



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	WARDEN AND LAMBTON COUNTY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT:	HOUSING SERVICES HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES ONTARIO WORKS
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MEETING DATE:	September 4, 2024
INFORMATION ITEM:	Homelessness Prevention and Affordable Housing Update

BACKGROUND

At its meeting dated April 3, 2024, Lambton County Council asked that staff *provide brief monthly updates on its affordable housing projects and homelessness prevention efforts within the community.*

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (“**CMSM**”), the Social Services Division is responsible for the delivery of homelessness prevention services as well as housing services.

This report is an update on the current state of each program area.

DISCUSSION

Ontario Works

Ontario Works (“**OW**”) provides financial assistance to those in financial need including emergency assistance to individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless. Financial assistance is provided to assist with living expenses including food, rent and utilities. OW is often the first point of contact for someone who is at risk of becoming homeless and in addition to financial support, action plans are developed, and referrals are made to prevent homelessness. This plan may include housing applications, childcare applications, life stabilization supports and employment readiness activities. Hundreds of households receive these supports monthly.

For the month of June 2024, the OW caseload was 3,052. This represents an increase of 4% over the May 2024 caseload. During the same time frame, the number of OW emergency applications received were 81. In addition to this, 95 households were supported through the Housing Stability Assistance benefit. This includes households in receipt of OW, Ontario Disability Support Program (“**ODSP**”), low-income families not in receipt of social assistance, and seniors. OW data is extracted from the provincial database called the Social Assistance Management System (“**SAMS**”).

Housing Services

The Housing Advocacy Program is an eviction prevention program. Community Support Workers (“**CSWs**”) within this program provide outreach and supports to tenants and their families by advocating on behalf of tenants to improve their quality of life while maintaining their housing. The CSWs have caseloads that consist of many hard to serve individuals with complex needs.

During the month of June:

- 119 unique tenants were assisted to maintain their tenancy.
- 225 visits/contacts were made.
- 18 evictions were prevented.
- 7 applicants were housed from the centralized housing wait list.
- 57 applications were received for the centralized wait list.
- 886 households remain on the centralized wait list.
- 48 months is the average wait time on the list for a one-bedroom unit.
- 3 Lambton Renovates conditional letter of approvals were issued.

Kathleen Avenue Development

Pre-development work is progressing on Kathleen Ave. The proposed project’s schematic design has been approved and the architect is working on design development. The zoning application has been submitted to the City of Sarnia, and while it is being reviewed by City staff, design work will proceed so that the project can move to site plan approval, building permit and shovel in the ground without delay.

Victoria Street Parking Lot

After receiving Council approval on June 5, 2024, staff reached out to City of Sarnia staff to discuss the amount of the site the City would like to retain for use as public parking. A proposed draft Option Agreement was also presented to City staff. Once the portion of the parking lot to be donated is determined by the City, the Option Agreement can be finalized and staff will return to Council for final instructions and directions on the proposed Option agreement.

The Ontario Aboriginal Housing Corporation has started construction on their 40 unit affordable housing development at 940 Confederation Street.

Housing Accelerator Fund 2 (HAF2)

On July 8, 2024 the launch of the second round of the Housing Accelerator Fund (**HAF2**) was announced. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (**CMHC**) contacted staff on July 9, 2024 to advise that the County of Lambton was eligible to apply for HAF2. The CMHC later advised that Lambton is not eligible for HAF2 as the program is primarily designed for lower-tier municipalities who have authority over zoning. The County will not be proceeding with an application under HAF2, however the County will support the Town of Petrolia, Town of Plympton-Wyoming and Township of Warwick, where possible, with their HAF2 application, being those municipalities within Lambton that have sought the County's assistance

By-Name-List

The By-Name List ("**BNL**") is a comprehensive, real-time list of every known and consenting individual experiencing homelessness. This number includes individuals experiencing absolute homelessness (i.e. living rough) as well as individuals or family without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring housing. As of July 31, there were 319 individuals on the BNL. This represents a decrease of 3 individuals or 1.1% from June's numbers There were 207 individuals who were experiencing chronic homelessness, which represents an increase of 19 individuals. Chronic homelessness refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness and have a total of at least six months of homelessness over the past year.

Integrated Homelessness Prevention Team

The County's integrated homelessness team contains CSWs that serve as either Intensive Housing Case Managers or Rapid Rehousing Workers. Intensive Housing Case Managers support lower caseloads of households that are experiencing chronic homelessness, often facing concurrent complex mental health and addictions challenges, to secure and retain permanent housing.

Rapid Rehousing Workers support larger caseloads of households that are newly or episodically experiencing homelessness, to retain or quickly resecure permanent housing. Both forms of CSW offer life stabilization supports, and work in close partnership with several local multidisciplinary teams to ensure the health and social needs of these households are supported.

During the month of July

- 221 unique individuals received services from a CSW.
- 496 visits/contacts were made.
- 2 individuals/families were moved into more permanent housing.

- 2 rent supplements were approved to assist individuals move into more permanent housing.

Community Outreach Workers

The Community Outreach Workers provide assertive community outreach to households experiencing homelessness. The team's efforts are primarily directed toward individuals that are experiencing absolute homelessness. The housing case management provided through this team is brought to households experiencing homelessness, wherever they are, and is often delivered outside. Assistance is concentrated on progressing the household along the housing continuum for long-term success. While addressing the basic needs of this vulnerable population is a vital component of the service, the primary goals of engagement are housing centric. Tools for engagement are commonly used to meet immediate needs including food security, temporary shelter, hygiene, health, and sanitation.

During the month of July:

- 108 unique individuals were served.
- 201 contacts/visits were made.
- 8 individuals moved from the street to more permanent housing (some individuals may have entered the shelter system for several nights).
- 82% of the above-noted contacts took place at or were related to Rainbow Park, in the City of Sarnia.
- 17 successful referrals to external services were made.
- 12 coordinated visits with partner outreach teams occurred.

Based on our conversations and interventions, the top three reasons individuals provided for sleeping rough are as follows:

Reason for sleeping rough	Proportion
Chose not to stay in shelter, personal relationships	19%
Chose not to stay in shelter, substance use	28%
Chose not to stay in shelter, mental health	28%

Emergency Shelter Capacity.

The County provides funding to the Inn of the Good Shepherd to operate the following shelter services:

- The Good Shepherd's Lodge – 35 beds. 75.5% occupancy during July.
- Out of the Cold Program – 28 temporary beds. 54.70% occupancy during July.

- Haven Youth Shelter – 9 beds. 60.20% occupancy during July.
- Overall system occupancy for the month of July was 63.4%.

River City Vineyard Church may have capacity at their Sanctuary however the site adopted a drug-free policy earlier this year which limits who may be eligible to stay at the Sanctuary.

In addition to the above, the County has secured additional beds through local motels and hotels to provide greater capacity and flexibility within the emergency shelter system, should the need arise. Due to staffing challenges, the Inn of the Good Shepherd has not been able to fully staff the Out of the Cold overflow shelter and as a result, as in the recent past, County Social Services staff continue to have operate the program. Even though the overall emergency shelter system is operating at only 63% capacity, the overflow shelter has remained open due to the situation at Rainbow Park.

Landlord Engagement Worker

The County Integrated Homelessness team contains a landlord engagement support worker role. This position focuses on directly engaging local property managers and landlords for the purposes of strengthening communication and cooperation related to households supported by case managers. This work better enables mediation to maintain existing tenancies and securing private market rental opportunities for housing case managers.

During the month of June:

- 30 landlords were engaged.
- 58 tenancy concerns were addressed.
- 2 apartment units were viewed with individuals experiencing homelessness.

The total number of unique individuals experiencing homelessness that progressed into more permanent housing with assistance from the integrated homelessness prevention team during the month of July was 10.

Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre

- 94 unique individuals were provided supports at the centre.
- 498 visits were made to the centre.
- 63 referrals were made to support services and community partners.

During the month of July referrals included but are not limited to, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Legal Assistance Services, assisting with ODSP and OW issues, connecting clients with their doctors and setting up telephone and virtual appointments, meeting with clients and possible landlords, referrals to Bluewater Health mental health and addictions services, calling The Lodge for beds (male and female), assisting client

with reconnection of hydro, assisting with income tax preparation, and connecting with IMPACT for wellness checks on clients that have not been seen or staff have concerns about, and referrals to the County's CHIC team for medical and health related concerns.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

CONSULTATIONS

Not applicable.

STRATEGIC PLAN

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

This report provides a snapshot of the work the three Departments within the Social Services Division delivered through an integrated program delivery approach. It includes the outputs and outcomes of each program. It does not include the longer-term systems related planning occurring within the Division and with community partners on an ongoing basis to address the underlying issues of homelessness.