



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	HOUSING SERVICES HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION & SOCIAL PLANNING
PREPARED BY:	Melisa Johnson, Manager Ian Hanney, Manager
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MEETING DATE:	January 15, 2025
INFORMATION ITEM:	Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Encampment Funding

BACKGROUND

On December 13, 2024, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced a new strategy and associated resources for municipalities to increase long-term housing and temporary supports for individuals residing in encampments. Within this strategy were three sources of potential funding for local communities to utilize including:

1. \$5.5 million available Province-wide to top-up the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (“**COHB**”) to immediately free-up emergency shelter spaces for people living in encampments by helping people living in shelter move into longer-term housing.
2. \$20 million available Province-wide to expand shelter capacity and create additional temporary accommodation spaces, like tiny modular units and climate-controlled semi-permanent structures, to provide people living in encampment with accessible alternative living options. Expenses incurred up to March 31, 2025 are eligible for funding.
3. \$50 million available Province-wide in last-mile funding for ready-to-build long-term affordable housing projects across the province. This funding will be allocated based on how close a project is to completion as well as its value for money, to help a project near completion but in need of targeted additional funding, to open their doors faster.

This funding is tied to clearing out encampments. For any municipality to be considered for this additional funding, the Ministry must receive a written pledge from the local Service Manager to use the funds towards ending encampments.

DISCUSSION

COHB Funding

The first among these funding announcements was a top-up to the COHB. The COHB is a housing supplement that is overseen directly by the Ministry of Finance, with client-level implementation and application facilitated by Service Managers such as the County of Lambton.

To be eligible for the COHB, individuals must meet several document readiness thresholds that align with eligibility for our community housing centralized waitlist. These additional supplements can be utilized by households experiencing homelessness in either emergency housing or unsheltered settings. Importantly, individuals must secure permanent housing, and their complete applications must be processed at the Ministry before the end of February 2025 to qualify.

The County of Lambton may receive an additional maximum \$186,100 in COHB allocation from this announcement. Based upon established average market rents, and resultant expectant supplement amounts, this additional maximum allocation has the potential to serve approximately 34 individuals.

While this tool does not directly address the primary limiting factor of a unit acceptance in obtaining permanent housing, this is a welcome tool that will better enable many eligible households to progress from shelter settings into more permanent housing, thereby creating more shelter bed vacancies. To maximize the potential uptake and impact of this tool, the County of Lambton Social Services Division will utilize a broad internal team of caseworkers, community support workers, and community outreach workers to facilitate the necessary documentation alongside unhoused individuals. Partnerships with local service providers that offer existing housing case management and shelter support will also be leveraged to ensure broad application and the largest possible impact. These current partnerships include the Women's Interval Home, the Inn of the Good Shepherd, and the Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton-Kent. Further providers may also be utilized, time-permitting.

Encampment Response Initiative Funding

The second funding announcement was the one-time shelter expansion and encampment response initiative. This initiative required a business case to be submitted by any interested Service Manager, such as the County of Lambton. This funding was accompanied by various inclusionary and exclusionary criteria, it could only be utilized to shelter individuals in existing encampments, and thereafter, potentially restore those specific sites after they have been vacated. At the time of this funding announcement, all known established encampments in Lambton County were situated within the City of Sarnia.

In consultation with several local agencies, including the Inn of the Good Shepherd, the City of Sarnia and Sarnia Police, a business case was submitted by the County of Lambton for this funding. The business case requested funds in the amount of \$325,810 for the extension of existing emergency housing solutions in addition to site restoration costs of \$104,000 for specifically identified encampments that could be cleared through this initiative. While social service agencies cannot force individuals to accept service, specific needs of individuals are supported through this proposal, enabled by robust local homelessness data, including real-time client-level assessments and case plans.

Importantly, the funding allocated under this initiative is short-term and one-time. Any funding secured through this program is limited to an end date of March 31, 2025. Distinct from the funding decisions resulting from this announcement, all local service providers continue to exhaust every available resource and opportunity to progress individuals along the housing continuum from experiences of homelessness and to obtain appropriate mental health and addictions care.

Last Mile Funding

The third funding announcement was the last mile funding available for affordable housing projects that are close to completion. Staff have submitted a business case requesting \$7.4M in Last Mile Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (“**COCHI**”) funding for two projects currently in progress. A business case has been submitted requesting \$2.3M for the Maxwell Park Place development addition and \$5.1M for the Kathleen apartment development. In the 2024 strategic affordable and supportive housing development plan, Flourish recommended that the appropriate level of capital contribution from the ministry for projects was \$150,000 per unit which was used to support the additional Last Mile funding requests.

Staff continue to explore all funding opportunities on these projects with the hope that if additional external funding sources are secured above the project requirements, County dollars for this project could be reallocated to advance additional affordable and supportive housing projects identified in the County's strategic affordable and supportive housing development plan.

Existing affordable housing project include;

New Construction – Maxwell Park Place

Work has resumed on the addition at Maxwell Park Place. The 24 units, including six March of Dimes supported units, is expected to be completed in early spring 2025.

New Construction – New units in existing buildings

Work began in the summer to repurpose non-residential space in existing community housing buildings to create 2 additional units. Work is progressing with occupancy expected in January 2025.

New Construction – Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

Construction has commenced on the project at 940 Confederation Street by Ontario Aboriginal Housing. This project will add 40 rent geared-to-income units to the community. Occupancy is expected in December 2025.

Development – Kathleen Avenue

Pre-development work is progressing on Kathleen Avenue. Housing Services staff held a public information session on October 8, 2024 to share information on the development with the neighbourhood. The re-zoning application was approved in November 2024 for this property and site plan has been submitted for approval. Pending site plan and building permit approval, it is hoped construction can start in the first half of 2025 with occupancy before the end of 2026. Once completed, this project will add 50 one-bedroom units, including 14 March of Dimes supported units to the community housing portfolio.

Property Acquisition – St. Bartholomew's Church

The County has entered into the conditional agreement to purchase the St. Bartholomew's Church property on Cathcart Blvd with the intention to develop new affordable housing. The County is presently undergoing its due diligence on this property.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations have occurred with the General Manager, Corporate Services, Manager, Ontario Works, City of Sarnia staff, Executive Director, The Inn of the Good Shepherd, and other relevant Social Services Agencies.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Providing safe affordable housing 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

Further to the announcement of the increased resources to support and provide more long-term stable housing and temporary accommodations for those living in encampments, staff have made applications to all three available funding opportunities. Business cases have been submitted for both the encampment response initiative and last mile funding. The Ministry noted that any additional funding will be supported by new reporting and accountability measures to ensure these funds support the shared provincial and municipal goal of ending encampments. If the County is successful in any of the applications, staff will provide Council with regular updates on these reporting measures. A response is anticipated in early 2025.

The written pledge to use any approved funds towards ending encampments in Lambton County was submitted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on Friday January 3, 2025 and is attached as Appendix A.