

Municipality Of Chatham-Kent
Community Human Services
Employment and Social Services

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Polly Smith, Employment and Social Services
Date: July 31, 2020
Subject: Shelter options in Chatham-Kent

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Director of Employment and Social Services be authorized to enter into a 2 year lease agreement for 280 Merritt Ave., Chatham for the purposes of a temporary emergency shelter, based on the terms as described in this report and subject to approval of the final terms of the lease by the Manager, Legal Services.
2. A full report on the option of Indwell as a long-term housing solution for individuals in need of supportive housing be presented to Council before December 31, 2020.

Background

This report has been completed as per Council request for information on a variety of alternative locations for the temporary emergency/isolation shelter that is currently occupying the John D. Bradley Centre, Exhibition Hall.

In early March of 2020, after seeing a significant increase in the number of local people experiencing homelessness, the homelessness prevention team of Employment and Social Services (ESS) began work on increasing motel room capacity. In recent years, hotels and motels have been used as transitional housing until permanent housing could be obtained. The increased supply achieved by the homelessness prevention team could not keep up with the increased demand created by the pandemic.

On April 6, 2020, April Rietdyk, the General Manger, Community Human Services noted at council that the numbers of visibly homeless people had increased substantially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The concern brought forward initially was the need for a place where individuals were able to self-isolate while finding housing. Suddenly people were turned out of overcrowded accommodations or unable to frequent the places they previously spent time, in increasing the number of Chatham-Kent's homeless almost

instantaneously. Thus, it was decided that a temporary shelter was required to allow people who were unhoused to socially distance or isolate in a safe place.

After viewing various municipally owned properties, the John D. Bradley Centre Exhibition Hall was chosen as a short-term location. It was vacant and provided a large wide open municipally owned space with several needed amenities (i.e.: internet access) and it was able to be set up relatively quickly. After ordering supplies, and redeploying and training staff, the temporary shelter opened on April 29, 2020. Through a variety of outreach efforts, many individuals in need took up occupancy almost immediately.

Prior to the pandemic, shelter operation was not part of the plan for housing the homeless. Funding provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing could not cover both running a shelter and providing the needed funds to help people secure and maintain permanent housing (i.e.: first and last month's rent and payment of rent arrears). Until the pandemic, motels and hotels were used fairly successfully in giving people who found themselves homeless a safe private space until permanent accommodations could be found. The Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) provided an opportunity to shelter the increased numbers of visibly homeless people. This fund covers the cost of running a shelter while leaving annual Ministry of Housing funding available to house people and prevent evictions.

The General Manager, Community Human Services noted in her April 6, 2020 presentation, the work of the shelter is estimated to take 18-24 months with SSRF funding guaranteed until March 31, 2021. While Chatham-Kent recovers and job and housing options are limited, and the needs of community members who are homeless are generally high, lasting solutions will take time. Typically in times of high unemployment, Chatham-Kent has been slow to recover. Lower than average wages, lower education levels and higher than average numbers of people with lower incomes are ongoing challenges, now exacerbated by the pandemic.

While the first goal of Employment and Social Services is to house all who need it into permanent accommodations and extensive efforts will be continued, financial sustainability plans for the transition period for shelter operation over the next 2 years include:

- Gradually reduce the number of individuals using the shelter and shelter beds through housing provision
- Finding savings in day to day operations
- Requests for an extension of the SSRF and increased funding from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
 - On July 2, 2020, the premier announced an additional 150 million for homeless shelters who were clearly creating opportunities for long term housing
- If required, access to economic downtown reserves to help fund beyond March 31, 2020

Sheltering Options

Council requested that the following sheltering options be explored by staff. A multi-disciplinary team researched and provided input into these options including: Employment and Social Services, Building Development Services, Building Maintenance, Finance, Police Community Mobilization, Information Technology Services, Public Health, Prosperity Round Table and United Way of Chatham-Kent..

Upon review it quickly became clear, that a number of the options suggested required a significant investment of capital funds, were not temporary, were not suitable, provided a different type of housing option or would take longer than Council would be willing to wait for the shelter to move. Employment and Social Services staff have identified that the shelter must be 8000-10,000 square feet, able to shelter 30-50 people, provide separate areas for isolation and different genders, physically accessible, located on or within 400 meters of a bus route, and ideally have a separate area for community program space.

The chart outlines the options and outcomes of this review.

Location	Facility Features	ESS Comments	Issues
Chatham Banquet Hall and Conference Centre 280 Merritt Ave., Chatham	Ample square footage and amenities Move in ready condition Kitchen facilities allow for cost savings on food Separate spaces for offices, programs and sleeping quarters Good location for access to services, but not densely populated nearby Property is zoned UC(HC1), which permits a temporary care facility	Owner is willing to lease for 2 years Owner recognizes the need for sheltering services and is sympathetic to the guests who will use the services	As with all temporary facilities reviewed/available, portable showers would need to be utilized

<p>NOW Portable Emergency Housing Units</p>	<p>Container housing that can be quickly be erected and self-contained Low cost compared to traditional building</p> <p>Can be converted at a later date to permanent housing</p>	<p>Creative housing option for longer term exploration for transitional or permanent housing options</p> <p>Similar to a motel situation (individual rooms) but would require additional staffing to monitor (motels have their own staff)</p>	<p>Requires land availability and purchase</p> <p>Servicing of lands</p> <p>Zoning</p> <p>Time required to implement</p> <p>Better suited to a permanent solution</p> <p>No built examples yet to examine</p> <p>Costly to house 30+ people plus provide staff space</p>
<p>Indwell</p>	<p>Permanent housing with supports suited to people even with high needs</p> <p>Diverse building types in a variety of locations that are well received by communities</p> <p>Create homes and communities that improve the lives of tenants while strengthening neighbourhoods</p>	<p>Very interested in this as a solution to help community members in need of supportive housing</p> <p>Charity experienced in working with communities and striking partnerships leveraging various funding options from all levels of government</p>	<p>Permanent long term solution that would take up to 3 years from time of commitment</p> <p>Capital investment required</p> <p>Serviced land required</p>
<p>We Cover Structures</p>	<p>Buildings with fabric roofs used for agriculture and storage</p>	<p>Fast assembly</p> <p>Not intended for housing people</p>	<p>Permanent Structures that would require extra construction for habitation</p>

<p>Municipal Office Buildings: 435 Ave Grand, Park Avenue Business Centre, Cultural Centre</p>	<p>Municipally owned and controlled</p>	<p>Attempting to reopen</p> <p>Significant expense moving employees, information technology, and furnishing and advising public of change of use</p>	<p>Time consuming, impractical and costly</p> <p>Some spaces like Cultural Centre are too small for the shelter but could offer space for displaced programs</p>
<p>Other Municipal Buildings: i.e.) Wish Centre, Active Lifestyle Centre</p>	<p>Municipally owned</p>	<p>Attempting to reopen</p> <p>Serve vulnerable citizens already</p> <p>No suitable other locations for these organizations to move to</p> <p>Provide very important services to the community</p>	<p>Time consuming, impractical and costly to move</p>
<p>Municipal Arenas</p>	<p>Municipally owned and controlled</p>	<p>Do not have suitable cooling / air ventilation systems for ongoing use of rink space</p>	<p>Not appropriate for use for more than a few days in an emergency and not in summer</p>
<p>Commercial Properties</p>	<p>Numerous owners of more than 10 large vacant facilities were contacted by Realtor and/or Director of Employment & Social Services</p>	<p>Not willing to lease for this purpose, not willing to lease for less than 5 years, properties required extensive capital improvements</p>	<p>Few vacant commercial properties with enough space that are available for lease</p>
<p>Vacant Schools</p>	<p>All boards were contacted about the</p>		<p>No schools were available for lease</p>

	leasing of vacant schools, plus one private school		or lease for this purpose with the exception of the former Victoria Park school that would require extensive renovations and has been closed for more than 2 years
Vacant Land – Municipal and Commercial	This was considered in relation to pre-fabricated building types	Municipality owns some vacant land (Park Ave E) and park types spaces that could be used for housing Some privately owned properties are vacant that could be contacted for sale, serviced and re-zoned	Not pursued at this time as not appropriate for temporary use

Comments

The Chatham Banquet Hall and Conference Centre was chosen as the best fit for the temporary shelter with the goal in closing the overnight services within 12-18 months. At that time, alternative transitional housing will be utilized and the final months of the lease could be for day services only.

A lease agreement has not been finalized. Cost is expected to be \$9.00 per square foot (triple net) per year for approximately 10,000 square feet.

To successfully house Chatham-Kent’s homeless, the management team, employment and social services staff and community partners will provide all needed services. Due to the short duration, and the need to ensure a ‘housing-focused’ approach is maintained an RFP to operate the shelter is no longer under consideration. Temporary staff will be hired to replace redeployed staff who are gradually returning to their other municipal positions. The positions will be funded through provincial funding. Redeployed staff have been a tremendous asset to ensure a safe and successful temporary shelter.

While the shelter continues to be heavily used, it is important to note that in each month of 2020, an average of 18 individuals or families have been housed through Chatham-Kent's coordinated access program. That is 127 households so far this year, despite the challenges of the pandemic. The goal of the temporary emergency shelter is to continue to house people by utilizing multiple community partnerships. As stated, the shelter is "housing-focused", which means all staff are trained to focus activities and interactions with guests to be related to housing. This is a proven model supported by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and federal and provincial funders. The shelter cannot be a place of choice to stay, but merely a place to pass through on one's way to something better. It is what sets a Housing Focused Shelter apart from smaller operating shelters that are often in the business of sheltering versus housing. In the coming months, it is the goal of Employment and Social Services to increase outreach efforts (utilizing current staff) in partnership with Outreach groups like ROCK Missions to reach even more individuals in need of housing. This would expand on the work already being completed by Ontario Works case managers and the Rapid Re-Housing team.

Areas of Strategic Focus and Critical Success Factors

The recommendation(s) in this report support(s) the following areas of strategic focus:

Economic Prosperity:

Chatham-Kent is an innovative and thriving community with a diversified economy

A Healthy and Safe Community:

Chatham-Kent is a healthy and safe community with sustainable population growth

People and Culture:

Chatham-Kent is recognized as a culturally vibrant, dynamic, and creative community

Environmental Sustainability:

Chatham-Kent is a community that is environmentally sustainable and promotes stewardship of our natural resources

The recommendations in this report support the following critical success factors:

Financial Sustainability:

The Corporation of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is financially sustainable

Open, Transparent and Effective Governance:

The Corporation of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is open, transparent and effectively governed with efficient and bold, visionary leadership

Has the potential to support all areas of strategic focus & critical success factors

Neutral issues (does not support negatively or positively)

Financial Implications

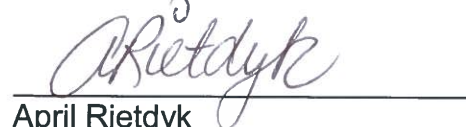
The approximate cost for this lease will be \$125,000 including utilities and maintenance per year for two years. This will be funded by provincial dollars utilizing the Social Assistance Relief Fund (SSRF) and the Community Homeless Prevention Initiative Funding (CHPI). Council will be provided with updates on ongoing funding options.

Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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