

Briefing Note: Mitigation Strategies at the Overflow Shelter

Date: October 2025

Subject: Comprehensive Overview of Operational Contingencies

1. Executive Summary

The Overflow Shelter remains a vital component to Lambton County's response to homelessness, fulfilling a component of County Council's top strategic priority of providing shelter. The site, including by way of the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre (HHRC) serves as the driving force behind Lambton's markedly high housing placements, and near-unique low rates of unsheltered homelessness within Ontario. It is significantly more difficult to progress individuals along the housing continuum when they are residing in encampments, compared to shelter settings. The negative community externalities borne from encampments are the primary crisis currently faced by most Ontario communities.

Since its inception, the Overflow Shelter has directly addressed widespread public demand for increased shelter capacity. Occupancy has remained high, consistently at 80-90% even across the summer months. The residents in shelter are not a static cohort of individuals, but reflect ongoing, significant demand for local homelessness services, despite very strong local housing outcomes. Were it to close, there would be more than 30 individuals who would almost certainly reside in scatter-site encampments across the City of Sarnia, and all member municipalities would be limited in their ability to enforce local encampment protocols.

Since its inception, the County has implemented extensive, proactive mitigation strategies, often at great expense, in direct response to concerns from neighbouring residents, especially the Melrose Community Group, whose feedback has informed ongoing site adaptations. This briefing outlines a detailed list of all current operational mitigation interventions.

2. Current Mitigation Strategies

All current strategies have been informed by:

- Two separate **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)** audits by **Sarnia Police Services** (initial: 2023; updated: Jan 2025).
- Ongoing dialogue and formal community meetings with the **Melrose Community Group**.
- Continuous feedback from local service partners and neighbours.

A. Security & Monitoring

1. A **minimum of two trained security guards** are on duty at all times, 24/7.
2. A **third security guard** is deployed during periods of increased site activity based on feedback from the Melrose Community Group.
3. A **marked on-site security vehicle** is permanently stationed at the property exterior corner for visibility of both building access points and deterrence.
4. Security performs **mandatory, frequent, documented perimeter rounds** throughout the day and night.
5. Rounds include **the entire back of the property** directly adjacent to a row of nearby townhomes.
6. **Real-time, direct communication** is maintained between security and Overflow/HHRC staff during rounds.
7. **Proactive loitering intervention** is conducted during rounds, directing individuals back on site or referring them to external services as appropriate.
8. **Surveillance cameras** are installed across multiple angles of the building.

9. Additional **camera coverage has been added** at flagged congregation points exterior to the building and the back of the property.
10. **Bright lighting** was installed around various points on perimeter and property line.
11. **CPTED principles** guide all surveillance and lighting placement to maximize deterrence.

B. Structural & Environmental Enhancements

12. A **full privacy fence** was installed on the property line that borders a residential home before commencing operations.
13. **Additional Landscaping** was completed along this same property line, and the building exterior to discourage congregation and increase clearer visibility.
14. **Designated fencing with privacy screen** was installed across the client entrance in response to significant feedback from the community that individuals and their belongings were visible from Exmouth St.
15. A **designated smoking area** was created within the property to prevent smoking on sidewalks.
16. The smoking area is **actively monitored** by staff, security, including with live cameras to ensure proper use.
17. **The client access point was relocated** to the gated Exmouth entrance to minimize traffic along Melrose Street.
18. **Perimeter landscaping and property maintenance** conducted regularly to increase cleanliness of property, discourage congregation and maintain clean sight lines.

C. Client Engagement & Behavioural Management

19. New clients receive a **mandatory orientation** upon intake that emphasizes respectful neighbourhood behaviour.
20. Staff regularly provide **verbal reminders** on smoking, noise, and loitering restrictions.
21. Large, clear **signage** is posted on-site reminding clients of the code of conduct, and behaviours that can impact the community.
22. **Zero-tolerance policy for drug use** on-site is strictly enforced.
23. **Immediate service restrictions** are applied to clients who violate on-site conduct rules.
24. Clients are **informed of community feedback** and reminded how individual behaviour impacts the shelter's relationship with neighbours, in daily practice and at regular all-resident meetings.
25. Clients who receive repeated service restrictions and do not show improved behaviour **meet with the shelter supervisor** to develop a behavioural agreement, outlining goals, desired behaviour, and strategies for both personal and peer accountability.
26. Harm reduction services have been **removed from this site** to minimize traffic, in preparation for regional integration via the HART Hub.

D. Cleaning Measures

27. Clients participate in **daily on-site cleaning**, which includes garbage pickup and property maintenance.
28. Cleaning responsibilities include **entrances, sidewalks, the smoking area, and parking lots**.
29. Less frequently, clients participate in **off-site cleaning**, focusing on sidewalks, public boulevards, and nearby parkettes.
30. Participation is **voluntary but incentivized**, offering clients community-building opportunities and recognition.
31. Clients in the cleaning program receive **life-skills development**, coaching, and mentorship from staff.
32. Cleaning participation is **tracked** to ensure coverage and accountability.
33. A **dedicated dumpster** is on-site and frequently emptied to manage debris.
34. Refuse and debris are **promptly cleaned** after incidents or weather events.

- 35. Additional signage is posted at site exits regarding garbage to reduce off-site refuse.
- 36. On-site staff and security frequently remind clients to dispose of waste on-site before leaving.
- 37. Extensive third-party cleaning services are utilized to maintain a clean property.

E. Neighbourhood Relations & Community Engagement

- 38. Regular **meetings with the Melrose Community Group** allow residents to share feedback and help shape site adaptations.
- 39. Staff maintain **ongoing, frequent, ad-hoc communication** with neighbours to catch emerging concerns early.
- 40. The shelter team provides **follow-up responses** after every Melrose Community Group meeting.
- 41. Feedback from neighbours is reviewed frequently during regular staff meetings and integrated into operations.
- 42. A second **CPTED audit** was completed by Sarnia Police Services in **January 2025** to reassess community risks.
- 43. Recommendations from both CPTED reviews are being actively implemented, including additional cameras, lighting, and additional security door measures.

F. Service Coordination & Flow Management

- 44. Clients do **not access the site directly** for shelter; all intake is coordinated through **Good Shepherd's Lodge**. This strategy reduces **in-person traffic** and unnecessary presence near residential properties.
- 45. **Good Shepherd's Lodge fills first** before beds are utilized at the Overflow Shelter, minimizing traffic volume.
- 46. **Controlled building access** further limits non-resident congregation near entrances, including restricted hours for entry/exit.
- 47. Standardized restriction rules, guided by best practices and shelter standards, are utilized to ensure on-site code of conduct is followed.
- 48. An extensive list of community partner agencies participate in regular on-site service delivery to promote life stability among clients, and ultimately independence to reduce reliance of the site.
- 49. Partner agencies include, but are not limited to, the Inn of the Good Shepherd, the County of Lambton Social Services, Sarnia Police Services IMPACT, Lambton EMS Community Health Integrated Care team, John Howard Society, Service Canada, ACT, Emmanuel Presbyterian Church etc.

G. Multi-Agency & Enforcement Partnerships

- 50. Ongoing partnership with **Sarnia Police Services IMPACT Team** enables proactive and timely interventions.
- 51. Regular collaboration with **Lambton EMS CHIC Team** ensures health and crisis management on and near the site.
- 52. Additional support from **mental health, addictions, and housing partners** is leveraged to address high-risk behaviours.
- 53. The **Social Services Outreach Team** is frequently deployed to engage individuals experiencing homelessness in nearby public spaces.
- 54. Minimum of **weekly shelter meetings** are held between the County and Inn of the Good Shepherd to address emergent concerns and ensure adherence to the host of ongoing mitigation strategies.

3. Conclusion

The County of Lambton continues to take extensive, and responsive steps to mitigate community impacts of its HHRC and Overflow Shelter. These steps go well beyond what is seen in comparator municipalities, and have been co-developed with community input, most notably through the Melrose Community Group.

The facility operationalizes Council's #1 strategic priority—shelter—and stands as a core driver behind Lambton's successful housing outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness.

The County is committed to closing the Overflow program at the soonest available opportunity but must rely on local demand for shelter services as the primary factor for this consideration. Day programming services are expected to move to the current CMHA office at 210 Lochiel St. by November 3rd, contingent on a final HART Hub budget from the Ministry of Health.

The County remains open to continuing community feedback, and evidence-informed solutions.