



**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT**  
**Housing Services Division**

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members General Issues Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	September 6, 2023
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Family Shelter System (HSC23041(a)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Michelle Baird Director, Housing Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department <i>Michelle Baird</i>
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Angie Burden General Manager Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	<i>A. Burden</i>

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- (a) That council direct staff to conduct a Call for Applications (CFA) to address family homelessness, as a way to consider new and innovative opportunities to expand system capacity:
- (i) to serve up to an additional 50 families in emergency shelter or transitional housing through March 31, 2025;
  - (ii) to provide services and supports that address root causes, complexity of need and create flow through the shelter system to permanent housing
  - (iii) with applications to be considered as a temporary time limited emergency solution, or as an annualized program;
- (b) That Council approve up to 1M in temporary emergency supports between September 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 in order to address urgent program and staffing needs within Housing Services Division and Good Shepherd Hamilton related to family homelessness at the recommendation of the Director, Housing Services Division and approved by the General Manager, Healthy and Safe Communities, to be funded by the COVID19 reserve; and,

- (c) That Council direct staff to report back in Q4, 2023 on opportunities and recommendations to address escalating family homelessness and resources required, and that any recommendations for continued or additional staffing beyond March 31, 2024 be referred to the 2024 budget.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report is a companion report to HSC2041, Addressing the Needs of the Unsheltered. Its purpose is to update Council on the escalation of family homelessness that Hamilton is experiencing in recent weeks. As of July 31, 2023, 1985 individuals are experiencing homelessness in our City, up from 1723 last month and an increase of 258 individuals and 166 households from June, according to Homelessness Individuals and Family System (HIFIS) data. Although some of the rise is as a result of data cleaning issues, this increase is our largest month over month increase in the last year.

This report seeks funding approval to implement emergency supports that are required to address urgent issues in the family shelter system. This report also seeks approval from Council to conduct an immediate Call for Applications to identify new and innovative solutions from the community to address the issue of family homelessness, including the creation of new emergency shelter or transitional housing spaces for families, and/or provision of services and supports to address root causes of family homelessness and/or create flow through the system to permanent housing.

While staff know what resources are required to address the urgent escalation of need identified in recent weeks, the family system is in crisis, and it is anticipated that there may be other needs that emerge as critical issues. The recommendations in this report enable staff to respond to the known urgent needs and flexibility to address unforeseen issues that may emerge, while also providing time for staff to fully analyze recent HIFIS data, continue to engage with current providers on next steps and solicit new solutions from the community. Staff will report back to Council in Q4 2023 with opportunities to address family homelessness and provide comprehensive recommendations.

## **Alternatives for Consideration – N/A**

## **FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial:** Staff are requesting an upset limit of 1M, in order to address urgent program and staffing needs related to family homelessness, with the approval of the General Manager, Healthy and Safe Communities. Costs incurred between September 1 2023 to March 31 2024, to a maximum amount of \$1M will be funded through the COVID-19 Reserve.

**Staffing:** The General Manager has authority through the budgeted compliment policy to hire temporary positions for < 24 months. Staff complement in Housing Services

Division to support homelessness response would be increased temporarily while a Call for Applications is underway to identify permanent solutions while staff analyze needs and prepare recommendations to be referred to the 2024 tax operating budget.

Legal: n/a

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

On March 23, 2023, the Emergency and Community Services Committee approved Report HSC23021 Ending Chronic Homelessness, outlining a comprehensive approach and investments required to end chronic homelessness in Hamilton. On April 19, 2023, the General Issues Committee received and approved Report HSC23028, the Housing Sustainability and Investment Roadmap, which outlined actions to be taken to address the housing crisis. Council in April 2023 declared emergencies related to homelessness, mental health, and opioid addiction. Since these reports were approved, staff have been working to implement the recommended actions and have subsequently brought reports to committee and council, with recommendations for immediate consideration, and/or to be referred to the 2024 Tax Operating Budget.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

To expedite the implementation of solutions for family homelessness, which is an identified crisis for the City, it is recommended that a Call for Applications be issued. The Procurement By-Law No. 20-255 Schedule B Exemptions (3)(a)(ii) applies to emergency sheltering and exempts from the requirements of the Procurement Policy, save and except for Policy # 2 – Approval Authority and Policy #13 – Authority to Execute Contracts. Where feasible, an authorized online Purchase Requisition shall be utilized to initiate a Purchase Order and/or formal Contract process. If there is to be an evaluative component involved in the determination of where funds are to be allocated, Procurement recommends a Request for Proposal be initiated through them. The Request for Proposal process is a lengthy one and would not likely be completed in a timeline that could meet the urgent need within the family shelter system. In this case we are asking Council to approve 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 negotiate, enter into, execute and administer all contracts, agreements and other documents necessary to implement a Call for Applications 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

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

City staff has consulted with Good Shepherd Hamilton leadership related to the escalating needs in family homelessness. Ongoing engagement continues with funded

providers related to addressing the needs of unsheltered individuals across family, women's, men's and youth systems to understand trends and identify solutions that could address the increasing pressures in the system. Finance and procurement have been consulted in the development of these recommendations.

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The escalating housing crisis has led to a concerning rise in unsheltered individuals and an increasing overall homeless population in Hamilton and beyond. While the impacts on the shelter system are widespread, the family shelter system is facing an unsustainable situation due to the escalating demand, complexity of need, lack of flow from the system and limited resources.

### Increasing Families Experiencing Homelessness

In Hamilton there is one permanent emergency shelter providing housing focused shelter and support for families experiencing homelessness, the Good Shepherd Family Centre. The Family Centre has 104 beds of which 80 are funded through Housing Services Division. Currently, as reported by Good Shepherd, the Family Centre is operating at double the funded capacity of families at the shelter with the numbers of clients outstripping the space available. Due to lack of space and lengthy stays, clients at the Family Centre are sleeping in all areas of the centre, including in hallways and other administrative spaces. As a result of pressures post-COVID-19, some hotel beds were maintained for family overflow pressure, and this continues today. Currently Housing Services Division is contracting with 2 local hotels to provide shelter space for 30 families within hotels. Good Shepherd places families in additional hotel rooms beyond the contracted spaces when possible and as of now there are 10 families using these spaces. In addition to the funded hotel space, the additional Good Shepherd hotel space, the overcapacity family centre there are also families turned away from the system. Since January 2023, there have been 488 occasions where families were turned away as there was no bed or overflow space to accommodate them. This represents 98 unique families. Being turned away means having not been offered a bed and there was no overflow space available to accommodate the family.

### Insufficient Staffing Resources to Support Current Number of Families

The family system has unintentionally become the City's largest shelter. With volumes doubled, and hotel spaces operating as an emergency shelter, current staffing levels are insufficient. As a result of overcapacity and demand, instead of working with clients on navigation and referral services, family support workers at the Family Centre are simply managing issues related to escalating volumes and daily crisis. To create flow from the shelter system to permanent housing, additional family support workers are needed to manage overflow clients.

There is an urgent need to stabilize the environment at the family overflow hotel. Current staffing is limited and does not adequately support the numbers of families onsite or their needs. Reportedly there are increasing issues with noise, ongoing partying, substance use and little to no activity or engagement for the children living here. Many of the adults and children residing at the hotel are living with significant complexities – including trauma and displacement for refugee claimants, and more broadly, substance use, mental health issues, developmental issues, gender-based violence etc. Complaints are being received from the hotels as a result of the behavioural issues occurring. Hotel staff are not skilled or contracted to provide oversight and are expressing concerns with the current operations. While Good Shepherd is funded to provide mobile housing case management, there is an immediate need for onsite caseworkers, support for children and youth and supervisory staff.

In addition, we are experiencing lack of flow from the family shelter system into permanent housing. We must find solutions to reduce lengths of stay. Past experiences, and challenges with money management and financial decisions leave families unable to secure a rental space. A voluntary trustee program is recommended as a new initiative to assist with money management, financial decisions, and support to move families successfully from shelters into long-term tenancies and permanent housing.

Given the volumes and demand which are anticipated to increase, there is a need to create more spaces for families experiencing homelessness and identify cost-effective options to address family homelessness. There are limited facilities within Hamilton's existing system that could accommodate an expansion. The housing crisis calls for a whole of Hamilton approach, and the City has a critical need to develop new capacity through new solutions and partnerships with new organizations and agencies willing to help. Therefore, staff are recommending a general call for applications to the community to identify locations and organizations that could create new spaces for families to be housed either as part of emergency shelter system and/or transitional housing, as well as services and supports to address family homelessness and create flow into permanent housing. It is not anticipated that this Call for Applications would not result in submissions for new construction or purchase, but rather that the Call for Applications could result in organizations identifying space currently not known to the city that could be easily repurposed for families, and/or partnerships between larger providers and grassroots organizations (faith-based or otherwise), as resources are identified and leveraged for the purpose of working together to help families in need of housing.

### Conclusion

As the numbers of families experiencing homelessness increases, innovative and cost-effective solutions are required to create additional capacity within the family shelter system. This report recommends issuing a Call for Applications to solicit solutions from

the community to create up to 50 additional emergency shelter or transitional housing spaces in family shelter system, either as a time-limited emergency solution, or for consideration as an annualized program, in addition to identifying services and supports to create flow for families to move from the shelter system to permanent housing.

While the call for applications addresses medium term need, there is an immediate need to stabilize operations and increase staffing to manage current volumes. Without this investment and attention to staff workload and wellbeing, we will see staff burnout, exits and sick leaves and place the City's response to family homelessness at risk of imminent collapse.

Staff understand the resources required to address the urgent escalation of need in recent weeks. However, as the family shelter system is at risk, it is anticipated that there may be other needs that emerge as critical issues. It is critical that staff have the ability to respond to urgent needs and also have time to analyze and provide comprehensive recommendations related to family homelessness. This report recommends approval of up to 1M, funded by COVID19 reserve in emergency supports to address critical program and staffing needs within Housing Services Division and Good Shepherd Services Hamilton.

The recommendations in this report enable staff to respond to the known urgent needs and flexibility to address unforeseen issues that may emerge, while also providing time for staff to fully analyze recent HIFIS data, continue to engage with current providers on next steps and solicit new solutions from the community. Staff will report back to Council in Q4 2023 with opportunities to address family homelessness and provide comprehensive recommendations related to family homelessness.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

None

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

None