



CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY & EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Housing Services Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	September 12, 2016
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot (CES16045) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Marjorie Walker 905-546-2424 ext. 4837
SUBMITTED BY:	Joe-Anne Priel General Manager Community & Emergency Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

That City Council request the Province of Ontario to commit to sustainable funding for recipients of the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot for a period of time beyond March 31, 2018 to ensure their affordability, safety and housing stability needs are appropriately addressed over the long-term.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 14, 2016 the Province released an update to Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. The update included a planned province-wide investment of more than \$17 million over three years for a Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot.

A portable housing benefit is a subsidy provided to a low-income household to assist with housing costs. The unique aspect of this subsidy is that it increases a household's choice of where to live since it is not tied to a specific unit like most RGI social housing. This is especially helpful for survivors fleeing domestic violence situations.

At its meeting of April 25, 2016, Emergency & Community Services Committee directed staff to submit a proposal for the City of Hamilton to be included as one of the municipalities to pilot an affordable housing benefit program for survivors of domestic violence. On July 11, 2016, the Ministry of Housing advised the City that it was selected to participate in the pilot.

Funding approvals for the City of Hamilton are \$600,000 in 2016-2017 and \$600,000 in 2017-2018 with all funds to be expended by March 31, 2018. This funding period allows for a maximum housing subsidy of only 18 months. Based on input from our VAW

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partner organizations, 18 months is too short a time frame considering the healing process and support required by victims of domestic violence. It also means that the pilot participants will still have to seek RGI housing through the Access to Housing waitlist and when obtained, move to the social housing building chosen, potentially further disrupting the household and any safety considerations.

There is concern that this will create a pressure in the community with expectations that the City continue funding past March 31, 2018, as there is no funding plan by the province for after that date. Clearly a longer term housing allowance would provide greater benefit to pilot participants. As such this report recommends that the Province commit to more stable longer term funding for the recipients of the Pilot housing benefit.

Alternatives for Consideration –Not Applicable

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Funding approvals for the City of Hamilton are \$600,000 in 2016-2017 and \$600,000 in 2017-2018 with all funds to be expended by March 31, 2018. There is concern that the short time lines of the Pilot will create expectations that the City continue funding past March 31, 2018, as there is no funding plan by the province for after that date.

Current housing allowances under the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) program are for a five year duration. Housing allowances under the new Hamilton Portable Housing Benefit program are for eight years. If the 18 month Pilot for survivors of domestic violence were extended to five years it would cost approximately an additional \$1.88 million. If the Pilot were extended to 8 years it would cost approximately an additional \$3.49 million.

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with Report CES16045.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with Report CES16045.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On March 14, 2016 the Province released an update on Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. The Strategy announcement included additional funding commitments for housing, previously announced with the 2016 Provincial budget, legislative changes, and numerous other changes to the housing system.

One of the legislative and policy changes included a planned investment of more than \$17 million over three years for a Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot.

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Emergency & Community Services at its meeting of April 25, 2016, approved the following motion as part of Supporting the Implementation of the Provincial Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy (CES15032(a)) (Item 7.2):

- c) That the General Manager of Emergency and Community Services be directed to submit a proposal for the City of Hamilton to be included as one of approximately three municipalities to pilot an affordable housing benefit program for survivors of domestic violence.

In accordance to this direction, a Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Expression of Interest was submitted to the Province on April 29, 2016. The proposal was the result of a collaborative effort between the City and the several community agencies that provide transitional supports to single women and families who are escaping abusive situations.

On July 11, 2016, The Ministry of Housing advised that the City of Hamilton was selected to participate in the Survivors of Domestic Violence – Portable Housing Benefit Pilot. All the municipalities selected for the Pilot are listed below:

Eastern Region

City of Cornwall

City of Kingston

United Counties of Prescott and Russell

City of Ottawa (Pilot plus evaluation)

County of Renfrew/County of Lanark (Partnership) (Pilot plus evaluation)

Central Region

Regional Municipality of Halton

Regional Municipality of Peel

Toronto

City of Toronto

Western Region

City of Brantford

City of Hamilton

Municipality of Chatham-Kent

County of Lambton

City of London

Regional Municipality of Niagara

County of Norfolk

City of Stratford

Regional Municipality of Waterloo

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County of Wellington
City of Windsor (Pilot plus evaluation)

Northern Region

Kenora District Services Board

District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (Pilot plus evaluation)

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

None

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The City's proposal to be one of the municipalities funded under the Pilot was the result of a collaborative effort between the City and the several community agencies that provide transitional supports to single women and families who are escaping abusive situations. The agencies were initially consulted about the key aspects of the program and they provided information and supports as needed through the proposal writing process.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Hamilton is an ideal municipality to pilot such a program because the need in Hamilton is great; local services for survivors of domestic violence are well developed; there are existing collaboratives, already working towards better system integration; and the City already administers a very successful housing allowance program.

A significant component of this Pilot is to evaluate the viability of a portable housing benefit as an alternative to traditional RGI assistance and its impact on the lives of survivors of domestic violence. While the City of Hamilton will not be actively participating in the evaluation component of the Pilot, it will be required to collect data in accordance with an evaluation framework developed by the Province.

Funding

Given that the Province announced the Pilot mid-year, we anticipate being underspent in year one. Further, the Province requires all funds be distributed to program participants before March 31, 2018. This allows for a maximum housing subsidy of 18 months which is a shorter time frame than other housing allowance programs and may be problematic for participants who require housing subsidy for a longer period of time. There is also concern that this will create a pressure in the community with expectations that the City continue funding past March 31, 2018, as there is no funding plan by the province for after that date.

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Based on input from our VAW partner organizations, 18 months is too short a time frame considering the healing process and support required by victims of domestic violence. It also means that the pilot participants will still have to seek RGI housing through the Access to Housing waitlist and when obtained, move to the social housing building chosen. Clearly a longer term housing allowance would provide greater benefit to pilot participants. As such this report recommends that the Province commit to more stable longer term funding for the recipients of the Pilot housing benefit.

Survivors of Domestic Violence on the Hamilton Access To Housing Waitlist

Currently, survivors of domestic violence have priority access to rent geared-to-income housing through the social housing waitlist. Under the pilot program, survivors will have the option of receiving a portable housing benefit while they are on the waitlist, so they can immediately find housing in the community of their choice. This allows for more choice than with traditional rent-geared-to-income (RGI) social housing assistance. The policy goal of the portable housing allowance is to make it easier for survivors of domestic violence to leave an abusive situation by granting timely access to affordable housing.

There are currently 198 active Survivors of Domestic Violence applications on the centralized wait list:

- 4 Senior (65+) households;
- 90 Family (with dependents) households;
- 1 Couple household (no dependents); and,
- 103 Single households

In 2015, 280 survivors of domestic violence households were housed from the social housing waitlist and the average wait time was 10 months. This compares to the average wait time in 2015 of 3 years for all 818 households (all categories) housed. Currently 4% of the 6,000 household waitlist are survivors of domestic violence, yet 34% of the 818 housed households in 2015 were survivors of domestic violence. This higher rate of being housed is because of the priority status that survivors of domestic violence have on the waitlist.

Although survivors of domestic violence households in Hamilton do not wait as long as other households for an offer of RGI housing, they are typically more vulnerable. Wait times on the social housing waitlist for a survivor of domestic violence household has steadily increased from 8.4 months in 2012 to 10 months in 2015. There is a growing need in Hamilton to quickly house survivors of domestic violence in housing that is appropriate to their needs and that they can afford.

Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot Program

Goals/Benefits

The goals and benefits of the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Pilot Program include:

- Enabling survivors of domestic violence to access stable affordable housing sooner than they would with the existing waitlist for social housing. Quicker access to stable affordable housing can lead to better longer term outcomes for the survivors and reduce the pressure on the survivors of domestic violence services and women's shelters which are in a crisis;
- Freeing up shelter beds more quickly, thereby decreasing the numbers of women and families who are turned-away from shelters when in need, and increasing the numbers of women and children served; and,
- Piloting a portable housing allowance program prior to the expected provincial transition to portable benefits in the future, as outlined in the Province's Update to their Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

Who is Eligible to Receive Assistance?

Applicants must meet the following criteria to receive Portable Housing Allowance assistance:

- Must be active on the Access to Housing Waitlist for social housing with Special Priority Status as Victim of Domestic Violence;
- Meet income eligibility thresholds (Housing Income Limits as determined by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing);
- Be a Canadian citizen or have legal status in Canada;
- Have an annual income tax return with the Canada Revenue Agency; and,
- Not already be in receipt of rent-geared-to-income (RGI) or other type of housing assistance.

Program Considerations:

Based on consultations with community agencies working with survivors of domestic violence, the following are key elements for consideration as part of the Pilot:

- Safety appropriateness of units;
- Geography – clients may need to be in certain parts of the city where they are safe, have existing supports, and in some cases proximity to children's schools, cultural networks, places of worship, etc.;
- Accessibility;
- Flexibility regarding family reunification situations;

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- Complex needs (health issues, children with disabilities) which may mean a higher rent due to a larger unit;
- Direct payment to the landlord ensures that the abuser cannot have access to the subsidy and ensures that the PHB is not considered income for the purposes of the Canada Child Tax Benefit; and,

A sufficiently deep subsidy is needed to enable survivors to make the best choices of living arrangements in terms of safety, supports, and other factors,

How the Program Will Work

- Housing allowances will be offered to households on the social housing waitlist with Special Priority Status (“Victims of Abuse”) in chronological order starting with the oldest application dates.
- The Program gives households greater housing choice by providing the option to receive a subsidy where they currently reside or to move to another more appropriate rental home in the private market. This ability to move is particularly important for survivors of domestic violence as they may need to move relatively frequently due to safety concerns.
- As per the Agreement with the Ministry of Housing, all funds must be distributed by March 31, 2018. This would provide a housing allowance for a maximum of 18 months.
- Participants of the program will remain active on the Access to Housing social housing waitlist while receiving the housing allowance in order to maintain the opportunity for a long term rent geared to income unit.
- The unit rent must not exceed 125% of average market rent for the unit type for the City as a whole (Average market rent data determined by the Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation shows lower rents than the true cost to rent a new unit because it averages rents for all purpose built rental units, both vacant and occupied. However, available vacant units are often more expensive than the Average Market Rent.)
- Participants must undergo an annual review to determine continued eligibility.
- Direct subsidy payment to the landlord.

An analysis was undertaken regarding current market rent and social assistance shelter allowance levels to determine the appropriate housing allowance amounts. Funding is a fixed rate based on household size, with an additional \$100 for those needing to rent an accessible unit, as outlined in the table below:

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Household size	Maximum annual household Income (HILs)	Appropriate occupancy standard (maximum unit size)	Maximum Rent Permitted	Amount of Housing Allowance
1 - 2 adults, 0 dependents	\$33,000	1 bedroom	\$950	\$300
1 - 2 adults with 1 dependents	\$40,500	2 bedroom	\$1,150	\$350
1 - 2 adults with 2 dependents	\$49,000	3 bedroom	\$1,350	\$400
1 - 2 adults with 3 – 4 dependents	\$59,500	4-5 bedroom	\$1,550	\$450
1 - 2 adults with 5+ dependents	\$59,500	5+ bedroom	\$1,750	\$500

*Additional \$100 premium for households in need of an accessible unit.

Supporting Partners

The partner Violence Against Women (VAW) organizations, listed below, have committed to providing supports, where operationally feasible, for women and families in the Program. This support is generally provided by transitional support workers. These organizations will receive referrals of those who are not already supported by an agency, and make referrals to other counselling, medical, housing, shelters, and child-focused programs:

- Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara;
- Good Shepherd Women's Services;
- Population Served: Women and their children;
- Interval House of Hamilton;
- Mission Services – Inasmuch House;
- Native Women's Centre; and,
- Phoenix Place.

The Woman Abuse Working Group (WAWG) is a coalition of more than twenty agencies in Hamilton working to end violence against women and their children. WAWG provides a forum to coordinate VAW services and address systemic issues.

Projected Outcome:

Based on an average housing allowance of \$350, it is expected that the program will assist approximately 128 Victims of Domestic Violence households on the Access to Housing Waitlist. Given that the Province launched the Pilot mid-year in the 2016/17 fiscal year, it is anticipated that the program will be underspent in the first year.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

None

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Community Engagement & Participation

Hamilton has an open, transparent and accessible approach to City government that engages with and empowers all citizens to be involved in their community.

Healthy and Safe Communities

Hamilton is a safe and supportive city where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None