



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES, HOUSING SERVICES
PREPARED BY:	Melissa Fitzpatrick, Manager Melisa Johnson, Manager (Acting)
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MEETING DATE:	June 21, 2023
INFORMATION ITEM:	Housing and Homelessness Plan Progress Report

BACKGROUND

Under the *Housing Services Act, 2011*, Service System Managers must provide an annual report to the public on the progress towards their plans by June 30th of each year. The attached Progress Report highlights the work completed over the past year on the implementation of the County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 - 2024.

DISCUSSION

The County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 - 2024 frames the planning and delivery of housing and homelessness supports within the community. Each year the County works towards the four strategic directions outlined by the plan to achieve the vision "every person has an affordable, suitable and adequate home."

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the Social Services system with unprecedented challenges, particularly in homelessness prevention and housing stability. Through 2022, the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness remained drastically elevated, placing increased demands on the need for case management supports and housing placements. Through strong partnerships with community agencies, the County continues to make significant advances towards the goals of the Housing and Homelessness Plan while serving an extraordinary number of households who experience housing insecurity.

The Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 - 2024 identifies four goals:

1. Increase and sustain supply and appropriate mix of affordable housing;
2. Increase access to affordable housing and supports that meet people's needs to achieve housing;

3. Coordinated housing and homelessness service systems;
4. Ending homelessness.

Some key accomplishments during the 2022 year include the following:

#1 Increase and sustain supply and appropriate mix of affordable housing:

- In 2022, Council approved the development of an affordable housing reserve and contributed \$1.2M to it.
- Received \$1.8M in funding from the National Housing Strategy Co-Investment Fund for the affordable housing development at Maxwell Park Place.
- 2022 marked the seventh year of the County's 10-Year Capital Asset Management and Funding Plan. The amount of \$4M dollars annually assists in addressing identified capital needs of the 830 County owned social housing units.
- Three affordable units were approved with Habitat for Humanity prior to 2022. Construction occurred throughout 2021/2022. Two units received occupancy in 2022 with the third unit expecting occupancy in 2023.
- The Housing Services Department purchased a duplex to add two rent geared-to-income one-bedroom units to the social housing supply in the County. These units were purchased in 2022 with renovations expected to be completed and occupancy to occur in 2023.

#2 Increase access to affordable housing supports that meet people's needs to achieve housing:

- A total of 156 households in the County received the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) to assist with housing stability and prevent homelessness. Individuals from the centralized wait list for rent geared-to-income assistance who were precariously housed as well as individuals who were homeless and receiving support through emergency shelter were referred to the program.
- A total of 126 households received the municipal Rental Assistance Program (RAP). RAP is a short term supplement meant to help individuals cover the cost of rent while waiting for additional financial supports or employment to begin. This support empowers recipients to maintain their housing through difficult financial circumstances and avoid the hardships of entering the emergency shelter system.
- The Community Support Workers (CSW) in the Housing Services Department assisted an average of 128 individuals monthly. In addition to assisting individuals from their caseload, the CSWs were tasked with regular check-ins with tenants living in County owned units. This contact was an opportunity to ensure tenants had access to necessary supports and services.
- In 2022, six households received down payment assistance to purchase an affordable home. Eleven households received funds under Lambton Renovates, a program that offers financial assistance to eligible households requiring major repairs and rehabilitation to make the home safe while improving energy efficiency.

#3 Coordinated housing and homelessness service systems:

- In October of 2021, the County launched the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) across local service providers to centralize By-Name list data collection. This shared data system allows clients to receive multiple services under one common consent. In 2022, there were 67 trained HIFIS users and 697 unique client files entered.
- The County was recognized by Built For Zero Canada for achieving a Quality By-Name list.
- Prioritization indicators were selected by Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee to decide what criteria would determine how clients experiencing homelessness in the Coordinated Access System are prioritized for housing resources.
- In 2022, the Housing Services Department and the Homelessness Prevention team implemented a local policy that ensures one in every ten vacancies in County owned units will be offered to households experiencing homelessness. Three households were housed into County owned housing because of this initiative.

#4 Ending Homelessness:

- Expanded an integrated team of CSWs to include staff from the Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society and Canadian Mental Health Association, in addition to staff in the Ontario Works and Homelessness Prevention Departments, the Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Centre, and the Inn of Good Shepherd. The multiagency team remains focused on permanently housing individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and ensuring supports are in place to successfully retain housing.
- Placed 142 individuals experiencing homelessness into their own permanent housing. Less than 9% of these individuals returned to homelessness.
- A total of 616 diversion services were offered with 104 individuals successfully diverted from the emergency shelter system.
- In 2022, two Community Outreach Workers were hired to provide case management supports to clients sleeping rough. In partnership with Lambton Public Health and North Lambton Community Health Centre, Community Outreach staff assist clients wherever they are to ensure connections to primary care services, harm reduction tools and services, and to receive supports to find permanent housing.

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 internal Social Services Division team, and numerous social service agencies in the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Implementation of the County's Housing and Homelessness Plan is a legislated initiative delivered 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:

- Advocating in a manner that raises the profile of the County and its needs in order to secure improved government supports, funding, grants, and other resources.
- Developing programs and initiatives that address poverty reduction and promote social belonging.
- Planning for and responding to the ever-changing needs of an aging population, homelessness and retaining young people in the community while supporting their transition to being employed community members and future leaders.
- Actively pursuing joint opportunities with community partners that contribute to the well-being of the Lambton Community.

CONCLUSION

The County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 - 2024 frames the planning and delivery of housing and homelessness supports within our community. The development and distribution of an annual Report via the County website fulfills the legislative requirement under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* to report annually on the progress of implementation efforts.