




CITY OF HAMILTON
HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT
Housing Services Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	January 19, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Winter Response Strategy (HSC23012) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Ariana King (905) 546-2424 Ext. 4288 Rob Mastroianni (905) 546-2424 Ext. 8035 Nadia Zelisko (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2548
SUBMITTED BY:	Michelle Baird Director, Housing Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- (a) That staff be authorized to implement an immediate Winter Response Strategy, to March 31, 2023, to support vulnerable individuals within the homelessness serving systems as follows:
- (i) A designated Recreation Centre (Benetto) to operate between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. during statutory holidays and inclement weather events resulting in centre closure to support up to 10 individuals, estimated to be a total of 9 days, at an approximate cost of \$65 K;
 - (ii) 21 additional low-barrier daily overnight warming spaces provided through The HUB to ensure equitable access for vulnerable, unsheltered and hidden homeless populations across the City through contractual agreements at an approximate cost of \$250 K;
 - (iii) Additional low-barrier daily overnight warming spaces to ensure equitable access for vulnerable, unsheltered and hidden homeless populations across the City through contractual agreements with community agencies and faith-based groups, at an approximate cost of \$100 K;

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.

- (b) That recommendation (a) respecting the immediate Winter Response Strategy for Q1 2023, be accommodated within the Housing Services 2023 Operating Budget and if necessary, a funding source will be identified through 2023 Year End reporting;
- (c) That the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department or their designate be directed and authorized, on behalf of the City of Hamilton, to enter into, execute and administer all agreements and documents necessary to implement the grant(s) outlined above on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department or their designate and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
- (d) That staff report back to the August 17, 2023 Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting with recommendations for an annual winter response strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a realized gap in winter response services over the 2022/2023 holiday closure, as well as increased demand on emergency shelter and drop-in spaces, a review of current cold response was conducted. An immediate temporary Winter Response Strategy is recommended. This will commit temporary low-barrier warm spaces to March 31, 2023 recommended to ensure the health and safety of all Hamilton residents, especially individuals experiencing homelessness, in an equitable way.

Costs are estimated to be \$415 K, which includes two concurrent response strategies.

The immediate need for an approximate cost of \$65 K is required for the operation of Benetto Recreation Centre as a designated recreation centre during statutory holidays and inclement weather events, when City facilities have closed as a result, within the winter operating period to March 31, 2023. Statutory holidays and inclement weather events effect operations of warming spaces, which disproportionately impacts vulnerable and marginalized populations, especially those living unsheltered. Based on the number of statutory holidays and historical extreme weather events over the past five years, it is anticipated this would result in approximately nine operational days during the winter months.

In addition, staff are recommending a more robust temporary winter response be established at an estimated cost of \$350 K for the operation of 50 additional low-barrier overnight warming spaces and ancillary expenses for items such as transportation services and nutritional items. This will ensure a nightly winter response is in place for the duration of this winter season. These additional overnight spaces are expected to be operational between 10:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m. daily, to March 31, 2023. In addition to the 21 spaces secured this season operated by The Hub, staff will conduct a public

call out process to community partners, faith-based organizations, etc. to contract for the remaining required 29 spaces with those interested and able to provide these spaces.

Alternatives for Consideration – See page 5

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial:

Recommendation (a) is requesting a total of \$415K to provide additional daytime warming spaces during stat holidays and inclement weather, as well as 50 overnight warming spaces throughout the winter season. Given the immediate need, and due to the timing of the 2023 tax budgeted deliberations, the 2023 portion will be accommodated within the Housing Services Division's 2023 Operating Budget and if necessary, a funding source will be identified through 2023 Year End reporting.

Recommendation (a)(i) is the continued operation of the Benetto recreation centre, during inclement weather and stat holidays when the centre would otherwise be closed, to support up to 10 vulnerable clients between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. will cost \$65 K broken down as follows:

For each 8 hour shift, one Recreation Division Manager, one Recreation Division Supervisor, one Human Services Divisions (Housing Services/Ontario Works/Children's & Community Services) Manager/Supervisor/Senior Project Manager and two Human Services Divisions support staff would be required to facilitate the operation of a warming centre at maximum capacity of 10 people. Total City staffing costs would be approximately \$50 K if Human Services Divisions staff were required for nine days. Ancillary costs such as Benetto building operating costs, taxi rides, snacks and hot drinks total approximately \$15K at maximum capacity of 10 clients for nine days.

Recommendation (a)(ii) is requesting the immediate approval to fund The HUB in support of 21 daily overnight warming spaces at an approximate cost of \$250 K.

Recommendation (a)(iii) is requesting approval to immediately begin working with agencies to create additional low-barrier overnight warming spaces to ensure equitable access for vulnerable, unsheltered and hidden homeless populations across the City at an approximate cost of \$100 K. This approval plus the existing approval from Council for the December 1, 2022 Cold Alert Response motion funding of \$125K will be required.

Staffing:

Staff will continue consultation with Human Resources and Labour Relations on an approved process for City staff operations, in line with Collective Agreements and other related Human Resources Policies.

Legal:
N/A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The winter season has a disproportionate impact on those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity. When Cold Alerts are in effect the Housing Services Division responds in coordination with community agencies and the homelessness serving system to expand service hours, ease service limitations and caps to provide accessible extreme weather spaces. Increased demand for emergency sheltering services has resulted in significant system pressure and reduced overall capacity available to be leveraged as overnight spaces during winter months.

At its meeting of November 4, 2021, the Emergency and Community Services (ECS) Committee approved a motion which directed staff to develop an annual winter services plan for people experiencing homelessness that includes monitoring and adapting to emerging needs, for report back to the ECS Committee.

At its meeting of November 18, 2021, the ECS Committee received Report HSC21048 which outlined the resources currently available as winter services for people experiencing homelessness.

Recognizing the current capacity pressures on the homelessness serving system and the reduced ability to operationalize warming spaces within existing services, the ECS Committee at its meeting of December 1, 2022 approved a motion directing staff that up to a maximum of \$125 K be allocated to additional Cold Alert response. As a result, additional overnight spaces were available during Cold Weather Alerts to operate overnight warm spaces from 10:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m. at The Hub, a community drop-in.

During the 2022/2023 holiday shutdown period, a gap in service was realized whereby drop-in services were not available on Statutory holidays or inclement weather days where City facilities have been closed. A review of current cold weather response was recommended as a result of this issue. The temporary response recommended within this report seeks to address this immediate need, with a report back in August on a proposed annual winter response.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

N/A

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Ongoing consultation with Public Health Services will enhance understanding of the effects of extreme cold on individuals and inform a Housing Services Division response

during winter months. The Extreme Cold Weather Response Committee continues to meet twice a year to review and consult on previous seasonal responses and determine best practice going forward. The Housing Services Division will consult on facility operations and protocols in coordination with the Recreation Division to ensure a recreational centre remains open until 10:00 p.m. during Statutory holidays and inclement weather events. Staff will consult with Labour Relations on an approved staffing model. The City of Hamilton is the designated Community Entity (CE) under Federal Reaching Home directives to deliver on a coordinated homeless strategy in partnership with the Indigenous Community Entity (Coalition of Hamilton Indigenous Leadership (CHIL). Staff are committed to regular consultation with the Indigenous CE to determine culturally appropriate strategies and funding implications for the Indigenous community.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

A critical shortage of housing that is affordable, safe and stable directly contributes to homelessness. As a result of the housing crisis in Hamilton we have vulnerable people without adequate housing options. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Hamilton has seen increased pressure on occupancy levels within emergency shelters, drop-ins, and other services. Agencies have additionally experienced staffing and recruitment pressures, which have limited the ability to expand services or at times maintain existing service levels. At the same time, there is a shift in existing capacity within the system impacted by an agency's strategic decision to close one long term drop-in service. Although a winter response as described will not resolve the homelessness issue it will address challenges during the winter months. Those experiencing homelessness are at significantly greater risk during winter months. Approval of an immediate temporary Winter Response Strategy to March 31, 2023 would establish a people-centred response for nightly low-barrier spaces dedicated to those unable to access other system resources and complement existing outreach services. The City's current Cold Alert response uses designated recreational facilities and public libraries across the City as warm places during regular customer service hours. Closures and inclement weather protocols do not account for the overnight needs of individuals experiencing hidden homelessness and living unsheltered during the winter. Jurisdictional scans of other Ontario municipalities demonstrate a strong need for low-barrier overnight spaces to maintain the safety of individuals experiencing homelessness during winter months. Cold Alert triggers will remain under the purview of Hamilton Public Health Services, while a Winter Response Strategy will leverage existing community resources and Hamilton's Coordinated Access system for ongoing housing supports. The Housing Services Division will manage contracts for services.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) A Designated City Recreation Centre will solely operate on statutory holidays and inclement weather days when City facilities close as a result of weather until 10:00

p.m. with no other overnight winter response, at a lesser estimated cost of \$65 K. This approach will satisfy current gaps for space during holidays and inclement weather events.

Financial: This alternative is the continued operation of the Benetto Recreation Centre, during inclement weather and stat holidays when the centre would otherwise be closed, to support up to 10 vulnerable clients between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. will cost \$65 K broken down as follows:

One Recreation Division Manager, one Recreation Division Supervisor, one Human Services Divisions' (Housing Services/Ontario Works/Children's and Community Services) Manager/Supervisor/Senior Project Manager and two Human Services Divisions' support staff would be required to facilitate the operation of a warming centre at maximum capacity of 10 people. Total City staffing costs would be approximately \$50 K if all Human Services Division staff were required for nine days. Ancillary costs such as Benetto building operating costs, taxi rides, snacks and hot drinks, total approximately \$15 K at maximum capacity of 10 clients for nine days.

Funding up to March 31, 2023 will be accommodated within the Housing Services Division's 2023 Operating Budget and if necessary, a funding source will be identified through 2023 Year End reporting.

- 2) Council may choose to approve the operation of a designated City Recreation Centre on statutory holidays and during inclement weather events until 10:00 p.m., as outlined in alternative #1 above, and an additional response for supplemental overnight warm spaces operated by contracted partners from 10:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m. when the Medical Officer of Health triggers a Cold Alert and/or there is inclement weather, up to March 31, 2023 at an estimated cost of \$130 K. If Council chooses this response, overnight warm spaces throughout the winter season will only be available during Cold Weather Alerts and inclement weather days.

Financial: This alternative is the continued operation of the Benetto Recreation Centre, during inclement weather and stat holidays when the centre would otherwise be closed, to support up to 10 vulnerable clients between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. will cost \$65 K broken down as follows:

One Recreation Division Manager, one Recreation Division Supervisor, one Human Services Divisions' (Housing Services/Ontario Works/Children's and Community Services) Manager/Supervisor/Senior Project Manager and two Human Services Divisions' support staff would be required to facilitate the operation of a warming centre at maximum capacity of 10 people. Total City staffing costs would be approximately

\$50 K if all Human Services Division staff were required for nine days. Ancillary costs such as Benetto building operating costs, taxi rides, snacks and hot drinks, total approximately \$15 K at maximum capacity of 10 clients for nine days.

In addition, requesting approval to immediately begin working with agencies to create additional low-barrier overnight warming spaces to ensure equitable access for vulnerable, unsheltered and hidden homeless populations across the City for an approximate amount of \$190 K.

This would be offset by \$125 K of available Cold Alert funding previously approved by Council.

Funding up to March 31, 2023 will be accommodated within the Housing Services Division's 2023 Operating Budget and if necessary, a funding source will be identified through 2023 Year End reporting.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

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