional Gender Lens through Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)**

Articulated in HRM's *Framework for Addressing Homelessness* is the 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.

Applying an intersectional lens to the Municipality's response to homelessness means establishing policies, practices and approaches that take into consideration the interactions of different social identity factors in the context of connected systems and structures of power.

HRM currently uses Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to help make its programs, policies, and services more inclusive. GBA+ is an evidence-based process used by multiple levels of government, including municipalities like the City of Edmonton, the City of Calgary, and the City of Montréal to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people may experience policies, services, programs, and initiatives.

Business Units across Halifax have been participating in GBA+ workshops and applying the tools developed by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) to work throughout the Municipality.

The use of a GBA+ can serve as a tool for municipal staff to address the disproportionate and intersectional impacts of violence and housing insecurity faced by women and gender diverse people.

### **The Impact of Homelessness on Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Residents**

We know from the expertise and lived experiences of residents and community organizations, as well as local, provincial and national studies, that women, girls and non-binary residents experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to compounding forms of insecurity and violence that impact their well-being, safety and survival.

For example, residents who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ who participated in the Women & Gender Equity Strategy engagement process in 2022 identified having access to housing as measure of community safety and gender justice as an area that they would like the Municipality to prioritize.

The Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Program Scoping Study highlights that as Halifax sinks further into an affordable housing crisis, women and youth in precarious living situations are made vulnerable to violence in both domestic settings and public spaces.

The Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network and the National Indigenous Housing Network assert that many women, girls, and gender-diverse people live in insecure or unsafe housing—or are made homeless—due to deliberate policy choices. They state that a lack of affordable and appropriate housing and emergency shelters that are beyond capacity result in many women and gender-diverse people being forced to rely on unsafe housing situations, dangerous survival strategies or remain in abusive or violent situations to maintain a roof over their heads.

As demonstrated in the *Home for Good Project* many women and gender-diverse people face gendered barriers that prevent that from accessing housing and impact them disproportionately, including living in core housing need, heading single-parent households, and having to choose between paying rent and feeding their children.

In a submission to the Federal Housing Advocate of the Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network, the National Indigenous Feminist Housing Working Group states that Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people are experiencing some of the most serious right to housing violations across Canada and are over-represented in almost all aspects of housing insecurity, homelessness, poverty and violence and trauma linked to precarious living situations.

The 2019 General Social Survey affirms that women, girls, and non-binary people experiencing homelessness experience heightened threats of violence. 1 in 10 individuals in Canada stated that they had experienced homelessness (considered by the survey to be living on the street, having to live with someone else or in their car because of having nowhere else to go) at some point in their lifetime. Respondents who reported experiencing homelessness in the 12 months preceding the survey experienced violent victimization at a rate three times higher than those who had never been homeless.

The November 2022 Sleeping Rough Survey indicated that 14% of people surveyed identified as LGBTQ2S, however 50% of homeless youth identified as 2SLGBTQ. From the Spring 2022 Point in Time (PIT) Count, 16% of the people interviewed identified as 2SLGBTQIA+ while 34% of those who were 24 years old or younger identified as being 2SLGBTQ+. From this same survey, 51% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents reported their first experience of homelessness happening at 18 years old or younger, compared to 37% of heterosexual respondents; 89% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents reported violence or conflict in the home with family members, partners and other adults as being their most recent reason for housing loss compared to 64% of heterosexual respondents; and 89% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents reported having challenges with mental health compared to 64% of heterosexual respondents.

When people's basic needs like housing are not met, they are also made more vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, an issue that disproportionately affects women and youth ([Hearing Them](#), TESS).

## **Applying a Gendered Intersectional Lens to Municipal Housing & Homelessness Initiatives**

### **Current State**

The Municipality does not currently have specific initiatives that address housing and homelessness through an intersectional gender lens. However, it does have a foundation of tools, strategies, policies and relationships with communities that are critical to approaching a response to homelessness in this way.

Foremost, individual municipal staff engage with women, girls and gender-diverse residents experiencing homelessness on the ground and in partnership with various non-profit organizations that serve women, girls and gender-diverse residents experiencing homelessness. For example, the Municipality provides supplies, tents and sleeping bags to the Elizabeth Fry Society, a non-profit organization that serves identified women, girls, non-binary and gender diverse individuals.

Further, the following municipal policies and strategies inform the Municipality's approach to housing and homelessness and support staff to understand and respond to the impact of homelessness on residents using an intersectional lens:

- Framework for Addressing Homelessness
- Administrative Order Number 2020-002-GOV Social Policy Administrative Order
- The renewed Public Safety Strategy (2023-2026)

Strategic actions within the renewed Public Safety Strategy (2023-2026) include advancing Indigenous-led safety and expanding the Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Program. Both strategic actions highlight the need to consider how intersecting forms of oppression can disproportionately impact women, gender diverse and non-binary people's safety in public spaces, such as those who are experiencing homelessness, living on municipal property or receiving support from municipal staff through a variety of services.

With the approval of the Municipality's Framework for Addressing Homelessness and associated funding, the municipality is now well-positioned to intentionally integrate an intersectional gender lens into its work in addressing homelessness. Each action, policy and initiative within the framework has the potential to be developed and carried out in a way that responds to the needs of diverse women, girls and gender-diverse residents who are experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

Planning and Development administers the Affordable Housing Grant Program as well as the Rapid Housing Initiative, which have provided funding to non-profit housing organizations. The AHGP is eligible for non-profit or charitable organizations, which prioritizes projects that provide deeply affordable housing. The Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) is a Federal program that provides funding for the rapid development of new residential units that will provide housing for those in need of deeply affordable housing. Units must be targeted to vulnerable populations who are homeless or at severe risk of experiencing homelessness with a percentage of housing that must be targeted to women/women with children, urban Indigenous populations, and Black Canadians.

### **Opportunities**

There are several areas of work that offer particularly important opportunities for taking an intersectional approach to housing and homelessness.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The municipality's Framework for Addressing Homelessness proposes a municipally prepared annual report card on housing and homelessness. Recommendation 1 from the Home for Good research project could be incorporated into the development and application of this report card.

By including disaggregated data as presented in the Point-in-Time (PIT) counts, the Municipality will be better positioned to better understand the current state of those experiencing homelessness from an intersectional gender lens.

### *Training and Capacity Building for Municipal Staff*

HRM can leverage internal tools and training opportunities to equip staff who work in a range of roles including policy and program development and front-line services that support residents experiencing homelessness with the skills and knowledge they need to apply a gendered intersectional lens to municipal housing and homelessness initiatives.

The following are key trainings and tools available to municipal staff:

#### *Women's Safety Assessments*

HRM's Public Safety Office's Women's Safety Assessment is a community based, intersectional and participatory tool used to build safer neighbourhoods, schools, campuses, workplaces, transit systems and other public spaces. Use of this tool in project planning ensures that women and gender-diverse people, including 2SLGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and racialized women and gender-diverse people and individuals with disabilities, have a voice in making spaces safer for all Halifax residents.

#### *Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Toolkit Training for Municipal Staff*

Facilitated by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSIAO, this training supports municipal staff to identify systemic barriers and support equitable and inclusive public service delivery. During the training, staff will have the opportunity to increase their knowledge of the six step GBA+ process while using HRM's GBA+ Toolkit to apply it directly to their work.

#### *Trauma-Informed Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training*

This training is a comprehensive trauma-informed and person-centered program designed to equip professionals with strategies to safely prevent and manage disruptive behaviour, emphasizing the importance of early intervention and non-physical methods of de-escalation. The training helps strengthen understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, and emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone. Women, gender-diverse individuals, and those with intersecting marginalized identities are disproportionately impacted by trauma; housing instability is a source of trauma for many individuals, and it is often through experiences with trauma that individuals become unhoused.

As the unhoused population continues to grow, and number of encampments increase, consideration should be given to whether the municipality should make some designated encampment locations gender specific, or not allowing certain behaviours, such as the consumption of alcohol or drugs. These initiatives will require additional spaces and increased security and support. Similarly, as the Municipality works in partnership with the province of Nova Scotia to consider temporary housing villages or tiny home communities it will be important to consider structuring some of them specifically for those escaping from intimate partner violence. It is also crucial that we consider the element of gender diversity in hiring support workers for people experiencing homelessness.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications as a result of the material in this report.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

As part of the development of the Women and Gender Equity Strategy (WGES), HRM staff have engaged over 100 residents from diverse communities and community-based organizations across the Halifax region including The Youth Project, Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities, Immigrant and Migrant Women's Association, Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse, and the YMCA Immigrant Programs department. Input from these community engagement sessions was reviewed as part of this report.

Staff also attended and reviewed the presentation "The State of Homelessness in HRM" by Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homeless and Gayle Collicut, Housing Support Coordinator with the Elizabeth Fry Society, Mainland Nova Scotia to WACH in April 2023.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A – Women's Safety Assessment Description

Attachment B – Framework for Addressing Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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## What is a Women's Safety Assessment?

The Women's Safety Assessment (WSA) is a participatory tool used to build safer neighbourhoods, schools, campuses, workplaces, transit systems and other public spaces. It brings together community members and other important partners to assess and make safety recommendations, grounded in people's expertise from their daily lived experience of using, or choosing not to use, the space.

The WSA is based on the understanding that the social elements and the design of physical environments affects our safety. Research shows that when women and gender-diverse people, including 2SLGBTQIA+, youth, Black, Indigenous and racialized women and gender-diverse people, and women and gender-diverse people with disabilities, are meaningfully involved in the process of identifying safety concerns in public spaces and developing potential solutions, these spaces are made safer for everyone.

The safer a space feels, the more people will use it, and the safer it will become due to increases in community stewardship, activation of the space and natural surveillance. The tool has been adapted for use all over the globe and endorsed by leading organizations such as UN Women.<sup>1</sup>

## How was the safety assessment developed?

Safety assessments were first developed in 1989 by the Metro Toronto Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC).

The tool builds on the best practices of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and incorporates culturally competent, asset based community development, and gender-based approaches.

The tool considers how different people experience the space through 7 Principles of Design:

### 1. Know where you are and where you are going



- Signage
- Signals
- Orientation

### 2. See and be Seen



- Visibility
- Lighting
- Hiding places

### 3. Hear and be Heard

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<sup>1</sup> The municipality joined the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces program in 2019.



- Rush hour
- Peak circulation
- Social use of space
- Proximity of others

#### 4. Being able to escape and get help



- Informal and formal surveillance
- Access to emergency services
- Multiple route options

#### 5. A clean and welcoming environment



- Design
- Maintenance
- Management
- Organized space

#### 6. Working together



- Community Participation
- Grassroots involvement
- Partnerships

#### 7. Accessibility and Inclusion



- Universal Accessibility
- Flexible space
- Barriers to Access

In January 2020, HRM's Public Safety Office hosted a training in which a diverse group of residents learned how to use the WSA tool and support/lead assessments.

Every time we do a WSA, we learn more about the process and the way folks use the tool. We adjust the tool based on this feedback, ensuring the assessment process evolves to best reflect our local context.

#### **How does an assessment work?**

An assessment is most rich when it includes people who experience a place in different ways so that insights and actions arising from the assessment reflect a diversity of feelings and experiences of safety in public spaces.

As participants move through a space or place using the tool, they are asked to observe, discuss and record (in notes, photos, maps and voice recordings) their impressions of various social, built and natural features, relying upon their senses, experiences, feelings and perceptions.

Participants complete the assessment together, learning with and from one another, and making recommendations for changes to enhance safety, enjoyment, and accessibility of the space. The goal is that, through this process, participants will also feel a sense of reclamation over the spaces they assess, thereby supporting them to use the space more frequently, which, in turn, makes the space safer.

The Public Safety Office prepares a summary of the results of the assessment and sends this to the participants and key stakeholders. Participants can use the findings and recommendations from the WSA in their own community efforts to shape the public space, as well as work with other stakeholders and decision makers to implement the recommendations.

For more information about HRM's Women's Safety Assessment tool or to organize a safety assessment with your community, organization, business unit or other group, please contact Amy Brierley, HRM's Safe City & Safe Public Spaces Coordinator at [amy.brierley@halifax.ca](mailto:amy.brierley@halifax.ca) or 902 430 6703.