



## SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>WARDEN AND LAMBTON COUNTY COUNCIL</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND SOCIAL PLANNING</b>
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<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	<b>February 5, 2025</b>
<b>INFORMATION ITEM:</b>	<b>Homelessness Prevention Services</b>

### **BACKGROUND**

In October 2023, and January 2024, Lambton County Council received reports which offered an overview of emergency housing in Lambton County, including the extension of the Out of the Cold program operating at 837 Exmouth Street, in the City of Sarnia. These reports described the continued elevated demand for emergency housing services, despite tremendous housing outcomes across the network of community providers that support individuals experiencing homelessness. The January 2024 report also described the services and outcomes offered through the local Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre (“**HHRC**”) that is co-located at this site. Several subsequent monthly reports offered regular key outcomes related to both the Out of the Cold Program and HHRC.

In December 2024, Lambton County Council received a report that further described the elevated local demand for emergency housing, which led to a business case submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing through the Encampment Response Initiative funding. This submission sought additional short-term dollars to support this elevated demand.

This report seeks to offer a brief overview of the services and outcomes of both the Out of the Cold program, and the HHRC, including recent changes resulting from a community meeting held in December 2024 with neighbourhood representatives.

### **DISCUSSION**

In partnership with several local service providers, two programs are operated at 837 Exmouth St. Sarnia that serve households experiencing homelessness. The overnight Out of the Cold emergency housing program is operated at this site in close partnership with the Inn of the Good Shepherd. With assistance from various community health and human

service agencies, the County of Lambton also coordinates and operates the daytime HHRC at this site.

### Out of the Cold Program

The Out of the Cold program offers up to 35 shelter beds for individuals experiencing homelessness. Beyond overnight shelter services, this program offers associated basic need supports such as food security for shelter residents. Since its inception, the program has supported more than 9,000 shelter bed night stays, with a monthly average of approximately 650 stays. More than 160 unique individuals have been supported through this program.

The Inn of the Good Shepherd has extended their agency, including the staffing compliment and numerous related necessary operations, to operate the Out of the Cold program. Shared oversight, staffing, and frequent collaboration between the County of Lambton and the Inn of the Good Shepherd have been necessary to operate this initiative. Despite significant strain on the limited shared workforce and the high regular operating cost, this program was continued across 2024 to offer adequate emergency housing opportunities for the significantly increased number of individuals living unsheltered in our community. Demand for this program has increased markedly due to the cold weather in recent months. Recently, occupancy between the Out of the Cold program and the Good Shepherd's Lodge is consistently near or above 90%.

This site and the Good Shepherd's Lodge also offer low-barrier overnight warming centres in instances of extreme weather warnings that are issued by Lambton Public Health.

### Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre

The HHRC operates on weekdays using opposite hours from the Out of the Cold program so that individuals can remain sheltered if they choose during daytime hours. The HHRC is a multidisciplinary repurposed church space that offers lower-barrier day-programming for individuals experiencing homelessness. Various social and health service agencies support the operations of the program, including the Inn of the Good Shepherd, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Lambton Public Health, and Lambton EMS Community Health Integrated Care ("**CHIC**") Team. On-site programming is offered through a wide range of partners to meet the most relevant needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, including Service Canada, Community Legal Assistance, the Mobile Care Bus, North Lambton Community Health Centre and more.

Through a collaborative approach, individuals experiencing homelessness are supported with basic needs, health services, and primarily housing supports with the central goal of progressing along the housing continuum. Individuals living in an encampment often visit the HHRC several times prior to opting to accept services, including permanently leaving the encampment to stay at the emergency shelter, as it takes time for them to build trust with the staff. The HHRC has supported almost 9,000 visits from those experiencing homelessness, served more than 375 unique individuals, and 208 individuals have

progressed from an experience of homelessness into more permanent housing directly through the County homelessness team in connection with this program. An additional 79 individuals have been housed through community partners across this same duration through this collaborative approach.

In line with best practices, the low-barrier approach taken at HHRC has drastically increased the number of individuals who seek services necessary to move from the street or shelter into housing.

### Operational Contingencies

Offering the mandated essential services for the most vulnerable members of our community can pose operational challenges. To reduce the potential impact on the surrounding community, numerous measures were introduced at the site. These initial mitigation strategies were informed by a Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (“**CPTED**”) inspection performed by Sarnia Police Services. These measures have since been enhanced using feedback from partner agencies, in addition to a community meeting requested by members of the neighbouring properties in December 2024. A second CPTED was also recently completed by Sarnia Police Services in January 2025. The recommendations from this community meeting and the recent CPTED assessment are being actioned, and include changes to lighting, cameras, signage, building access and locks.

To reasonably address concerns raised in the community meeting held December 2024, the following mitigation strategies were discussed and have been implemented:

### Increased Monitoring

There has been an increase in the staff/security presence in the areas surrounding the shelter to discourage loitering and ensure clients respect private property. This includes doubling every security shift to ensure two guards are monitoring the property at all times with frequent, tracked mandatory minimum external rounds. A security vehicle has also been stationed outside of the site entrance at all times.

### Designated Smoking Area

A designated smoking area within the shelter’s premises has been implemented to encourage clients to use this space rather than public areas.

### Fencing

Fencing has been erected around the property to reduce visibility of the smoking area and provide more privacy to the neighbours. Covering for the fencing, that permits the wind to blow through without removing the covering, has been installed.

### Community Education

Staff have reinforced, and will continue to reinforce, with individuals attending the shelter and the HHRC the importance of respecting the neighbourhood and avoiding disruptive behaviors like loitering and smoking near residential homes.

### Site Maintenance

On a regular basis, staff and clients make rounds to remove refuse or clutter on the property. Many individuals utilizing the services volunteer to complete this task on a consistent basis. A dedicated dumpster is utilized and frequently emptied to better enable the reduction of debris on property.

### Collaborative Solutions

We work closely with many community agencies along with the Sarnia Police IMPACT team, the Lambton EMS CHIC team, and many other multidisciplinary agencies to ensure a harmonious environment for both shelter clients and the neighborhood.

### Coordinated Intake

For the overnight shelter service, individuals cannot initially directly access the site for a bed. Instead, all intakes and referrals are facilitated in a coordinated manner through the Good Shepherd's Lodge to reduce the amount of in-person traffic surrounding the site.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no financial impact on the County Budget as a result of this report.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

Consultations have taken place with members of the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table, Sarnia Police Services, the internal Social Services Division team, and numerous social service agencies in the community.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

Delivering emergency housing and the multidisciplinary health and housing services at HHRC is in keeping with the County's Mission to promote an enhanced quality of life through the provision of responsive and efficient services accomplished by working with municipal and community partners.

The activities of the Division support the Community Development Area of Effort #3 in the County of Lambton's Strategic Plan, specifically:

- Strengthening the County's advocacy and lobbying efforts with other levels of government to raise the profile of the County and its needs to secure improved senior government supports, funding, grants, and other resources to meet emerging infrastructure and service needs;
- Consulting with the community and stakeholders on ways to increase housing options and affordability, and innovative programs and initiatives that focus on poverty reduction and promote social belonging;
- Supporting the development of a variety of affordable housing to meet demand;
- Implementing, monitoring and updating community health and wellness-related plans and priorities, including, but not limited to, the *Housing and Homelessness Plan*, *Community Safety & Well-Being Plan*, the Long-Term Care division's mission, vision, and values, *Age Friendly Community Planning* framework, Lambton Public Health's strategic priorities, *Lambton Drug & Alcohol Strategy*, *Lambton EMS Master Plan*, and *Child Care and Early Years 5-Year Service System Plan*; and
- Advocating for, and supporting access to, mental health and addiction services.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Out of the Cold program and HHRC provide critical resources to reduce unsheltered homelessness in the County of Lambton and provide life-saving health and basic need supports including shelter to the most vulnerable members of our community. Both programs are imperative to continue to operate while the multi-year Supportive and Affordable Housing Strategic Development Plan is implemented to address the affordable and supportive housing crisis in Lambton County.