



## INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	December 9, 2021
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	2021/2022 Winter Service Planning (HSC21048) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Rob Mastroianni (905) 546-2424 Ext. 8035
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Edward John Director, Housing Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

### COUNCIL DIRECTION

Emergency and Community Services Committee at its meeting of November 4, 2021 approved a motion stating the following: that staff be directed to develop an annual winter services plan for people experiencing homelessness that includes monitoring and adapting to emerging needs, for report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee.

### INFORMATION

The winter season has a disproportionate impact on those experiencing homelessness or living in vulnerable situations. The Housing Services Division collaborates with social service agencies in operating services and supports which provide options for warm spaces and programming throughout the winter season to enhance available spaces, as well as enacting specific protocols during extreme cold weather periods.

Under the City of Hamilton's existing Extreme Weather Protocol, existing services and programs offer supports which operationalize when a Cold Alert is activated by Hamilton Public Health Services. A Cold Alert is triggered when weather conditions are at or below minus 15 degrees Celsius (-15°C) and/or the temperature feels like minus 20 degrees Celsius (-20°C) with wind chill.

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OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

During a Cold Alert, these social service agencies and the homelessness serving system respond to the needs of homeless and vulnerable residents by expanding service hours, easing service limitations/caps, and ensuring locations offer a welcoming location for individuals to access space out of the cold. In addition, specific City of Hamilton buildings operate as warming locations. Specific details on the Extreme Cold Weather protocol can be found on the City of Hamilton's website under the following path: [www.hamilton.ca/cold](http://www.hamilton.ca/cold).

In addition to the existing Extreme Cold Weather protocol noted above and in response to impacts on services available due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the following services, which are to be fully detailed in our subsequent Transition and Adaption Report to be presented at the December 9, 2021, Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting, have been operationalized or are being explored by staff to respond to inclement weather during winter months.

Winter Planning Services in effect:

- Staff have secured the operation and availability of 15 additional temporary emergency shelter beds and required supports to serve single homeless women at Mission Services Emma's Place, which was recently approved by Council.
- Expansion of 21 Rooms at an existing hotel serving homeless women and couples.
- Invested in the operation of four drop-in centres serving men, women and youth that will support the needs of vulnerable individuals throughout the winter months. This operation will continue until March 31, 2022, as approved at the June 3, 2021 Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting.

#### **Available Resources:**

Staff will ensure an updated resource list is available to outline all available supports during winter months, as well as enhanced availability of outreach opportunities, including their times of operation and locations.

#### **Community supports:**

A number of opportunities are still being explored to expand community supports including the following:

- Women's System capacity

A significant enhancement which would address immediate capacity pressures in the women's emergency shelter system is in the final phase of negotiation. This intervention recognizes the current capacity in the women's system and seeks to address it in a meaningful manner, beyond increasing beds alone, but to include women specific supports and accommodations that best represent their emergency needs.

- Implementing additional surge capacity within emergency shelters

As is often the practice within cold alerts, all available space within each shelter is optimized in those conditions of inclement weather. Complexity in this past practice is presented currently as a result of the pandemic and the congregation limitations. Staff are working closely with Public Health Services to identify those options which can safely increase the capacity in shelters while proving conformity with all screening and separation requirements as a result of COVID-19.

- Exploring increased hotel capacity

Over the past several months available beds in our hotel system has been constrained as a result of staffing shortages and pressure for hotels to return to 'business as usual' operations. In addition to the expansion of 21 hotel rooms, staff are continuing to negotiate the continued and increased capacity at available hotels to meet the winter demands.

- Isolation Spaces

Our ability to offer separate isolation space for those individuals testing positive to COVID-19 has served as an essential tool to limit the duration and scale of outbreaks within our system. However, favourable vaccination rates and less than expected demand on these services in the face of a potential fourth wave has allowed staff and the supporting agencies to consider the potential of vacant available space when these rooms are vacant and not being utilized for isolation needs.

- Community support

Staff will be recommending the establishment of a funding source in the upcoming Transition and Adaption Report, to be presented at the December 9, 2021 Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting, to support independent agencies and community entities (churches/social clubs, etc.) who may be interested in supporting vulnerable individuals but who may not have the operational funds to be viable. Staff would act as coordinator to ensure all potential funded interventions are co-ordinated and delivered in a structured and comprehensive manner with particular focus on addressing the needs of women and indigenous individuals within the system.

- Service specific interventions

In addition, discussions are to occur with operators of local Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) sites on the logistics and feasibility of expanded operating hours and coordination with the housing system to provide greater access to these much-needed resources.

**Expanding warming centres:**

- Drop-Ins

Housing Services Division will continue to work with partners to maximize available space and extended hours of operation at drop-ins through the winter and ensure individuals are aware of municipal buildings which have been identified as warming centres.

- Overnight warming centres

Staff recognize that the creation of warming centres only in response to Cold Weather Alerts disproportionately affects those homeless and unsheltered individuals experiencing the impacts of inclement weather. As such, Housing Services Division are in advanced discussions with a local community social service agency in order to provide low barrier overnight and/or extended operational access to warming facilities, as this represents a current gap in the provision of services. As such, staff are working with community agencies to explore additional overnight warming spaces both in existing drop in locations as well as the potential throughout the City.

**Service Restrictions:**

Service Restrictions within emergency shelters are eased and/or lifted wherever possible during extreme cold weather instances. Housing Services Division staff review and discuss service restriction occurrences and policies with service providers on a regular basis and will meet with providers to explore opportunities to mitigate length and occurrences of Service Restrictions within funded agencies. Where feasible the relaxation or removal of service restrictions will be encouraged in circumstances where no significant health and safety concern exists.

**Continue to build housing stock and enhance housing outflow:**

Housing Services Division staff will continue to work with partners and funded agencies in order to refocus and enhance outflow to permanent housing. This includes maximizing all available federal, provincial and municipal funding to build and create as many housing with supports units as feasible as well as work with existing partners and funded agencies to maximize efforts.

As noted, detailed information on a number of the above noted responses will be included in an upcoming report at the December 9, 2021 Emergency and Community Services Committee. However, staff will continue to keep Council updated as more information becomes available.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

None