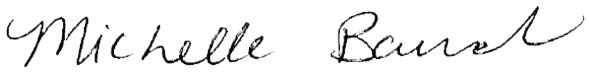




**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT**  
**Housing Services Division**

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	September 7, 2023
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Annual Winter Response Strategy (HSC23012(a)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Rob Mastroianni (905) 546-2424 Ext. 8035 Greg Witt (905) 546-2424 Ext. 4818 Robyn Perry (905) 546-2424 Ext. 7801 Ariana King (905) 546-2424 Ext. 4288
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Michelle Baird Director Housing Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (a) That Council approve, and staff be authorized to implement an immediate Winter Response Strategy, from December 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 to support vulnerable individuals within the homelessness serving systems as follows for an approximate cost of \$1,499,588 and to be funded by the Tax Stabilization Reserve #110046:
- (i) One hundred overnight drop-in spaces through a Call for Application that would function as additional low-barrier overnight winter warming spaces at an approximate cost of \$584,154.
  - (ii) The operation of one overnight warming bus through Hamilton Transit, at an approximate cost of \$217,550, which includes approximate operating costs based on the 2023 rate of \$150,000 with staff on site to support individuals experiencing homelessness at a cost of \$67,550 to be contracted through a Call for Application.

- (iii) One hundred daytime drop-in spaces through a Call for Application that would function daily to March 31, 2024 as low-barrier daytime services at an approximate cost of \$584,154.
  - (iv) Additional operating hours to 11:30PM at three designated recreation facilities to enable these facilities to operate as warming spaces on statutory holidays and other days the recreation facilities are regularly scheduled to be closed from December 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024 at an approximate cost of \$103,660.
  - (v) Additional operating hours at the Hamilton Public Library Central location to operate as a warming space, between 1:00PM - 5:00PM, on ten statutory and other days the library is regularly scheduled to be closed from December 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024, at an approximate annual cost of \$10,070.
- (b) That funding beginning April 1, 2024 to continue existing drop-in services be referred to the Housing Services Division 2024 Tax Operating Budget Process as follows:
- (i) Mission Services' Willow's Place twenty two spaces for day-time drop-in for women at an approximate annual cost of \$653,558
  - (ii) Young Women's Christian Association's Carol Anne's Place night-time drop-in twenty-two spaces for women at an approximate annual cost of \$964,510
- (c) That funding beginning April 1, 2024 to create year-round capacity and programming for 100 daytime drop-in spaces, at an approximate annual cost of \$1,752,462, be referred to the Housing Services Division 2024 Tax Operating Budget process;
- (d) That the annual winter response strategy, from December 1, 2024 to March 31 2025 and annually thereafter, which supports vulnerable individuals within the homelessness serving system as follows at an approximate cost of \$915,434 be referred to the Housing Services Division 2024 Tax Operating Budget Process:
- (i) One hundred drop-in spaces through a Call for Application that would function as low-barrier overnight winter warming spaces at an approximate annual cost of \$584,154.
  - (ii) Annualized funding for the operation of one overnight warming bus through Hamilton Transit at a cost of approximately \$217,550, which

includes approximate operating costs based on the 2023 rate of \$150,000, with staff contracted to be on site to support individuals experiencing homelessness at an approximate cost of \$67,550.

- (iii) Additional operating hours to 11:30PM at three designated recreation facilities on statutory holidays and other days the recreation facilities are regularly scheduled to be closed from December 1 through March 31 annually to operate as warming spaces at an approximate cost of \$103,660.
- (iv) Additional operating hours at the Hamilton Public Library Central location to operate as a warming space, between 1:00PM - 5:00PM, on ten statutory and other days the library is regularly scheduled to be closed, from December 1 through March 31 annually, at an approximate annual cost of \$10,070.
- (e) 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 recommendations (a) through (d) 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.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Although capacity was significantly expanded during COVID19 as a result of Social Service Relief Funding (SSRF), service levels for drop-in services and warming centres for unsheltered individuals were reduced once this funding ended. The current winter response within homelessness serving agencies does not include expanded overnight drop-in warming spaces, rather relies on existing agencies going into overcapacity and attempting to accommodate a higher number of individuals than they are set up for. However, as emergency shelters are experiencing significant occupancy pressures since the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to face staffing shortages, shelters have limited ability to admit additional users above their normal maximum capacity as a viable option. An ongoing annual Winter Response Strategy will address current system gaps and enable low-barrier overnight warming spaces to meet the needs of individuals unable to access emergency shelter services. This report recommends that council approve, to the implementation of an annual winter response strategy along with year round day time drop in services to provide a more comprehensive approach and higher level of services for drop-in services and overnight warming spaces.

Individuals who are unhoused are particularly vulnerable during the winter season. This report recommends immediately expanding access to daytime and overnight warming spaces for the cold weather months, and annualizing this response. In addition, this report recommends annualized, ongoing funding for existing day-time, drop-in services and creating 100 new year-round daytime drop in spaces. Overnight warming spaces provide critical services to meet the level of heightened risk of cold exposure for people who live unsheltered in winter. Drop-ins act as critical services in the homeless serving sector, as they provide supports that meet immediate needs, build trust and connection to additional resources, and offer triage and assessment services that facilitate access to additional housing resources.

The supply of available drop-ins and overnight warming spaces are currently limited. Carol Anne's Place and Willow's Place offer a combined forty-four spaces (twenty-two each). Willow's Place is accessible during the day, while Carol Anne's Place is accessible overnight, and these act as low-barrier drop-in spaces for women and female-identifying individuals. Funding for these programs expires on March 31, 2024 and it is recommended that these services continue and are provided year round. The demand for both drop-ins and overnight warming spaces remains high. Approximately 552 non-unique individuals are served on average, per quarter, in currently funded drop-in programs. Previously the Wesley Day Centre served approximately 275 unique individuals per quarter until it closed in March 2023.

Year-round drop-ins would maintain daytime services while enabling providers to scale-up and expand these spaces for overnight low-barrier warming spaces during winter months, from December 1 to March 31 each year. Warming spaces would be separate and distinct in their service offerings compared to daytime drop-in programs. Specific offerings for warming spaces would include a place to sit, washrooms, warm beverages and light snacks between the hours of 8:30 p.m.-8:30 a.m. On-site access to other services such as toiletries, wi-fi, showers and laundry may be provisionally accommodated.

Through the strategy the City would provide 24/7, year-round, drop-in services and overnight warming spaces during the winter months, including holidays and weekends, with multiple locations across the city of Hamilton. The recommended approach leverages partnerships with providers in homelessness serving sector and utilizes City facilities such as recreation facilities and the Central Public Library, as well as maximizing the geographic area by implementing a mobile warming bus. The central piece of the strategy is that staff conduct a Call for Applications to community partners, faith-based organizations, and other potential proponents to contract up to one hundred low-barrier spaces for warming purposes during the winter months. It is critical that new partnerships are explored and pursued as we work together to find needed capacity within our City to serve the needs of unsheltered individuals during the winter months, and year round.

**Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 10**

**FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial: To support a Winter Response Strategy as outlined in recommendations (a), prior to the 2024 Tax Operating Budget process, staff are requesting approval for \$1.5M for the period of December 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024. Cost for this period will be tracked separately in a Winter Response account, Dept ID 673248 Account Number 57403, and funded at the end of each calendar year (2023 and 2024) by the Tax Stabilization Reserve #110046.

Included in recommendation (b) are requests to provide annualized funding of \$1.62M in 2024 for drop-ins that are currently funded until March of 2024, through Council approval in report HSC23019, with no approval to continue operating with City of Hamilton funding after this date. In addition, recommendation (c) is requesting \$1.75M of funding to support 100 additional day-time drop in spaces. The costs reflected in the recommendations are the annualized amounts to be referred to the Housing Services Division 2024 Tax Operating budget process and reflected in Dept ID 673245 “Homelessness Programs”.

Recommendation (d) includes the annualized cost of approximately \$915K for the delivery of a Winter Response Strategy to be referred to the Housing Services Division 2024 Tax Operating budget process.

For each recommendation, any savings due of timing related to the 2024 budget process, would be used to offset the costs approved for the period of January – March 2024. In addition, the existing 2023 budget approved for \$125K to provide a Winter Response would reduce the total requested in recommendations (a) and (d). Please refer to table 1 below:

Table 1: Estimated new costs to be realized for each time period effected by the report.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Dec 2023 Reserve Expense*</b>	<b>Jan to Mar 2024 Reserve Expense*</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Apr to Dec 2024*</b>	<b>2024 Annual Budget</b>
(a) In-Year overnight/daytime Winter Response	\$374,897	\$1,124,691	\$1,499,588		
(b) Existing daytime and overnight Drop-Ins**				\$1,213,551	\$1,618,068
(c) Annualized 100 new daytime drop-in spaces***				1,314,347	1,752,462

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(d)Annualized Winter Response***				228,859	915,434
Less: Existing Levy Budget	-125,000	-93,750	-218,750	-31,250	-125,000
<b>Total estimated costs by time period</b>	<b>\$249,897</b>	<b>\$1,030,941</b>	<b>\$1,280,838</b>	<b>\$2,725,506</b>	<b>\$4,160,964</b>
*Total costs have been distributed to the time period by assuming an equal monthly distribution					
**Jan-Mar 2024 costs have received approval through HSC23019					
*** Jan-Mar 2024 costs are included in recommendation (a)					

Legal: Legal Services would draft all necessary Contracts and Agreements necessitated by recommendations (a) to (e) above.

Staffing: Hamilton Transit will allocate and schedule 1 FTE operator from its existing complement to operate the warming bus during the assigned hours.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

On August 11, 2022, the Emergency and Community Services Committee approved Report HSC20020(f) Adaptation and Transformation of Services for People Experiencing Homelessness Update 6. This Report outlined an interim plan for homelessness system service levels from January to March 2023, including continuation of enhanced drop-in services for approximately \$735K per quarter.

On December 1, 2022, the Emergency and Community Services Committee approved a motion directing staff that up to a maximum of \$125K be allocated to additional Cold Alert response. As a result, the City was able to procure additional overnight spaces during Cold Weather Alerts in winter 2022-23 through The Hub community drop-in.

On March 23, 2023 the Emergency and Community Services Committee approved Report HSC23019, which included extension of funding for drop-ins in the women’s system (The Hamilton Young Women’s Christian Association - Carol Anne’s Place and Mission Services of Hamilton, Inc.- Willow’s Place) through March 2024.

On March 31, 2023 the largest drop-in centre in Hamilton, Wesley Day Centre closed., This closure has left a sizeable gap in drop-in services.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

To enable Housing Services Division to expedite the implementation of the winter response strategy, a Call for Applications is recommended and supported by Procurement. 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 before the Winter. 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**

On June 12, 2023, the Board of Health approved Report BOH23005(a), which detailed a review of the City's existing cold response which was conducted by Hamilton Public Health Services and determined to be adequate to meet the needs of the general public during extreme cold alerts. However, staff in Housing Services and Public Health Services consulted with community organizations providing services to people experiencing homelessness and determined that current Cold Alert protocols do not meet the needs of individuals sleeping rough due to increased mortality risks related to cold weather well above currently established thresholds. As service levels provided during COVID19 have declined, staff concluded a dedicated Winter Response was necessary to further reduce associated health and safety risks for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

City staff met with the Hamilton Public Library Board and Recreation staff to discuss the potential to leverage and expand existing services to support individuals experiencing homelessness between December 1 and March 31. Staff also met with Hamilton Transit to discuss the feasibility of creating one overnight warming bus to service a designated overnight route daily during winter months as well as consider staffing implications. This service would allow individuals to get warm and access transportation to other designated warming spaces across the City.

City staff consulted with the City of Edmonton who runs an overnight warming bus, operated by the Edmonton Transit System about program operations as well as challenges around operating a mobile support for people sleeping rough and/or experiencing hidden homelessness. Feedback received during the public engagement process regarding the Encampment Protocol has also informed this report and recommendations.

### **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

As described in Addressing Needs of Unsheltered Individuals and Those Relying on Hamilton's Emergency Shelter System (HSC23041), Hamilton's shelter system has consistently been at or over-capacity since before the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue has worsened as a result of a severe lack of affordable housing, impacts of the opioid emergency, lingering bottlenecks from the COVID-19 pandemic, and long lengths of stay in the shelter system. As a result, there are a lack of spaces for people experiencing homelessness to stay warm overnight. In addition, as described in Public Feedback and Recommendation for an Encampment Protocol and Sanctioned Sites (HSC20036(g)), the numbers of individuals living unsheltered in encampments has increased throughout the City. Overnight exposure to cold during the winter months leads to elevated risk of hypothermia, frostbite, mental distress, and potential death. Historical averages of people in Hamilton staying outside during winter months reached 50 individuals in 2022, the highest on record to date, however, given our current experience with people living unsheltered we anticipate this number to be much greater through the upcoming winter season. Significant increases in the number of people outside during winter months demonstrate a strong need for low-barrier overnight spaces to maintain the safety of individuals experiencing homelessness during winter months.

Recommendations in this report align with other major municipalities including Toronto, Edmonton and London. These municipalities all have Cold Alert triggers in place through Public Health, as well as designated responses to support people experiencing homelessness during winter months through expansion of existing services to serve as warming spaces overnight.

This report recommends a comprehensive winter response approach which involves maximizing the availability of access through providing multiple services at multiple access points, across a breadth of geographic locations including a mobile warming option for people experiencing homelessness. The approach both utilizes City operated locations as warming centres in the form of recreation facilities and the central public library as well as leverages existing community organizations to extend and adapt services during the winter months. The mobile warming service leverages the City's Transit assets, as well as community expertise to provide on-board supports, that combined provide an innovative additional overnight warming service that will be able to serve a broader scope of the City during the colder overnight hours when fewer private and public services are otherwise available. Appendix "A" to Report HSC23012 provides detailed descriptions of these services, hours of operation and summary of service levels. In short, warming services will be available through multiple access points 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, between December 1 and March 31 including statutory holidays.



The mobile warming service is an innovation approach that is successfully utilized in other major municipalities. For example, the City of Edmonton runs an overnight warming bus, operated by the Edmonton Transit System, during winter months to provide mobile support for people sleeping rough and/or experiencing hidden homelessness. Partners in Edmonton have noted this approach to be successful in reducing cold weather mortality risks for the City's most marginalized by operating along scheduled routes throughout the City daily between 10 p.m.- 6 a.m. Creating one bus to run along a designated route overnight between December 1 and March 31 is a cost-effective option that can be quickly operationalized to provide enhanced mobility and reduce cold weather risks.

Leveraging our existing drop-in services is an advantageous and cost effective approach to extend warming services to people who need them. To accommodate the need for one hundred overnight drop-in spaces during winter, it is recommended that Hamilton invest in the creation of one hundred permanent daytime drop-in spaces that operate year-round. This provides predictability for providers to recruit and retain staff, and scale-up existing facilities and staff resources for a more comprehensive winter response. Barriers to operating a time-limited, overnight operation, during only the winter months are start-up costs, recruitment and retention of staff and challenges finding dedicated seasonal space. For instance, a Call for Applications in January of 2023 to contract with providers for an additional twenty nine nightly warming spaces for the balance of the winter received no applications. Combining annual funding for daytime drop-in service enhancements with an overnight warming drop-in during winter months would attract more potential applicants and increase the likelihood of a successful proponent(s).

Beyond the ability to scale up for cold response, drop-ins play an important role in connecting people to additional housing resources and supports. Drop-in services often serve as an entry point to the homelessness-serving system for individuals who may be provisionally accommodated or experiencing hidden homelessness and may not be accessing any other services. Community consultation with service providers throughout 2022 reinforced the role of drop-ins as a vital low barrier service in meeting basic needs for the most vulnerable while building trust and coordinating community resources. Annualized funding for Carole Anne's and Willow's Place would ensure that marginalized women would continue to have their basic needs met during the day as well as an option for low-barrier overnight accommodation.

The multifaceted service offering of drop-ins, uniquely positions them to effectively function as a provider of both daytime housing support services and overnight low-barrier warming spaces during winter months. Overnight warming spaces would function as separate and distinct from daytime programs, with service provision limited to the physical space, a place to sit, warm drinks and light snacks from 8:30 p.m.-8:30 a.m. nightly during winter.

Public Health Services will continue to oversee activation of Cold Alerts, as determined by the Medical Officer of Health. Enhanced collaboration through an Annual Winter Response would ensure designated Recreation Facilities and Libraries have expanded evening hours daily between December 1 and March 31 as opposed to only during Cold Alerts and have select locations open during statutory holidays.

## **ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Alternative to recommendation (a) and (c) – expanding capacity to 50 spaces:**

That Council approve, and staff be authorized to implement an immediate overnight Winter Response Strategy, from December 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 to support vulnerable individuals within the homelessness serving systems as follows for an approximate cost of \$509,627 and to be funded by the Tax Stabilization Reserve #110046:

- (i) Fifty drop-in spaces through a Call for Application that would function as additional low-barrier overnight winter warming spaces at an approximate cost of \$292,077.
- (ii) The operation of one overnight warming bus through Hamilton Transit, at an approximate cost of \$217,550, which includes approximate operating costs based on the 2023 rate of \$150,000 with staff on site to support individuals experiencing homelessness at a cost of \$67,550 to be contracted through a Call for Application.
- (iii) Additional operating hours to 11:30PM at three designated recreation facilities to operate as warming spaces at an approximate cost of \$103,660.
- (iv) Additional operating hours at the Hamilton Public Library Central location to operate as a warming space, between 1:00PM - 5:00PM, on ten statutory and other days the library is regularly scheduled to be closed, at an approximate annual cost of \$10,070.

Alternative to recommendation (c)

That annualized funding beginning April 1, 2024 for day-time drop-in fifty spaces at an approximate annual cost of \$876,231 be referred to the Housing Services Division 2024 Tax Operating Budget process

Analysis

This alternative recommends a comparatively lower level of service, reducing the proposed quantity of drop-in spaces from one hundred to fifty for both 2023-2024 and on an annualized basis. This alternative is lower cost; however, the trade-off is that this recommendation does not meet the full scope of need in the community at outlined in HSC23012.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix "A" to Report HSC23012: Description of Services and Summary of Service Levels