




CITY OF HAMILTON
Healthy and Safe Communities Department
Housing Services Division

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	April 3, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Asylum-Claimants Transitional Housing Proposal (HSC24016) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Kelly Coxson (905) 546-2424 Ext. 6535 Shannon Honsberger (905) 546-2424 Ext. 6524 Rob Mastroianni (905) 546-2424 Ext. 8035
SUBMITTED BY:	Michelle Baird Director, Housing Services Division Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That funding up to \$280,000 be provided to Good Shepherd Centres for the provision of a 10-bed women's transitional housing program for refugee claimants and asylum seekers between June 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. subject to Good Shepherd Centres confirming it is a non-profit organization and Good Shepherd Centres entering into a funding agreement with City on such terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and that the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department be authorized and directed to execute the funding agreement and any ancillary documentation; and
- (b) That funding up to \$200,000 be provided to Good Shepherd Centres for the provision of a 10-bed women's transitional housing program for refugee claimants and asylum seekers between January 1, 2025 to May 30, 2025 to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly from Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. subject to Good Shepherd Centres confirming it is a non-profit organization and Good Shepherd Centres, entering into a

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funding agreement with City on such terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and that the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department be authorized and directed to execute the funding agreement and any ancillary documentation;

- (c) That funding up to \$642,000 be provided to Wesley Urban Ministries for the provision of a 30-bed transitional housing program for men, women, family, and couples between June 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly from Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. subject to Wesley Urban Ministries confirming it is a non-profit organization and Wesley Urban Ministries, entering into a funding agreement with City on such terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and that the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department be authorized and directed to execute the funding agreement and any ancillary documentation; and
- (d) That funding up to \$459,000 be provided to Wesley Urban Ministries for the provision of a 30-bed transitional housing program for men, women, family, and couples between January 1, 2025 to May 31, 2025 to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly from Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. subject to Wesley Urban Ministries confirming it is a non-profit organization and Wesley Urban Ministries, entering into a funding agreement with City on such terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and that the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department be authorized and directed to execute the funding agreement and any ancillary documentation; and
- (e) That funding up to \$122,000 be provided to Refuge Newcomer Health for the operation of a Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub serving all newcomer demographics between June 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly from Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. subject to Refuge Newcomer Health confirming it is a non-profit organization and Refuge Newcomer Health, entering into a funding agreement with City on such terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and that the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department be authorized and directed to execute the funding agreement and any ancillary documentation; and

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- (f) That funding up to \$87,100 be provided to Refuge Newcomer Health for the operation of a Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub serving all newcomer demographics between January 1, 2025 to May 31, 2025 to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly from Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. subject to Refuge Newcomer Health confirming it is a non-profit organization and Refuge Newcomer Health, entering into a funding agreement with City on such terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor, and that the General Manager of the Healthy and Safe Communities Department be authorized and directed to execute the funding agreement and any ancillary documentation; and
- (g) That staff be directed to continue to pursue full recovery from senior levels of government for the costs associated with the City's response to the refugee claimants and asylum seekers and that any funds received for this purpose be applied to the Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-Program Dept.
- (h) That staff report back following six months of operation to report on program success and make a recommendation on the continuation of services after May 2025.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hamilton continues to experience unprecedented rates of refugee claimants and asylum-seekers accessing emergency shelter services¹. From September 2023 to January 2024, the weekly proportion of emergency shelter beds occupied by refugee claimants or asylum-seeking persons has ranged from 24% to 36%. This is concentrated in the single men shelters (33%), women's shelters (27%) and family hotel overflow (21%). Across the emergency shelter sector, total monthly shelter bed occupancy rates are consistently at or above 100% capacity in all sectors except for youth, which has ranged from 62% to 77% occupancy per month between September 2023 and January 2024. To address the continued occupancy pressures, and the unique needs of the refugee and asylum population, staff are recommending two short-term transitional housing programs and a Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub comprised of two mobile system navigator positions.

¹ Refugee claimants have received documentation (Acknowledgement of Claim Document or a Refugee Protection Claimant Document from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada) and Asylum Seekers are people currently in the process of completing their documentation.

The transitional housing programs would result in 40 new beds, with 10 beds for women delivered by Good Shepherd Centres (Good Shepherd) at a cost of \$480K and 30 beds for men, women, couples, and families delivered by Wesley Urban Ministries (Wesley) at a cost of \$1.1M (Appendix “A”). This ratio addresses the need in men’s, women’s, and family shelters, and provides a women’s only housing option for those who feel safer in that setting. Both programs can be scaled up in the future, if deemed appropriate.

Wesley’s proposed site is at 467 Main Street East (Ward 3) and Good Shepherd’s proposed site is at 320 Hwy 8 in Stoney Creek (Ward 10).

The Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub would be delivered by two mobile system navigators employed by Refuge Newcomer Health at a cost of \$209K (Appendix “A”). This Hub would result in 100 men, women, couples, and families refugee claimants and asylum seekers experiencing homelessness being supported while navigating community services per year. The program would increase shelter staff capacity to support people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness while ensuring that refugee claimants and asylum seekers receive appropriate supports to exit homelessness.

Hamilton is engaging with the Federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to advocate for ongoing support to address the pressures within Hamilton’s homelessness serving system. The City has been successful in advocating for Interim Housing Assistance Program for partial funding for the reimbursement of the costs associated with asylum seeker programs from January to September 2023 and are awaiting reimbursement of the full costs to the end of December. Staff are optimistic that funding will also be available in 2024 due to recent funding announcements in the media. Should the City be successful in receiving additional funding, these programs would be eligible to claim under the Interim Housing Assistance Program and could be used to reimburse the City.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 7

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Recommendations (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) requests funding of \$1.79M to support up to 12 months of operations, from June 2024 to May 2025, for 40 new beds between Good Shepherd (\$480K) and Wesley (\$1.1M) and two mobile system navigator positions provided by Refuge Newcomer Health (\$209K). These programs are recommended to be funded first from eligible Provincial or Federal funding, then by any program, Department, or Corporate surplus, and lastly from Corporate Financials – Expenditures/Non-program Dept. Funding has been separated across calendar years to align with internal financial processes.

Provider	2024 Jun – Dec (7 months)	2025 Jan – May (5 months)	Total Jun 2024 – May 2025 (12 months)	Beds/ Caseload Spaces
Good Shepherd (a) & (b)	\$280,000	\$200,000	\$480,000	10
Wesley (c) & (d)	\$641,667	\$458,333	\$1,100,000	30
Refuge Newcomer Health (e) & (f)	\$122,000	\$87,100	\$209,100	100
Total	\$1,043,667	\$745,433	\$1,789,100	40 beds, 100 caseload spaces

Staffing: There are no anticipated staffing implications associated with Report HSC24016.

Legal: Establishing these programs would require the City enter into funding agreements with Good Shepherd, Wesley and Refugee Newcomer Health.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since early 2023, municipalities across Canada have seen an influx in refugee and asylum-seeking households arriving in Canada, with many requiring immediate emergency shelter services and support finding housing.

On September 13, 2023, Council endorsed a letter from Ontario's Big City Mayors and Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario calling for an urgent meeting of all orders of government to discuss municipal and regional funding to support newcomers including refugees. In January 2024, General Issues Committee members endorsed a motion requesting that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities urge the Federal government to take immediate action to support asylum claimants in Canadian municipalities.

Council also received a report titled Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) (HSC240003), which recommended the City enter into an agreement with the Federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to receive \$3.5M in funding through the Interim Housing Assistance Program. These funds would partially reimburse costs incurred providing temporary housing and emergency shelter to refugee claimants and asylum seekers from January to September 2023. Currently, the Federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has committed to funding for October to December 2023, and is exploring costs for January to March 2024. In addition, the City has provided enhanced supports to the whole Homelessness Sector, including asylum seekers and refugee claimants experiencing homelessness, in Hamilton's Winter Response (HSC23012(a)).

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

Housing Services Division staff will need to adjust some coordinated access and data management policies and procedures to reflect the process for directing asylum-claimants to the proposed programs.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Internal: Between early 2023 and January 2024 Housing Services Division consulted with City staff from the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council and Human Services Integration to determine appropriate programs and resources to alleviate pressure on the emergency shelter sector. The programs recommended in this report were reviewed and approved by City staff from these departments.

Community: Housing Services Division and Human Services Integration staff consulted with community partners to determine organizations with the expertise and capacity to provide transitional housing supports to asylum-claimants. Community partners were foundational to the development of the programs proposed in this report.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Throughout 2023 and into 2024, there has been a continued increase in the number of refugee-claimant and asylum-seeking households seeking shelter in Hamilton's emergency shelter system. There have been similar increases in our encampments across the City, while our shelters continue to operate at or above capacity. Refugee claimants and asylum seekers have utilized an average of 26-36% of the shelter capacity since fall 2023. Developing a refugee claimant and asylum seeker housing program, separate from the shelter system, can address the specific needs of this population while redirecting existing supports to those living unhoused.

Refugee claimants and asylum seekers often arrive with no pre-attained status with the Federal government. As such, they cannot access support through Federally funded settlement services and need specialized help to get connected appropriately. Once they are connected, they can quickly exit into more stable housing options. Often this takes two to three months which makes a short-term transitional living program an ideal set up to manage initial housing needs.

The programs proposed by Wesley and Good Shepherd would house over 100 refugee claimants and asylum seekers per year, at a cost in the same price range of our existing emergency shelter services. Both programs can be integrated into our existing coordinated homelessness service delivery system and can be scaled up in the future if there is further need. These programs would move over 100 individuals per year from

shelter into private market housing and will reduce pressures on the men's, women's, and family shelter sectors.

The Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub proposed by Refuge Newcomer Health would deliver supports through two mobile system navigators. Emergency shelters are frequently at or over capacity and have limited resources or experience supporting refugee claimants and asylum seekers. The mobile system navigators would provide case management for approximately 100 men, women, and family refugee claimants and asylum seekers per year with navigating community and settlement services. The Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub will provide a central point of contact for refugee claimants and asylum seekers who are new to the City, and not connected with existing services. Having a dedicated team will increase outflow rates from shelter and transitional housing into permanent housing.

The City is in conversation with the Federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to advocate for adequate funding to reimburse the expenses incurred by the City to house and shelter refugee claimants and asylum seekers. Hamilton's advocacy efforts with the Federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada have resulted in securing Interim Housing Assistance Program funding for the reimbursement of the costs associated with refugee claimant and asylum seeker programs in 2023. Additional funding from the Federal government will likely become available in 2024 and can be applied to reimburse spending from City reserves.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

In addition to increasing housing capacity and funding two mobile system navigator positions, Council could direct staff to allocate \$740K in funding to a physical Newcomer Referral and Coordination Hub with three additional mobile system navigators, a program coordinator, a receptionist, and an administrative assistant. This 'Hub' of services for refugee claimants and asylum seekers would provide settlement, health and housing services to people accessing emergency shelter beds to expedite outcomes for a150 more people than the two mobile system navigators would support (Appendix "A").

While this option doesn't address shelter capacity pressures, it does better address service connectivity issues for many refugee claimants and asylum seekers welcomed to Hamilton. This would not cover all aspects of service navigation; similar work is underway in the Region of Peel. This approach may be duplicative of these efforts while being resource intensive.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report HSC24016: Transitional Housing and 'Hub' For Asylum-claimants Program Overview