

Municipality of Chatham-Kent

Health and Human Services

Housing Services

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Ray Harper, CPA, CMA, PMP, Director, Municipal Housing Development
Josh Myers, Director, Housing Services - Operations

Date: April 8, 2024

Subject: Emergency Transitional Cabin Program Location

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. Administration pursue the development of an Emergency Transitional Cabin Program on Municipality of Chatham-Kent owned 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham properties.
2. Council authorize Administration to hire a contracted Project Manager for a 2-year period to assist with the Emergency Transitional Cabin Program project along with current and future municipal affordable housing developments across the community, in the amount of \$264,000 and be funded from the ESS Future Economic Downturn Reserve.
3. Administration begin pre-site development work at this location including drawings and site servicing up to \$500,000, which will be added to the debenture costs of the capital build and paid as part of operations over a recommended period.

Background

On January 15, 2024, Council approved the following recommendations found in the [Municipal Options to Address Growing Housing and Homelessness Crisis](#) report:

1. Housing Services be directed to complete a Request for Proposal (RFP) to secure 50 transitional cabins to replace Victoria Park Place. The final capital costs, along with recommended locations, will be returned to Council for final authorization.
2. Housing Services complete a RFP for 24/7 security services at the future cabin location to ensure that occupants are provided a safe and secure location. The approved cost would be included in the final operational budget for Council approval.

3. Housing Services be authorized to operate this site providing 24/7 case management staffing that focuses on securing community housing, life skills training, and community referrals. Updated operational costs would return to Council for approval.

Administration is working to replace emergency shelter operations with an emergency transitional housing solution that includes the purchase of individual cabins. This model will have a positive impact on the lives of the people who need this program now and those who will need it in the future. This program will be treated like other forms of affordable housing including similar expectations, controlled entry and independent living. In addition, staff and security will be on site 24/7 but will focus heavily on life skill development, community referrals and rehousing in the public and private market.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, administration has provided emergency shelter to those in need at three separate locations. Considerable time and effort have been spent reviewing possible locations for this type of programming since 2020. Council has set guidelines for Administration to consider while reviewing properties which are:

- Not adjacent to elementary schools, splash pads and wading pools or licensed child care centres;
- Not in parks or directly park adjacent; and,
- Not within residential neighbourhood interiors.

Administration has used these guidelines to compare properties while also working to ensure that any recommended property is accessible to the people that will temporarily live here. Moving this program outside of Chatham would come with added transportation costs and reduced participation in the program thereby limiting the community's efforts in reducing homelessness. It is also expected that the prevalence of encampments would grow at a faster rate than they already are should the program be located outside of Chatham.

Over 25 properties across the city of Chatham have been reviewed for the Emergency Transitional Cabin Program location. After extensive efforts reviewing properties, one property is being recommended that best meets the needs of the program, constraints of location and timelines for the expiring lease. Administration however is providing information on two other properties that although not recommended at this time, could be considered in the future.

Comments

Administration has reviewed every appropriate municipally owned property within Chatham that is appropriately located and sized. In addition, Administration has reviewed a number of vacant land parcels to consider for purchase; however, after further detailed review, these locations were either not for sale or not appropriate (e.g. zoning, environmental concerns). Members of the public have also recommended vacant properties around Chatham; however, these recommendations were on sites

that have significant environmental concerns, which is why they remain vacant and undeveloped.

Additionally, the use of several different parking lots was considered but removing them would cause unintended consequences on a number of other community services and businesses.

Recommended Location: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham

Administration is recommending 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham (Corner of Park and Hyslop) for the location of the Emergency Transitional Cabin Program. This location is a vacant, semi-treed lot that would work well in providing housing and supports to Chatham-Kent's vulnerable population. Figures 1 – 7 below provide different views of this property.

Figure 1: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham Aerial View



Figure 2: Park Street and Hyslop, Chatham Aerial View



Figure 3: Park Street, Hyslop and Park Ave E, Chatham Aerial View



Figure 4: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham Georcortex System View**Figure 5: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham
(corner of Park St. & Hyslop Street View)**

Figure 6: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham (Park Street View)**Figure 7: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham (Hyslop Street View)**

Property details are as follows:

- Civic Addresses: 378, 390 & 392 Park Street, Chatham
- Property Roll Numbers: 3650 420 007 19100 & 3650 420 007 19300
- Property Identification Numbers: 005090163 & 005090164
- Zoning: Urban Commercial (Highway Commercial First Density) (UC(HC1))
- Land use designation (Official Plan): Highway Commercial Area
- Acres: 0.83 acres (0.34 hectares)

The location is:

- 250 m from a convenience store
- 350 m from a bus stop
- 1.1 km from Outreach for Hunger
- 1 km from a laundromat
- 1.3 km from ROCK Missions
- 1.6 km from Hope Haven
- 1.9 km and 2.5 km from two grocery stores

While this location is at the end of a residential neighborhood, given its proximity to Park Ave East (250 m), staff are not concerned that the site would be inaccessible to those that will be temporarily living here. There is a community park approximately 200 m away from this location separated by railway tracks and a natural treed barrier. There are no schools, licensed child centers or splash pads in the vicinity as per Council recommendations. The site has limited neighbors and is close to a main road, which is important to support future participants' privacy.

Administration observe no major difference in accessibility from many of the neighborhoods across Chatham where housing has been secured for people who were previously experiencing homelessness. In 2023, staff helped 256 people across Chatham who were at high risk or actively experiencing homelessness to secure housing.

This location was previously dedicated to the adjacent animal shelter for a future dog-walking park through a 2015 report and presentation to Council titled "Animal Shelter Fundraising Committee Update". Administration commits to exploring alternate future options for a dog walking park including the review of adjacent municipal land.

Additional Properties Considered

435 Grand Ave West, Chatham:

435 Grand Ave West is a municipally owned site. The municipality's Health & Human Services (HHS) Department's office is located on this site. It is surrounded by green space and youth soccer fields. This location is not being recommended at this time due to a current courthouse lease agreement with the Ministry of the Attorney General, which would need an amendment to provision this development. The Provincial Courthouse is located beside 435 Grand Ave West; however, the 30-year lease agreement (ending April 1, 2031) that the Municipality has with the Province covers much of the surrounding vacant green space and parking lots. Amendments to this lease agreement are possible; however, it is unknown whether the Ministry of the Attorney General would be amenable to the required changes or whether these changes could be made prior to May 31, 2025 when the current lease agreement at Victoria Park Place expires.

Municipality of Chatham-Kent owned 421-461 Park Ave East, Chatham:

With the acquisition of the 700 Park Avenue East property in Chatham, the Public Works department is now able to transfer their operations to this new 700 Park Avenue East location. This transition will allow the 421-461 Park Ave East property to be used for future affordable housing development. The new Public Works site will take a few months to be prepared for operations as well as for the transfer of materials from the existing site to the new site. In addition, the 421-461 Park Ave East property requires environmental studies and processes that will take several months to complete. Depending on the results of these reports, further site remediation processes may be required to make this site suitable for residential purposes. There likely could be extensive time involved in getting a Record of Site Condition (RSC) through the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). While this site would also make a good location for the Emergency Transitional Cabin Program, staff are concerned with the mentioned unknown variables to make this recommendation at this time.

Summary

378, 390 & 392 Park Street in Chatham will best meet the requirements for an Emergency Transitional Cabin Program due to all of the reasons previously described. Administration will include this location in the RFP to inform potential proponents. Several interested modular housing developers (including local) have contacted Administration already. It is important to provide a site location and as much detailed information in the RFP to attract a wide range of proposals and ensure a competitive process by comparing different vendors' offerings, approaches, and prices.

Staff have heard from neighborhood associations and some business groups that this type of housing, as well as supportive housing, should be located outside of town or within an industrial area away from others. Administration is confident that doing so would prove counter-productive, as the people that need this service would be unable to access it. This is demonstrated by the low waitlists for community housing in some of the outlying communities. Public transportation and access to services are essential considerations for housing developments.

Encampments continue to grow in every municipality in Ontario as part of the growing housing & homelessness crisis. Encampments exist for a number of reasons and there have been a variety of approaches to address them. Administration has seen no evidence to support the idea that making services harder to access will reduce the prevalence of encampments. Encampments and social disorder is growing largely because of people living in extreme poverty with limited access to critical services. These phenomena are not growing because of the programs that are trying to help.

Additional information

The Emergency Transitional Cabin Program on its own will not:

- End homelessness;
- End opioid poisonings;
- End mental illness;
- End addictions; or,
- End crimes of survival.

The Emergency Transitional Cabin Program will:

- Improve the lives of people interested in accessing this programming;
- Give organizations like Canadian Mental Health Association, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance and Community Living an opportunity to provide services to their clients in a safe and consistent home;
- Reduce the number of emergency room visits due to homelessness; and,
- Provide a critical starting point that will afford people with the dignity and opportunity to change their lives.

It is with this understanding that staff are developing a multi-pronged approach to deliver additional affordable housing options and increase community supports that are currently missing in Chatham-Kent.

A contracted Project Manager for two years is needed to provide support with the development of the Emergency Transitional Cabin Program. This position will assist in the site servicing, RFP and construction processes. This Project Manager will also support several municipal affordable housing projects that are currently under construction as well as a number of housing projects that are in the pre-development stages. This position will provide effective and efficient project management, oversee all aspects of capital projects from scoping/planning, design, tender and construction processes, and manage the various consultants and contractors. The Project Manager will coordinate with internal departments and external stakeholders to ensure a cohesive and successful delivery of capital projects, and transition built infrastructure to the divisions/departments within the Municipality managing the operations of these assets. With an increased focus on creating sustainable housing solutions, a dedicated resource to support these projects is needed.

Upon completion of the RFP evaluation process, Administration will bring a report to Council with finalized capital and operational costs.

On [January 15, 2024](#), Administration received Council approval to move forward with an Emergency Transitional Cabin Program that would replace the existing emergency shelter. Since then, Administration has met with organizations that make up the community Housing & Homelessness committee to discuss next steps. The emergency Transitional Cabin Program is only one aspect of what is needed to change the





trajectory of homelessness in the community. Members of the committee agree to work together to explore how to expand immediate access to self-contained, affordable modular housing for people experiencing homelessness. This concept was detailed as Phase 2 in the January 15, 2024 Council approved report titled [Municipal Options to Address Growing Housing and Homelessness Crisis](#). Staff will continue to review the feasibility of partnerships that can bring this plan to fruition across Chatham-Kent.

Staff and partners will also be hosting a community forum later this year that will map out the current gaps and identify how they are driving homelessness and specifically encampments. Community organizations, businesses, community members and people with lived and living experience will be invited to attend the forum to map out what specifically is required to end the need for encampments in Chatham-Kent. Council members will also be invited to participate in this forum. Together a community plan will be put together with a path forward allowing for focused efforts to pursue grants, fundraising and partnerships.

A steering committee to guide the development of the agenda for this forum has been created and is comprised of representatives from the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Community Living, ROCK Missions, Hope Haven, CMHA and Family Services Kent.

Council Term Priorities

This report supports the following Council Term Priorities:

			
Deliver Excellent Service	Promote Safety & Well-Being	Grow Our Community	Ensure Environmental Sustainability
	2.2,2.5	3.1	

Consultation

Staff are mindful of the human rights implications that come with recommendations for housing and services that are targeted at marginalized groups. Administration has met with staff from the Ontario Human Rights Commission who cautioned administration from making recommendations that could potentially breach citizen's charter rights or human rights, specifically "people zoning" or the practice of approving or denying a service based on the people who access this service. If an area would be

suitable/approved for residential housing, then it should not be denied for another type of residential housing based on the people who would be residing at that location.

Staff have not consulted with the neighboring residents of this location. Staff believe that it is important to inform Council of the potential location before initiating consultations with the community.

Through working with multiple realtors, and reviewing dozens of properties, staff are of the opinion that this is the best location based on accessibility, cost and ability to meet timelines. Staff plan to connect with direct neighbors to discuss the program and hear their concerns on an ongoing basis. The housing and homelessness crisis continues to be a front-page news story as it is having an impact on every community in Canada. What is often heard is that more needs to be done, but there is never consensus on location. What is also clear, and is demonstrated daily in every community across the country, is that homelessness is growing largely as a result of the reduction of affordable housing.

There is no location that is a perfect fit. Failing to support the programs that are trying to help people will only result in more people remaining homeless which leads to more suffering and concerns amongst the broader public. Alternatively, choosing a location that is not accessible to the people that need it introduces a genuine risk that the efforts will prove counterproductive. Chatham-Kent is actively working with community organizations to end homelessness in the community by having sufficient services available and accessible so that no one is required to live in an encampment. We have more work to do as a community and require significant support from the Provincial and Federal government to make this a reality. This Emergency Transitional Cabin Program will move Chatham-Kent in the right direction.

Communication

Following the approval of these recommendations, a “Let’s Talk” page will be launched providing further information to the public on the Housing and Homelessness Crisis and what the Municipality is doing to respond. Additionally, this site will be used to provide the community with regular updates as well as an opportunity to submit questions.

Housing Services will be contacting neighbors on Hyslop St. and those adjacent to this property on Park Street to offer an in-person meeting to discuss more about the program operations and to hear suggestions on how we can best support the neighborhood.

Administration will return to Council to recommend the successful proponent for the RFP and will provide further updates at this time.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)

Chatham-Kent is exceeding targets for market housing. Market housing makes up the vast majority of housing in Chatham-Kent; yet lower income community members cannot afford it, and have few or no other housing options to access.

Both the governments of Canada and Ontario have deemed housing a human right; however, funding for this right has not been adequate. The Municipality will continue to seek opportunities to increase emergency, supportive and deeply affordable housing options for low-income residents.

Marginalized groups including racialized groups, people with mental health or substance use disabilities are over-represented in shelters and encampments in Chatham-Kent and staff seek to provide safe, affordable shelter and housing for those who need it. Health and Human Services staff adhere to a “Housing First” approach as stable housing is key to improving health and wellness.

The growth of the housing market must include growth in the emergency, supportive and deeply affordable housing options if Chatham-Kent wishes to stand for human rights and diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. More people with lived experience will be included in public awareness campaigns and the planning of these projects going forward as part of the department’s DEIJ work.

Financial Implications

It is recommended that the pre-site development work and final capital costs be funded through the issuance of a 15-year internal debenture at 4% interest. The annual debt payment will be added to the operating cost and be brought to Council for base budget funding in the 2025 Budget update this fall. The total operational costs will be determined once a recommended proposal, costing and proponent from the RFP process have been determined.

The contracted Project Manager for a two-year period to assist with the Emergency Transitional Cabin Program project along with current and future municipal affordable housing developments is recommended to be funded from the Employment and Social Services (ESS) Economic Downturn Reserve. The costs for this temporary position is approximately \$132,000 per year (including salary, benefits, computer/software and cell phone). The Project Manager will be situated in the Infrastructure & Engineering Services department.

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Attachment(s): None

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