



**SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration**

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**TO:** Chair Jane Brewer and Members of the Community Services Committee

**DATE:** March 7, 2006

**FILE CODE:**

**SUBJECT: SHELTERING NEEDS ASSESSMENT UPDATE**

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

For information only.

**SUMMARY:**

Nil

**REPORT:**

**1.0 Purpose and Rationale for Undertaking the Sheltering Needs Assessment**

In 2004, Council received a report entitled, "*The Region of Waterloo's Role in Addressing Homelessness: A Discussion Document*" (SS-04-049). This report outlined a number of proposed activities that would be undertaken over the next two years by Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration in fulfilling the Region's role of Service System Manager for Homelessness. The *Sheltering Needs Assessment*, which will form part of a System Plan for Homelessness, was one of the identified activities.

The purpose of the *Sheltering Needs Assessment* is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current and future need for sheltering services in Waterloo Region (including emergency shelter, transitional housing/support and supported/supportive housing) for those aged 24-65. Youth and older adults will be the subjects of subsequent reports.

The *Sheltering Needs Assessment* is both significant and timely for a number of reasons:

Support for other Regional planning initiatives. The *Sheltering Needs Assessment* will form part of the *Human Services Plan* of the *Regional Growth Management Strategy* and complements the Region's *A Community Action Plan for Housing (2005)* by examining other factors, outside of the availability and affordability of housing that contribute to the prevalence of homelessness in Waterloo Region. The *Sheltering Needs Assessment* will also partially address action #26 within the *Community Action Plan for Housing* by identifying gaps in supportive/supported housing in Waterloo Region.

Assist staff to prioritize resources. The *Sheltering Need Assessment* will help to support the Region's mandate, as Service System Manager, to establish key community priorities in an effort to strengthen the homelessness system. We need a clear and comprehensive picture of what is required to appropriately meet our needs now and into the future. There is an overall perception that levels of homelessness have increased over the last ten years. Over the past two years, there

have been a number of occasions where local shelters have been operating at or over capacity, as well as under capacity. The temporary, informal shelter system through the K-W Out of the Cold is seeing increasing numbers and is considering further expansion to overflow sites as well as youth sheltering options. Other community groups and organizations are considering shelter, transitional housing/services and supportive/supported housing projects. Some of these groups will be seeking Regional funding. Given the demand for resources and the need expressed in our community, the *Sheltering Needs Assessment* will provide data to inform resource allocations in the future.

Review cost effective solutions to homelessness in our community. Homelessness is a significant cost factor for our society. The total net annual societal cost of homelessness for urban Canada has been estimated at \$1.4B per year<sup>1</sup>. The *Sheltering Needs Assessment* will include cost-effective options to address homelessness.

Provide a comprehensive sheltering system resource. The inventory of services, key contact database and governance sections detail who the primary parties are in our community, what they do and how the (formal and informal) referral system operates between front-line agencies. This resource will likely increase opportunities for networking and collaboration among and between different aspects of the sheltering system, and will increase the level of community awareness in terms of what supports currently exist.

Develop methods to continue tracking trends. Tracking trends will strengthen other efforts currently underway to address homelessness. Greater awareness will be developed regarding the impact of various supports which will assist in setting a course for the future in the context of a growing population.

## 2.0 Planning Approach

The overall framework for the study was adopted from a Needs/Impact Based Planning Model<sup>2</sup> which suggests four approaches to determining need: normative need (using research or experts in the field to define what should be improved), expressed need (where objective actions have demonstrated need) felt need (attitudes, or wants, related to the need within the community) and comparative need (comparing to other areas or programs). Each approach produces a different source of knowledge from which analysis and recommendations have been drawn.

- Normative Need (Secondary Research Sources) – Normative need is being assessed through a strategic review of promising principles/practices along the full spectrum of sheltering services (emergency shelters, transitional housing/supports and supported/supported housing) with particular reference to issues related to different populations.
- Expressed Need (Quantitative and Qualitative Data) – An inventory of over 60 programs and services within the sheltering system has been compiled including data regarding capacity and demand.
- Felt Need (Qualitative Data) – Data was gathered in the spring of 2005 from service providers and people experiencing homelessness through 51 interviews and 12 focus groups.
- Comparative Need (Secondary Sources) – Results of data collection will be compared against programs and service levels in other comparable communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The calculation accounts for service provision costs, the value of services not used by the homeless and emergency shelter capital costs. Data was extrapolated on a population basis, assuming that Alberta's urban centre homeless incidence rate prevails at a national level.

<sup>2</sup> A Needs Analysis for Supportive Housing for the Elderly in Waterloo Region, Wellington County and Dufferin County (January 2003).

Community stakeholders have had the opportunity to participate in three open meetings to provide input at key milestones in the process. Furthermore, draft materials have been reviewed by a voluntary Community Editorial Group with representation from different types of sheltering services across the Region.

Background information gathered to-date including an inventory of services, results of the interviews and focus groups, social trends, governance information and promising principles/practices will be posted on the Region's website in mid-April for community review in preparation for a series of meetings. Two open community meetings will be held in early May, one in Kitchener-Waterloo on May 4 and one in Cambridge on May 5, to seek feedback regarding the information provided on the website as well as the interim analyses and preliminary recommendations. Further meetings will be held with smaller stakeholder groups towards the end of May.

The *Sheltering Needs Assessment* is expected to be presented to Community Services Committee in the summer of 2006.

#### **CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:**

This report is consistent with the Region's Corporate Strategic Plan, Focus Area 2 to enhance community health and social well-being through identifying resources and gaps in the existing service system increasing the community's capacity to more effectively address issues of homelessness.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Expenditures related to staff time and incidental costs associated with the consultation meetings will be covered within the existing Social Services approved budget.

#### **OTHER DEPARTMENT CONSULTATIONS/CONCURRENCE:**

Staff from Planning, Housing and Community Services, Public Health and Community Safety and Crime Prevention participate on the report steering team and have been guiding the development of the Sheltering Needs Assessment and the framing of the consultations.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Nil

**PREPARED BY:** *Marie Morrison*, Acting Manager, Social Planning

**APPROVED BY:** *Michael Schuster*, Commissioner Social Services