

1. HOMELESSNESS: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION AS AMENDED

**That Council:**

1. Assume the role of a local service systems manager for homelessness.
2. Direct staff to include in the Community Action Plan (to be presented later in 1999), measures the Region could take to support the development of affordable rental housing through its planning, property and regulatory functions.

DOCUMENTATION:

1. Commissioner, Social Services Department/Medical Officer of Health joint report dated 29 Mar 99 is immediately attached.
2. Extract of Draft Minute, Community Services Committee of 15 April 1999 follows the report, and includes a record of all votes.
3. Report, Homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton, April 1999, is on file with the Regional Clerk.

NEXT ITEM: p.

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT

MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.  
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 29 March 1999

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator  
Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner Social Services Department  
Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **HOMELESSNESS: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN**

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### **DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Community Services Committee recommend Council assume the role of a local service systems manager for homelessness.**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of a preliminary study of homelessness in the Region of Ottawa-Carleton. This study will form the foundation for building an integrated community plan to end homelessness in the Region.

### **BACKGROUND**

On November 14, 1998, in response to the level of homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton and other municipalities, a resolution was passed by Regional Council calling upon the Federal Government to declare homelessness a national disaster. In order to address the homelessness issue in Ottawa-Carleton and as a result of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness recommendation that municipalities act as local service systems managers for homelessness, the Community Services Committee directed Social Services to study the issue of homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton in a manner similar to the Interim Report of the Toronto Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness.

Extensive public consultation with the Region's Community partners has begun to build consensus on an integrated community plan to deliver services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The report of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness, released in October of 1998, recommended that local governments assume the role of "local service system managers for homelessness." In this role the Region is expected to work with the community, service providers, provincial ministries and funders to develop co-ordinated approaches to achieve three goals, namely: to move people from the streets to emergency shelters; from emergency shelters to permanent housing and to prevent homelessness by supporting people in the retention of permanent housing. In its role as a local service systems manager, the Region will assume the role of facilitator, working with the community to ensure a co-ordinated and efficient delivery of services to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

## DISCUSSION

The final report of the Toronto Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, released in January 1999, contains comprehensive recommendations to address homelessness in that city. That report was the result of more than a year of work. Ottawa-Carleton will follow a similar two stage process albeit on a smaller scale.

This first phase of the process, consists of an environmental scan of homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. The report is the result of a comprehensive review of existing data on homelessness in the Region and is intended to provide a basis for discussion and the development of an integrated community plan to end homelessness. The second phase of the process involves extensive community consultation which will take the form of interviews with key informants from various sectors involved in homelessness, a community forum and a public awareness forum organised in co-operation with the Alliance to End Homelessness and to be held April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1999. The results of this second phase as well as recommendations for the community plan will be presented in a report to the Community Services Committee in June of 1999.

The study has revealed that although Ottawa-Carleton, at the level of both the community and municipal government, has taken steps to deal with homelessness in the past, the problem persists. The number of people at risk of becoming homeless is on the rise. Data specific to Ottawa-Carleton indicates that in terms of poverty and affordable housing the scope of the problem is proportionately similar to the situation in the City of Toronto with the cities of Ottawa and Vanier having the highest levels of people at risk.

Emergency response initiatives will not result in long term solutions to the underlying causes of homelessness such as poverty and lack of affordable housing. Effectively dealing with homelessness will require a sustained effort by the community and all levels of government adopting a pro-active, co-operative and long-term approach to relieving the underlying issues that result in homelessness.

In order to effectively manage the solutions arrived at through the planning process, the Region must have the co-operation of several key provincial ministries including, but not limited to, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Public consultation is currently underway. A series of key informant interviews with service providers and representatives of government ministries, involved with services to persons who are homeless, have already been completed. A public consultation is scheduled for April 8, 1999 with community partners to discuss homelessness and work toward solutions. In addition, a public awareness forum is being planned, in partnership with the Alliance to End Homelessness, to take place concurrently with the submission of this report to the Community Services Committee.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications have not yet been determined. Once the public consultation has been completed and an initial plan has been developed the financial implications of such a plan will be determined. It is anticipated that an analysis of the financial implications will be included in the June report to Community Services Committee.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study has confirmed that homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton is a problem that is large both in scope and magnitude. Many agencies and providers extend services to the homeless. What is required is a co-ordinated, integrated community wide approach to serving persons who are homeless and those who are at risk of becoming homeless with the exchange of information between agencies in order to support clients to move to stable housing and remain housed. Poverty and the lack of affordable, supportive housing options are core causes of homelessness.

Although the Region has been designated as the local service systems manager for homelessness, the solutions lie beyond the scope of local government alone. A commitment by all levels of government, service providers, funders, the private sector and the citizens of Ottawa-Carleton to a common vision is required to end homelessness. The Region of Ottawa-Carleton can support this vision by assuming the role of facilitating the understanding of the current situation, the causes that lead to unstable housing and by co-ordinating the development of an integrated community plan.

*Approved by  
Dick Stewart*

*Approved by  
Dr Robert Cushman*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Region of Ottawa-Carleton, through Social Services and Health, has undertaken a comprehensive examination of homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. The study was conducted in response to the Region's Community Services Committee directing staff to develop an integrated community plan to end homelessness in the Region. The study will form the basis of the discussion, public consultation and planning required to produce long term solutions to homelessness.

Consistent with the recommendations of the Provincial Task Force on Homelessness, the development of a community plan is being done in the context of the Region's role as a local service systems manager for homelessness. To this end, the planning process is being conducted as a co-operative effort between Social Services, Health and Social Housing in partnership with the Alliance to End Homelessness and the Region's provincial and funding partners.

The study is an attempt to comprehensively document the causes of homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton, provide a profile of persons who are homeless in the Region and to provide an indication of the services available to the homeless in Ottawa-Carleton for the purpose of identifying gaps that may exist in the current system.

How homelessness is defined shapes the course of discussions on how to end it. Since the goal of this planning process is to arrive at long term preventative solutions to homelessness, a broad definition has purposely been adopted. The United Nations defines homelessness as being either absolute or relative. The absolutely homeless are those who are without housing and are living in the streets or in emergency shelters. The relatively homeless are those who are living in housing that is beyond what they can afford or which is unsafe or overcrowded.

The causes of homelessness are varied, yet when viewed together they provide a measure of society's ability to care for its members. The scan has confirmed that a combination of causes often contribute to homelessness. The primary causes of homelessness are Poverty, Lack of Affordable Housing, Evictions, Mental Illness and Addiction.

The diversity of those who are homeless, the many facets of homelessness and the lack of consistent data collection among service providers make it difficult to obtain a concise profile of the homeless at this time. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study provides an indication of the extent of homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton as well as illustrating who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

In terms of absolute homelessness, more than 600 men, women and children are sheltered in the Region's emergency hostels on a daily basis. In 1998, more than 4,500 single persons and 375 families, with a total of 901 children, were sheltered. Eighteen percent of all emergency shelter users are dependent children in the care of a parent.

In terms of relative homelessness, in 1996, 75,500 households paid in excess of 30% of their income on shelter and approximately 30,000 households were estimated to be paying in excess of 50% of their income on shelter.

Poverty and low income contribute to homelessness when people are unable to afford private market housing. The incidence of low income in the Region was 19% in 1996 representing an increase of 26% over the rate in 1990. Low income is particularly prevalent in the cities of Ottawa and Vanier where the rates are 28% and 34 % respectively. The incidence of low income for the former city of Toronto was by comparison 24%.

Vacancy rates for rental housing in Ottawa-Carleton dropped by half between 1997 and 1998, while at the same time the cost of rental housing in the private market increased. Very few new rental housing units have been constructed in Ottawa-Carleton in recent years and no new social housing has been built for several years.

Approximately 80% of persons receiving social assistance and living in non-subsidized housing, pay more than their maximum shelter allowance on rent. There are currently approximately 15,000 outstanding applications for social housing in the Region, which translates into a five to seven year waiting period.

Approximately 40% of the single homeless population suffers from some form of mental illness and a similar proportion suffer from addictions. Although it is agreed that a significant portion of the homeless population suffers concurrently from mental illness and addiction, an accurate estimate of this number is unknown at this time.

The length of stay in shelters varies among the various segments of the homeless population. For example, the average length of stay in emergency shelters for families is approximately 50 days. For single men and women it is approximately 20 days and for single youth it is 10 days.

The study has revealed that homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton is a problem that is as prevalent in this region as it is in other municipalities across the country. In light of these initial findings, it is clear that homelessness is a problem that must be addressed.

In Ottawa-Carleton, there is a strong network of services to help people who are homeless. We have an opportunity to strengthen the supports to people who are homeless by building an integrated approach to service delivery through community planning. An intensive community consultation is underway to begin the development of a community plan to end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. Presentation of an initial plan to the Region's Community Services Committee is anticipated in June of 1999.

Extract of Draft Minute  
Community Services Committee  
15 April 1999

#### HOMELESSNESS: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

- Social Services Commissioner/Medical Officer of Health joint report and Executive Summary dated 29 Mar 99
- Homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton, April 1999: report issued separately

The Committee Chair, A. Munter, acknowledged the presence of Mr. Dave Smith, Co-chair, Community Forums, Mr. Alex Cullen, M.P.P., Ottawa West, Mr. Richard Patten, M.P.P., Ottawa Centre, Ms. Elizabeth Arnold, Councillor, City of Ottawa and the Honourable Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour and Federal Co-ordinator for Homelessness.

D. Stewart, Commissioner, Social Services Department, spoke briefly about the upcoming public consultation and the implementation report that will be brought back for Committee consideration in June. The Committee heard from H el ene Durand-Charron, Manager, Policy Planning and Performance Services, who gave an overview of the process to-date. She spoke about developing a plan to achieve three goals:

- ◆ moving people from the streets into emergency accommodation
- ◆ moving people from emergency shelters into permanent accommodation
- ◆ preventing homelessness by supporting permanent housing

Ms. Durand-Charron explained the differences between absolute homelessness, which includes persons living on the street or in shelters and relative homelessness, i.e., people whose homes do not meet minimum standards of safety and comfort or cost more than people can afford to pay. Some of the causes of homelessness include the lack of affordable housing, reduced social assistance rates and the lack of stability of families and relationships.

Ms. Durand-Charron presented the following statistics which relate to the lack and loss of social housing:

- ◆ 50,000 households in Ottawa-Carleton spend more than 30% of their income on shelter
- ◆ the percentage of persons in need of housing rose from 16% to 44% subsequent to the cuts in social assistance benefits and ensuing evictions
- ◆ 84% of persons on social assistance pay more than their maximum allowance on rent.

Extract of Draft Minute  
Community Services Committee  
15 April 1999

Focusing on the service system approach, Ms. Durand-Charron indicated that community programs and partnerships will be a key component of the response. The major responsibilities will include:

- ◆ planning a service system
- ◆ allocating/re-allocating resources to achieve agreed-upon outcomes
- ◆ providing quality assurance to give good services to the right clients
- ◆ managing the service delivery network, ensuring accountability
- ◆ ensuring outcomes, preventing and ending homelessness

Ms. Durand-Charron concluded her presentation by outlining the next steps which include, consulting with the community, building an inventory of services, devising strategies and solutions. She indicated that the next report to Committee will include recommendations for an integrated community plan, as well as an implementation plan. Ms. Durand-Charron introduced her colleagues at the table, Ms. Trudi Sutton, Ms. Connie Woloschuk, Salvation Army Booth Centre and Ms. Maureen Murphy, Director, Adult Health Division, regional Health Department.

Councillor D. Holmes asked whether the department would ensure the Region gets back into a joint funding stream with the Province. The Director, Area Operations Central, Luc Legault, indicated staff will be able to use shelter funding in a different manner, and it is anticipated an additional \$533,000 will be received for emergency shelters. D. Stewart added the staff recommendations will be rooted in what is practical and what can be immediately implemented, i.e., coverage of rental arrears and possibly supplementary rent money.

Councillor Holmes suggested staff be directed to include, in the next report to Committee, recommendations on retaining properties that are surplus to the Region's needs and maintaining these in a housing land bank.

Councillor A. Loney made reference to statistics which indicate that only 29% of persons discharged from institutions have accommodation. He suggested staff include in their June report strong recommendations about the health sector keeping this information in mind when preparing to from institutions persons whose accommodations once released are not assured.



Extract of Draft Minute  
Community Services Committee  
15 April 1999

Councillor L. Davis asked about the length of stay at the family shelter on Forward Avenue. Mr. Legault responded that families stay an average of 60 days, with single persons staying for up to six months. He added that, through the offices of Councillor Davis and a coming together of the community, good outreach programs have been helping the situation.

Councillor Holmes inquired as to whether it is the Health Department's job to ensure cleanliness in areas where people live on the street. The Medical Officer of Health, Dr. R. Cushman, described the work of nurses working with the Street Health Coalition and the needle clean-up initiatives as two activities undertaken in this regard. Dr. Cushman added the department is only skimming the surface and need more funds to assist homeless persons. He noted that the burden of mental health is in the community, while the resources are concentrated in institutions.

Councillor J. Legendre asked about those persons, both singles and families, who choose not to go to shelters. Mr. Legault indicated there is a different outreach for families. Ms. C. Woloschuk, representing the Salvation Army Booth Centre, added that the women's shelter is often inadequate, noting that 1000 requests went unanswered in the past week. The men's' shelters are full and often to overflow and there are alternatives for those persons who chose to live on the street.

The following delegations were heard:

Dave Coffey, a panhandler, said that homelessness is a national disaster and something that should not exist. He suggested that consideration be given to "low rental businesses" and to legalizing panhandling and begging. The businesses would be issued monthly vendor licenses at an affordable rate and this might allow individuals on the street to get jobs through this medium.

A. Cullen, M. P.P., Ottawa-West, spoke about the cuts made by the Harris Government reducing the ability of municipalities to help the most vulnerable in their communities. Mr. Cullen said that, despite the successes of the Our Homes/Chez Nous Coalition to Protect Social Housing, which he co-founded, the provincial housing policies have created the current crisis in homelessness. A cut of 21.6% to social assistance rates has impoverished persons on assistance. The fact that new social housing construction has been shut-down and that social housing has been downloaded to municipalities contributes to the present crisis situation. Mr. Cullen outlined the Ontario New Democratic Party plan to deal with the housing crisis and homelessness in Ontario.

Extract of Draft Minute  
Community Services Committee  
15 April 1999

The NDP has made a commitment to spend \$250 million to build 16,000 units of affordable housing and 14,000 units of supportive housing and it will enhance the shelter allowance for social assistance recipients.<sup>1</sup>

E. Arnold, Councillor, City of Ottawa, began by complimenting staff on their report. She pointed out there are currently 16,000 persons on waiting lists for social housing and something must be done to meet their needs. She emphasized the importance of ensuring all community partners are clearly identified. Councillor Arnold described a personal experience upon encountering a woman she knew who has been reduced to begging to survive. She pointed out this is unnecessary in the Ottawa-Carleton community. The Councillor said she looked forward to the June report and to hear about the roles that all stakeholders can play.

Barbara Bareham, a resident of Ottawa-Carleton, spoke about people needing a safe and permanent place to sleep. She reiterated the comments of other speakers about the impact of decreased assistance rates and the need for more social housing. Ms. Bareham pointed out that one out of five persons in shelters is a child. She suggested that all municipalities need to assess the needs of the homeless in their area.

Nicholas Patterson, Economist, Canadian Development Institute, expressed the view it would have been helpful if the staff report, which was ready on 29 March, had been provided to the public forums. He stressed the importance of ensuring reports are freely available. Mr. Patterson focused on the two kinds of poverty, absolute and relative, noting that people are paying over 30% of their income for rent. With respect to absolute homelessness, Mr. Patterson posited that the cost of addressing this problem is within the RMOC's budget. This amount, which represents between \$4 and \$10 million, represents only 1% of the Region's budget and would provide additional funds to agencies working to help the homeless. Mr. Patterson called the situation highly scandalous and immoral.

#### Committee Discussion

Councillor D. Holmes said she had found the report thorough, and she stressed the need for a Phase 2 with strong recommendations. She asked whether staff intend to send the current report to the senior levels of government to apprise them of its content. Having heard from staff that this was not being considered, Councillor Holmes put forward a Motion calling for the report to be forwarded to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing, Federation of Canadian Municipalities for the FCM's June conference.

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<sup>1</sup> The complete text of this presentation is held on file with the Committee Co-ordinator

Extract of Draft Minute  
Community Services Committee  
15 April 1999

The Committee Chair, A. Munter, said the Committee will consider the action plan on 17 June 99. He pointed out that local governments are getting together, as they are all facing this problem, and effectively writing a national housing policy. He suggested that the Federal Co-ordinator for Homelessness should also receive the staff report, as she has asked for municipalities' help in this matter. Councillor A. Loney spoke about the need to better define relative homelessness in the upcoming report.

The Committee then considered the following:

Moved by D. Holmes

**That staff be directed to forward the report Homelessness: Environmental Scan, (April 1999) to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, in time for the FCM's June 1999 conference, for information.**

CARRIED

Moved by D. Holmes

**That staff be directed to include in the Community Action Plan, measures the Region could take to support the development of affordable rental housing through its planning, property and regulatory functions.**

CARRIED

The Committee then approved the staff recommendation, as amended by the foregoing.