

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed by   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** August 26, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Mobile Shower Pilot Program

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## **ORIGIN**

June 29, 2021 Regional Council motion (Item 11.8.2):

MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Stoddard

THAT Regional Council request a staff report examining the possibility of a pilot program providing shower facilities for people experiencing homelessness either through retrofitted transit buses or partnering with a community organization to provide mobile shower trailers or working with recreation facilities.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

## **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39, subsection 2(c) provides:

The purpose of this Act is to

...

(c) recognize that the functions of the Municipality are to

- (i) provide good government,
- (ii) 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
- (iii) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That Halifax Regional Council direct staff to rent portable shower facilities for a period of nine weeks.
2. That Halifax Regional Council direct staff to explore the potential of refining and expanding the shower program in HRM operated recreation centers as well as with partner facilities.

## **BACKGROUND**

The above motion directed staff to examine the possibility of providing a shower program for people experiencing homelessness. This motion aligns with the Public Safety Strategy, Priority 2 - to Ensure Safe Places and Actions (21) Ensure the availability of drop-in services and warming/cooling centers for vulnerable, street-involved residents and (24) Monitor emerging homelessness trends and support initiatives to address chronic and episodic homelessness.

The number of people sleeping rough in Halifax has more than doubled in the past year, as of August 10, 2021, 400 people are homeless according to the Affordable Housing Association (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Current homeless figures (Source: AHANS 2021: <https://www.ahans.ca/hrm-homelessness-statistics-2>)

The pandemic has exacerbated pressures on housing and shelter across HRM and led to a substantial increase in the number of individuals sleeping rough, with limited access to basic hygiene.

Access to personal hygiene is a basic human need and an international human right. “[F]or persons experiencing homelessness, access to hygiene facilities such as toilets and showers, is essential for human dignity and maintenance of personal and public health.”<sup>1</sup> It supports wellbeing by lessening the chances of being rejected, “othered”, and unseen by society. The ability to take care of basic hygiene needs and having the opportunity to meet social standards of cleanliness and personal appearance helps people transition to next steps while feeling more comfortable in social environments. This helps with building confidence in searching for a home, seeing case workers, job hunting, and going to an interview.

Having the opportunity to shower helps in the prevention of infectious disease, something even more essential during this pandemic. Individuals who do not have access to showers are at a higher risk for health problems, diseases, infestations, and infections such as rashes, skin problems, fleas, head lice, and scabies. Personal hygiene practices can help prevent illness and help improve mental health. Showers also

<sup>1</sup> Health Needs Assessment of Persons Experiencing Homelessness in Alameda County 2014-2015. Alameda County Healthcare for the Homeless Program. County of Alameda, 2015, p. 54.

offer many benefits of pain relief and treatment through hydrotherapy, aiding in easing muscle aches and pains, increasing blood flow, improving concentration, and reducing swelling, to name a few.

Access to showers for those living homeless is extremely limited and existing options are not widely known. What follows is a list of some HRM supported facilities for showering and personal hygiene.

### **HRM Supported Showering Facilities**

1. The Sackville Sports Stadium currently offers shower passes to those struggling with homelessness through the Sackville Area Warming Centre. People can obtain a pass from the warming center and can access showers when the facility is open.
2. Since 2015, Captain William Spry Centre and Needham Recreation Centre have been offering access to their showers. The chart below are the numbers of people accessing this service at Capitan William Spry Centre (there were no clients at Needham). Please note the numbers reflect both unique and returning guests.

*Table 1: Rec centre Shower program usage Captain Spryfield 2019-2021(Aug)*

YEAR	Number of users (unique and repeat)
2019	285
2020	132
2021	4

3. During COVID-19, the Acadia Building in Sackville opened to people experiencing homelessness from 1:00-4:00 pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Shower facilities are still available with Library staff providing access. During the period of June 18 to August 24, 81 people used the shower facilities. Guests were provided with hygiene kits, which were purchased using grant monies. The HRM Public Safety Office provided \$300 which was used to provide laundry support services to guests in washing their clothes at a local laundry mat.
4. Shelter Nova Scotia is in the process of installing a shower in their new drop in housing hub at 5506 Cunard Street with a target opening of Fall 2021. Government Relations & External Affairs (GREA) provided financial assistance of \$5000 to support the building and installation of the shower.

In addition, during the Public Health mandated lockdowns, staff partnered with Halifax Public Libraries to install washroom and handwashing stations in downtown Halifax. Staff also increased visibility and awareness of HRM's public washroom facilities and provided additional funding to the Street Navigator program to support homeless and precariously housed individuals.

### **DISCUSSION**

Homelessness is a complex issue which requires government and communities to think of alternative ways to support unhoused people. There is not one solution or action to this crisis. Multifaceted approaches to improve options which allow people to participate and remain engaged in services throughout the Municipality are needed. In doing this, the lived experience of those experiencing homelessness must be taken into consideration, which includes hygiene as a basic health need. All partners need to look at different ways to support people in the delivery of ongoing services and care.

### **Portable Shower Unit**

While options to provide long term shower facilities are being considered, staff recommend installing a portable showering unit for a nine-week period starting Oct 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Staff are working to identify a location to house the shower trailer, in partnership with Mainline Needle Exchange and Halifax Regional Library. This will provide an immediate solution and would allow time to explore enhancing and refining the current shower program offered through Recreation, as well as other potential solutions.

The addition of a Social Policy Strategist to the GREA team, expected in October 2021, will enhance HRM's capacity to understand and address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Once onboard, this staff resource will allow HRM to better understand the current service environment and engage service providers and those working with people experiencing homelessness to understand what the best model would be for Halifax.

### Recreation Centers

Staff intend to work with Recreational Area Managers and other community partners to investigate options for enhancing and refining existing shower program services at recreation facilities.

In preparation for this work, staff have conducted a preliminary facilities review, primarily of numerous recreation centers throughout the Municipality, and would like to explore this option further to improve ease of access for residents and cost effectiveness.

### Other Municipalities

An initial scan of other cities throughout Canada and the US has helped provide a better understanding of the scope of potential solutions, as well as reinforce the need to more deeply engage with service providers and people experiencing homelessness to better understand what program would best serve residents. Below are some showering programs that have been implemented in cities throughout Canada:

Organization/City	Program Information
<b>Mobile Shower Trailer</b>	
Salvation Army Victoria, BC <sup>2</sup>	The program started in January 2021 through a City Emergency Social Services Grant. Two staff resources were assigned. The program ran 5 days a week to various sheltering locations for 3 months and ended in March 2021.
Refresh Mobile Showers trailer King Road MB Church Abbotsford, BC <sup>3</sup>	The program started in May 2019. Each Refresh Mobile Showers event requires at least four volunteers to greet patrons, manage usage, and clean the units. Patrons can lock their possessions in a safe place while they shower. Most importantly, Refresh volunteers call patrons by name, and take the time to talk to them.
Boyle Street Community Services Edmonton, AB <sup>4</sup>	Boyle Street's Social enterprise Hiregood helps operate and maintain shower trailers.
<b>Recreation Centre</b>	
Canada Games Pool Shower Access New Westminster, BC <sup>5</sup>	Partnership between the city's parks and recreation department and the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society. Open three times per week - Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays - from 2:00 to 4:00 pm.
McNabb Community Centre Ottawa <sup>6</sup>	Was opened from April 24, 2020 to October 9, 2020 on weekdays from 9:30am-4:00pm. The program offered accessible toilets, showers, and meals to more than 300 visitors each week. This program was moved to Tom Brown Arena. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Weston, Scott. ["Salvation Army to Provide Showers for People Sheltering in City Parks."](#) Vancouver Island, CTV News, 5 Dec. 2020

<sup>3</sup> ["Homeless, Free Showers, Shower TRAILER, Refresh Mobile Showers, Abbotsford."](#) Less, Free Showers, Shower Trailer, Refresh Mobile Showers, Abbotsford,.

<sup>4</sup> Mertz, Emily. ["Boyle Street Offers Mobile Shower Facilities to Those Living Rough in EDMONTON - Edmonton."](#) Global News, Global News, 29 Oct. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> ["New West Provides Covid-Friendly Place for Homeless People to Shower."](#) New West Record,.

<sup>6</sup> ["New Respite Centre for Ottawa's Homeless to 'Make a BIG Difference' | CBC News."](#) CBCnews, CBC/Radio Canada, 25 Apr. 2020

<sup>7</sup> McNabb Respite CENTRE: ["It Feels Amazing to Feel Clean"](#)

Ambleside Fieldhouse Vancouver <sup>8</sup>	The District of West Vancouver. From April 15 to December 31 2020, the shower program had 932 visits by 73 unique individuals three times per week
<b>Retro-Fitted Bus</b>	
Hygiene on Wheels Toronto, ON <sup>9</sup>	Partnership with established organizations that visit areas where people experiencing homelessness already congregate.
<b>Other</b>	
Lava Mae <sup>10</sup>	The mobile shower programs listed above are based on the model provided by Lava Mae. Lava Mae is a nonprofit organization founded in 2013 that consults with people and organizations to provide mobile hygiene services and toolkits to start a shower program in neighborhoods. They have a network that spans the globe, serving 79,000 people.

Although these programs are each unique, and some were operated solely as a response to the pandemic, there are some essential common components that staff will consider when reviewing HRMs current shower program:

- Each facility has at least 2 or more staff and/or volunteers
- All programs provide hygiene packages
- All programs have set times of operation
- All programs had at least one or more partners

As requested in the above Motion, Regional Council could direct staff to investigate the retrofitting of a Halifax Transit bus. To retrofit a bus with shower facilities, electrical and plumbing systems would need to be designed and new walls, fixtures, ventilation systems and appliances would need to be installed, with consideration to weight and space restrictions. This intensive design and fabrication could cost upwards of \$150,000.

#### PROS

- The shower bus is a compelling story, which can attract attention, funds, and local support.
- HRM could use a retired public transportation vehicle at low or no cost.

#### CONS

- Depending on bus/truck classification, the vehicle may be expensive to register and require Class A/B driver's licenses, which makes hiring more difficult.
- The more custom the configuration of the vehicle, the more difficult it will be to troubleshoot.
- From initial retrofit to upkeep, this option is the costliest to operate.

Regional Council could direct staff to purchase a shower trailer. This option requires purchase of a truck to haul the shower trailer, able to tow up to 10,000 pounds. The cost is approximately \$60,000 for the trailer plus the cost of the truck. The shower trailer can be customized with materials, colors and layouts, and can be a small two-shower trailer that is quite easy to maneuver and park, or as large as six to eight stalls.

#### PROS

- Turnkey solution with less specialized maintenance in the long run for a cheaper operation.
- Anyone with a standard driver's license can be trained.

#### CONS

- Upfront costs include purchase of a truck.
- Less design appeal and flexibility.

<sup>8</sup> ["West Vancouver Shower Program Becomes Support Hub during Pandemic."](#) North Shore News

<sup>9</sup> ["One Creative Step in the Fight against Homelessness in Toronto."](#) Locallove, 30 Oct. 2018,.

<sup>10</sup> [LavaMae](#),

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The below budget is based on a nine-week pilot program, operating three days a week from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Although this is an unbudgeted expenditure, the cost can be accommodated within the existing GREA 2021/22 budget. While this pilot is in operation, a program evaluation will identify the type of facility and service level HRM could adopt for a permanent program.

*Figure 2: Financial*

<b>Operational Costs</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Shower Trailer Rental Cost</b>	
Rental (\$700/week)	6,300
Delivery	175
To pump grey water	325
<b>Staffing</b>	
2 staff (contracted through Mainline Needle Exchange)	3,500
<b>Supplies</b>	
Cleaning supplies	
Personal hygiene items (towels, soap, shampoo, socks, undergarments)	
Laundry Services	
Bins for Belongings	3,000
Program Evaluation	3,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$16,300</b>
Net HST	699
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$16,999</b>

**RISK CONSIDERATION**

No risk considerations were identified

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

For purposes of gathering information for this report, several stakeholders have been engaged including:

- Area Managers for HRM Recreation
- HRM Emergency Management Office
- Sackville Sports Stadium
- Zatzman Sportsplex
- Canada Games Centre
- Halifax Regional Library Staff
- Out of the Cold Shelter
- The Salvation Army
- Halifax North Community Mobilization Team
- Outreach Street Navigators
- Mainline Needle Exchange

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

No environmental implications were identified.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Regional Council could choose not to approve the recommendations.

Regional Council could direct staff to return to Council with a report researching the retrofit of a Halifax Transit bus.

Regional Council could direct staff to return to Council with a report researching the purchase of a truck and shower trailer.

**ATTACHMENTS**

No attachments.

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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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