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Item No. 3
Halifax Regional Council
December 14, 2021

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Caroline Blair-Smith, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 10, 2021

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

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

August 31, 2021 Regional Council motion (item 14.1):

Moved by Mayor Savage, seconded by Councillor Mason.

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to implement a range of emergency supportive housing and emergency shelter accommodations for those who are unhoused in collaboration with and based on feedback from community-based social services providers and the Province of Nova Scotia to address immediate and emergent needs including measures such as the fit-up of spaces for temporary accommodations, renting of hotel and other spaces and further, and to coordinate and collaborate with community-based social services providers and the Province of Nova Scotia in that respect;

Direct that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to \$500,000 from Fiscal Services in respect of addressing these needs, and report on the use of said funds through monthly public updates as an information report at Regional Council meetings until the end of the fiscal year and then quarterly at a minimum; and,

Further direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with Department of Community Services and community service providers on a needs-analysis including determining how many people are unhoused, how many of them are currently tenting or occupying other forms of shelter within parks and other public lands in Halifax Regional Municipality and how many can be accommodated in a safer manner.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

November 9, 2021 Regional Council motion (Item 15.1.9)
MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council

Direct that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to \$3.2 million from Fiscal Services to purchase, install and maintain modular units at two sites and to address suitable temporary housing to address needs of unhoused residents. Regular updates to Regional Council will occur monthly until the end of the fiscal year and then quarterly at minimum.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39 provides:

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

...

(b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and

(c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

BACKGROUND

As noted in the Origin section, in August Halifax Regional Council identified \$500,000 for use in addressing urgent and emergency needs related to homelessness and directed the Chief Administrative Officer to work with the Province of Nova Scotia and community partners to explore use of this funding. On November 9, Regional Council further directed that the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to spend up to an additional \$3.2 million for this purpose.

The number of people sleeping rough in Halifax has more than doubled in the past year. According to the Affordable Housing Association, as of August 10, 2021, 400 people are homeless in the municipality. The situation with homelessness is dynamic and changes frequently. Therefore, monthly updates provided to Regional Council will be reflective of a specific period, up to the point of having a report prepared in time for review and distribution on the Council agenda. This is the fourth monthly update report requested by Council and covers the period up to and including December 9, 2021.

DISCUSSION

Modular Units

The municipality has finalized and announced a location at Flotilla Lane / Alderney Drive / Church Street in Dartmouth for modular units to accommodate clients of the Out of the Cold shelter, currently housed at the Gray Arena, and potentially other individuals sleeping in municipal parks. Municipal staff from across several business units are meeting daily to advance the initiative and coordinate with utilities, including Halifax Water and Nova Scotia Power, to facilitate connection of services once the modular units are onsite. Four modular units, an accessible unit, and two support units will be installed at the Dartmouth site.

As of the writing of this report, this work is scheduled to begin on Friday, December 10. Based on the current rate of progress, installation of the modular units is expected to be completed by the end of December. Retrofit of two modular office trailers to accommodate barrier free bedrooms and a commercial kitchen are anticipated for early January 2022. Exact timing for occupancy is dependent upon the Province of Nova

Scotia, which is responsible for determining placement of individuals and providing wrap-around services onsite through its service provider. The province has announced funding for Out of the Cold to deliver the services required for the clientele moving from Gray Arena to the Dartmouth site. HRM is purchasing the units, providing all normal municipal services (i.e. garbage pick-up, snow removal, etc.), and covering the cost of utilities and maintenance on site. This site will be able to accommodate 26 individuals, based on single occupancy.

A portion of the parking area of the Centennial Pool has been selected as the Halifax site for installation of modular units. Key factors in helping choose this location include but are not limited to the property being owned by the municipality, meeting the applicable zoning requirements, and being located within reasonable proximity to important supports and services that occupants may need, including transit.

Six modular units, an accessible unit and a number of support units, for a total of nine (9) units, will be installed at this site. The units are expected to accommodate 38 individuals, based on single occupancy. A previous update indicated that 44 individuals could be accommodated but this number was based on double occupancy to accommodate couples in certain rooms.

Projected installation of the modular units in Halifax is late January 2022. Exact timing for occupancy is dependent upon the province, which is responsible for determining placement of individuals and providing wrap-around services onsite through its service provider. In addition, the specific timeline for the installation of the modular units in Halifax will not be finalized until installation and activation of the Dartmouth site is complete.

Status of Encampments

An ongoing priority is to work with those sleeping on municipal park lands to identify suitable temporary housing options. There has been an increase in both outreach activity and public reporting of encampments. As a result, the municipality is aware of thirteen (13) encampments within municipal boundaries. Staff from the municipality and partner organizations are visiting each of these sites regularly. Due to the transitory nature of the occupants of homeless encampments the number of individuals onsite can vary daily. As of December 5, there were 35 individuals, 54 tents, and six (6) shelters at various homeless encampment locations throughout the municipality. In coordination with multiple service providers, hotel rooms and shelter placement has been occurring regularly. Sixteen (16) individuals transitioned from living rough to alternative accommodations for the period from November 29 to December 5.

Staffing

To assist in responding to homelessness issues, Regional Council approved a Social Policy Strategist position in the 2021/22 budget which has been filled. In addition, a hiring process has recently been completed for a full time Housing and Homelessness Coordinator for a term of 12 months. A review will be conducted prior to the end of the term to evaluate the success of this position in helping to house those experiencing homelessness, in coordination with community service providers.

Service Providers

HRM is providing \$70,000 to a coalition of service providers (COPSO) for use as crisis funding to support those experiencing homelessness. Staff are working on a more detailed proposal and parameters to provide further funding to this group, which will support this activity until the end of the 2021/22 fiscal year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Of the \$3,700,000 approved by Regional Council, total expenditures as of December 9 are \$1,096,557. The majority of expenses are for purchase of the modular units. Additional costs include the funding

provided to COPSO; costs for short-term hotel stays up to the end of October; and security, maintenance and utilities at Gray Arena up to the end of October.

It is expected that homelessness will continue to be a significant social issue and a gap analysis has shown that the municipality will continue to require facilitation for those sleeping in parks and other locations. Therefore, a budget estimate and request will be developed for inclusion in the 2022/23 budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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