

**Municipality of Chatham-Kent**

**Health and Human Services**

**Housing Services**

**To:** Mayor and Members of Council  
**From:** Kim Crew, Program Manager, Housing Services  
**Date:** December 9, 2024  
**Subject:** Hope Haven Winter Warming Centre

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**Recommendation**

It is recommended that:

1. The Director of Housing Services (Operations) be authorized to amend the current sole source contract with Hope Haven to expand winter warming services from December 1 to February 28, 2025, subject to terms of the amending agreement being satisfactory to the General Manager, Health and Human Services and the Director of Legal Services. This extended service will cost an additional \$65,250 (including HST) and will be 100% provincially funded from the existing Homeless Prevention Program budget.

**Background**

[On April 8, 2024](#), Council approved a sole source agreement with Hope Haven to provide outreach services, day programming and limited winter warming for people living in deep poverty who are unable to afford their basic needs.

Hope Haven provides a safe place for people to attend, access laundry, shower facilities, and a light meal. In addition to this service, over the last few years Hope Haven has provided a winter warming space to the community when the temperatures have dropped below -5 degrees overnight. Opening their facility in colder temperatures has assisted 40 individuals on average per night. People come into Hope Haven to warm up, have a hot meal, and stay safe from the elements. Hope Haven does not operate as a shelter and as such does not provide sleeping arrangements. Instead, people experiencing homelessness are referred to Victoria Park Place (VPP), but due to record need this service has a waitlist.

The number of people experiencing homelessness continues to rise. Across the country, experts state that it has become easier for people to fall into homelessness but harder to exit it. This statement rings true in Chatham-Kent. Drivers of homelessness such as inadequate income have not kept up with the rising cost of food, housing, and

other necessities, making it more difficult for households in Chatham-Kent to afford essential expenses and much easier to fall into crisis.

Last winter (December 2023), approximately 178 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Chatham-Kent. Since then, the community has seen a 23% increase in homelessness with 218 individuals currently experiencing homelessness. Of those 218 individuals, 125 (57%) individuals have been experiencing homelessness for 180 days or more and 114 (53%) are staying outdoors. This illustrates a 9% increase in chronic homelessness and a 61% increase in the number of individuals living outdoors since last winter.

Chatham-Kent's emergency shelter, Victoria Park Place (VPP), continues to see the impact of rising homelessness in the community. Since opening, the average monthly occupancy rate at VPP is 104% as staff continue to use "overflow" options like motels. On average, all beds are filled at VPP in addition to families requiring stays in motels. The average occupancy at VPP last winter was 107% while the current occupancy sits at 118%, marking an 11% increase. There are no financial means or available and willing motel space to further increase capacity. Not only has the number of individuals requiring emergency housing increased, but the amount of time individuals require this service has increased. Last winter the average length of stay in the shelter was 43 days. So far this year, the average has increased by 109% to 90 days. This is due to the lack of available affordable housing. People simply cannot afford what the market is offering and therefore remain homeless longer.

### **Comments**

The increase in people experiencing homelessness is impacting a wide array of community services. Additional warming options are needed to reduce the loss of life and demand on other emergency services. The Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (CKHA) emergency department is one specific service that may be directly impacted by not expanding warming drop-in spaces in the community. For people sleeping outdoors (also known as sleeping rough), the emergency room is the only 24/7 service they can access. CKHA has noted an increase in patients who are currently homeless and are attending the emergency department reporting medical problems that allow for a six hour stay. It is believed that many of these individuals are attending for warmth and food versus medical emergencies. While this is understandable due to the lack of other options available, the consequence is that they are using resources that should be reserved for people facing medical emergencies.

By providing an additional overnight drop-in space, CKHA may see a drop in people attending for social issues potentially reducing emergency room wait times. This benefits all Chatham-Kent residents.

Hope Haven has proposed opening their warming centre each evening from December 1, 2024, to February 28, 2025. The service will open from 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM and will provide an opportunity for individuals to get out of the cold weather. This extended service will reduce the risk of death from exposure and decrease the risk of open fires.

Hope Haven continues to work with the Municipality to encourage and support people with accessing and connecting to services, such as Victoria Park Place for emergency housing, and providing referrals to community partners in the areas of mental health and addictions.

**Council Term Priorities**

This report supports the following Council Term Priorities:

			
<p><b>Deliver Excellent Service</b></p>	<p><b>Promote Safety &amp; Well-Being</b></p>	<p><b>Grow Our Community</b></p>	<p><b>Ensure Environmental Sustainability</b></p>
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**Consultation**

Housing Services in partnership with ROCK Missions recently completed a number of engagements with people experiencing homelessness as well as the community at large.

The community at large wants to see affordable and supportive housing so that no one is living in tents and encampments or needs to access warming spaces. Chatham-Kent (CK) needs significant capital and operational funding to build and manage the required amount of affordable and supportive housing. Until this is realized, programs like this are required to reduce harms and ultimately the loss of life in CK.

Housing Services plans to continue to meet with BIA, CK Police and Hope Haven in an effort to proactively address community concerns and fears. We intend to work together to collaboratively reduce the harms that homelessness is having on our community.

**Communication**

Communication is proposed to be through the inclusion of this report on the Council agenda and related communications.

Further, social media will be utilized to communicate this program and availability to the community. In addition, staff and partners will share this information directly with those that may require this service.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)**

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice frameworks are involved in homelessness prevention. The faces of people experiencing homelessness in Chatham-Kent are varied and diverse. These diverse identities include, but are not limited to, women, Indigenous peoples, young mothers, racialized people/people of colour, people who use substances, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and people with physical disabilities and/or mental health illnesses.

Behind each individual supported by emergency housing services is a person with lived experiences and unacknowledged strengths who is struggling to survive in the face of systemic exclusion and discrimination. Efforts to address homelessness must be accountable to and inclusive of those with experiences of poverty, homelessness, isolation, social exclusion, and multiple issues of marginalization. The work in homelessness prevention requires an acknowledgement of the lived realities and challenges facing those experiencing homelessness.

### **Financial Implications**

The Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) is a provincially funded program that supports Ontario's 47 municipal service managers to provide affordable housing and support services for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Housing Services is the Service Manager for the Homeless Prevention Program (HPP) in Chatham-Kent. Service Managers are responsible for providing shelter or housing and supports for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Service Managers receive annual funding from the province to develop programs and supports to address homelessness that best meet local needs.

This extended service will cost an additional \$65,250 (including HST) and will be 100% funded from the existing Homeless Prevention Program.

Prepared by: Kim Crew, Program Manager

Reviewed by: Josh Myers, Director – Operations

Reviewed by: Jodi Guilmette, General Manager, Health and Human Services

Attachment(s): None