



## SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

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| <b>REPORT TO:</b>        | <b>CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>  |
| <b>DEPARTMENT:</b>       | <b>HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>  |
| <b>PREPARED BY:</b>      | <b>Melissa Fitzpatrick, Manager</b>   |
| <b>REVIEWED BY:</b>      | <b>Valerie Colasanti, General Manager<br/>Stéphane Thiffeault, Chief Administrative Officer</b> |
| <b>MEETING DATE:</b>     | <b>May 15, 2024</b>   |
| <b>INFORMATION ITEM:</b> | <b>Housing, Homelessness and Addictions Summit Outcomes Committee</b>                           |

### **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting on May 3, 2023, County Council passed the following motion:

*#17: Bradley/McRoberts: That the County strike an advisory committee of individuals who attended the County's recent Homelessness Summit to work with the County in implementing the recommendations arising from the summit.*

*Carried.*

This report provides an overview and update on the Housing, Homelessness, and Addictions Summit Outcomes Committee.

### **DISCUSSION**

This report serves to update Council on the outcomes of the meetings held by the Committee. Membership of the Committee included representation from the following: YMCA of Southwestern Ontario, Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce, Sarnia Missionary Church, Vision 74 Inc., The Rapids Family Health Team and a Lambton County Council member. The group was co-chaired by Melissa Fitzpatrick, Manager of Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services, and Michael Gorgey, Manager of Health Promotion, Lambton Public Health.

The Summit Committee met five times and discussed specific priorities at each meeting. Meetings were framed around the five priorities identified from community conversations during the Summit and included:

- Reviewing the Housing, Homelessness, and Addictions Summit report, specifically the five priorities the community identified from summit discussions.
- Reviewing the foundational information related to homelessness and health including processes, working groups, and committees that already exist.
- The Committee offered recommendations for additional areas of focus and efforts needed to address housing, homelessness, and addictions.

The five top priorities identified from the Summit were:

1. Affordable Housing - including supportive and transitional housing.
2. Public Education - to address misinformation and increase knowledge in the community.
3. Advocacy -to different levels of government for funding and for client rights.
4. Access - supporting easily navigated services, including simplifying the process and creating consistent pathways to access services.
5. Collaboration – continue to support collaboration across the community, share resources, and ensure regular communication between partners.



Through the series of meetings emerged many ideas with common themes. Ideas overlapped each of the five priorities and can be summarized as follows:

- A “Not In My Back Yard” (NIMBY) campaign is needed to reduce stigma around homelessness and substance use, to educate the public, to increase awareness surrounding the complexities of these issues, and to debunk myths.
- Humanize homelessness and substance addictions - By highlighting the stories of individuals experiencing these challenges and by sharing their journeys, struggles, and aspirations, it will create a deeper understanding of the trials faced and inspire meaningful solutions that prioritize dignity and compassion.

- Include the voice of lived experience in planning - To truly humanize homelessness and addictions, listening to and amplifying the voices of those with lived experience is essential.
- Advocacy – Advocate to multiple levels of government for adequate funding and policy change to comprehensively address homelessness. This includes raising the rates for social assistance to ensure that individuals and families facing homelessness have access to the resources they need. Increasing social assistance rates is a critical step towards addressing poverty, improving housing stability, and promoting overall well-being.
- Housing affordability – Set aggressive targets to increase affordable and supportive housing supply. Leverage partnerships with community agencies, non-profit organizations, and faith-based groups to collaboratively work on housing solutions.

The Committee acknowledges there are several community planning tables and committees that, in various capacities, are working towards many of the above-mentioned ideas including The Poverty Reduction Network, the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the Community Housing Information Network and the Lambton County Drug and Alcohol Strategy and recognized this work does not need to be duplicated. The Poverty Reduction Network has taken the lead on poverty awareness for many years. Additionally, the Drug and Alcohol strategy identifies an anti-stigma campaign as an activity for 2024, and there is an opportunity to partner with this Committee to plan a joint campaign related to homelessness and addictions.

It is recognized that there is a significant gap in public relations and communications regarding housing and homelessness issues. Overall, there is a sense that the public lacks awareness of the ongoing efforts and advancements made by the various agencies including the County that provide housing and homelessness prevention services. Moreover, many individuals in the public express a desire to assist with addressing the housing and homelessness crisis but may not know how to effectively contribute.

A dedicated public relations and communications plan is needed to effectively inform the public about ongoing initiatives and actively engage them for valuable input and ideas to be a part of the solution. The strategy should encompass a range of options for individuals to contribute, acknowledging the various ways they can assist, from donating basic needs, to supporting fundraising efforts for affordable housing, to those interested in developing affordable housing.

Using funds from within the allowable administration amount of Provincial and Federal grants, the Social Services Division will purchase consultant services to create, coordinate and implement a multimedia campaign including:

- a) promoting how the community and all partners can be part of the solution, debunking myths, promoting best-practices, and amplifying lived experience voices.
- b) engaging the broader community, including those with lived experience.

- c) facilitating community engagement sessions, in person and virtually.

This work will commence in May 2024 and extend throughout the year. The Housing, Homelessness, and Addictions Summit Committee will be engaged as necessary to provide feedback and guidance. In addition, the Committee will be invited to assist in the development of the updated Lambton County Housing and Homelessness Plan, 2025-2030.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **CONSULTATIONS**

Consultations have taken place with the Manager of Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services, the Manager of Health Promotion, the General Manager of Social Services Division, the General Manager of Public Health Services Division, the Manager of Housing Services Department, and members of the Housing, Homelessness, and Addictions Summit Outcomes Committee.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

The activities of this report 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.
- Actively pursuing joint opportunities with community partners that contribute to the well-being of the Lambton Community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Housing, homelessness, and addictions are complex societal issues that require ongoing collaboration amongst community partners and all levels of government to find solutions. The Housing, Homelessness, and Addictions Summit Committee brought together community partners and advocates to examine the community priorities identified during the Stronger Together Summit – A community conversation about housing, homelessness, and addictions in Lambton County. Partnerships, collaboration, creativity, education and understanding are required to work towards a community where every person has an affordable, suitable, and adequate home.