



REQUEST FOR DECISION

MEETING DATE: March 20, 2023

TITLE: Community Hub Update - March 20, 2023

DIVISION: Community & Protective Services

SUMMARY:

To provide an update to Committee of the Whole on the Community Hub as approved by Council on August 22, 2022.

PROPOSED MOTION:

THAT Committee direct Administration to investigate alternative locations for a combined temporary Community Hub and Late Night Café (Winter Emergency Shelter) and report back to Council with options and costs for both capital and operating considerations.

THAT Committee direct Administration to further analyze and report back to Council on a more permanent supportive housing facility, including options on location, models, partners and cost implications.

BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS:

Council approved the creation of the Community Hub on August 22, 2022 and the required resources to support the initiative. As identified and approved by Council the intent of the community space / hub was to provide a safe place to connect with others, a sense of belonging to community, and timely resources. Namely, access to food security, financial aid, addictions and mental health supports, connections through community phone/computer, and support to access other community services (community dinners/meals, housing supports). The Community Hub opened on October 4, 2022 and was considered temporary in nature to June of 2023 as additional options were explored and presented to Council for consideration.

Council received an update on this initiative at the January 9, 2023 Regular Council meeting.

As indicated in the January 9 update to Council, the Community Hub has seen its fair share of both challenges and successes. The Hub was chosen for its current location based on a number of factors (facility owned by the City mitigated cost of retaining other space; current zoning - Government Services - allowed for this type of service; proximity to Late Night Café; proximity to a known residence of many unsheltered; central in location; not immediately beside a school or high density residential; and the location allowed for time sensitive and cost-efficient implementation).

Since its inception, the hours and resources provided have changed in response to various issues, challenges, and opportunities. Staffing has increased, community partners supporting service delivery has increased and so too has the number of users of the service. The number of community partners and individuals offering support has also been impressive since January.

There are many examples of community support including a recent instance of a local realtor hiring a few of the unsheltered for a labor job; sharing after how impressed they were.

Several issues were identified on the January 9 Council presentation and since through direct communication from residents and businesses. Likewise, and of note though, there have been many communications and behaviors of gratitude received as well.

In summary, concerns around safety, lack of programming, perceived image of the Community Hub, and the location were expressed; following are some of the actions that have been taken since that time.

Issue: Safety

Strategies undertaken:

- Increased policing and enforcement services in the immediate area;
- Meetings occurred with policing and enforcement to better understand scope and limitations of applicable laws, policies, and rights of the unsheltered;
- Additional staff were secured in the Grant Fuhr arena;
- A Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) from Boyle Street provided a 90-minute presentation to Community Hub staff, staff from IS, Community Hub volunteers and staff from Community Social Development (CSD) on recognizing an overdose and how to manage higher risk individuals safely; and
- Working on developing and leveraging an outreach program with potential partners, ability to respond in real time to incidents in community. Expectation will be that this is a component of any model going forward.

Issue: Lack of formal programming in space**Strategies undertaken:**

- Bredin provides weekly support to several unsheltered to help upgrade their trade certificates or obtain recertification/activation and provided a formal workshop whereby 6 residents attended;
- The Primary Care Network (PCN) Telehealth was launched on Thursday afternoons from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Residents are filling the time slots to gain medical care through the Nurse Practitioner;
- Narcotics Anonymous started weekly support groups on January 16;
- Negotiations and agreements are being established with Our Collective Journey to provide addiction coaching supports and services; and
- Court specific support that connects clients with legal resources, as well as eliminates any potential barriers to addressing legal issues (court reminders, transportation arrangements).

Issue: Perceived image of the Community Hub (internal and external)**Strategies undertaken:**

- Increased expectations and responsibility of users in the space to take more active part in maintaining the space with more pride;
- Providing more guidance and enforcement of personal belongings in the space and outside of the Community Hub.
- Comprehensive messaging and updates to Community Hub on City's website undertaken

Issue: Passionate desire to move and find better solutions**Strategies undertaken:**

- Have investigated for lease, for sale, and vacant lands in Spruce Grove and area to determine possible sites, for immediate and longer-term solutions; and
- Have met, spoke with, received presentations, and set up tours with several organizations and individuals. Researched models, funding mechanisms, and potential partners in government.

In addition to the actual location not being ideal, the current physical space of the Community Hub is not conducive to the range of supports and resources required either. The layout of the space limits programming capabilities, involvement of additional community partners, doesn't align to proper safety mitigating factors and is insufficient in terms of other factors such as co-existing with the Late Night Café for example.

Administration continues to work towards long term solutions and intends on bringing those forward to Council for consideration and this will include options with respect to models, service delivery, and funding implications.

In some regards it has been the perfect storm in terms of contributing factors that has led to the numbers of unsheltered, at risk and provisionally sheltered; not the least of which has included COVID, the economy and the lack of affordable housing. Individual trauma, loss, abuse, and addictions mirror what is known as the common pathways to homelessness (systemic, structural, relationship).

The housing continuum shown provides illustration to the various models that can help address homelessness in the short and longer term.



Research supports that investment in supportive housing has the best return on investment (ROI), helps alleviate homelessness, provides a more sustainable and integrated model of intervention, and offers the best granting/partner opportunities. Supportive housing is built on the premise that the resources to aid in success are a part of the delivery model, if not co-located then at minimum, are readily available to assist with the challenges residents often have (medical, addiction, mental health, etc.).

There are many examples of shelters, pods, pallet housing, detox centres, multi-faceted facilities, and transitional, supportive and subsidized housing. It is not Administration's advice that a shelter or multi-faceted facility be the chosen approach; nor is it for a specialized facility such as a detox centre.

Supportive housing and community housing that provides longer term solutions, that address not only the immediate need of the unsheltered but that of the at risk and provisionally sheltered, along with those living in core need, is the preferred model.

Recognizing it will take a period of time to secure land, partnerships, funding and an operating partner, it is necessary for some transitional resources and subsequently why the first motion is to continue the Late Night Café and the Community Hub, albeit in an alternative location as the most appropriate avenue.

Administration considers this a three phase approach among the two motions presented:

- Phase One: Relocate the Community Hub in a timely and expedited manner;
- Phase Two: Consider integration of the Late Night Café for the 2023-2024 winter months potentially operated by a third party; and,
- Phase Three: Secure the necessary funding, partners and location to implement supportive and subsidized (community/social) housing.

OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES:

The City recognizes the benefits of the services provided out of the Community Hub and know they truly make a difference to those experiencing homelessness; it is also understood, the impact the location has had on residents, schools and businesses. As such, Committee could give additional direction to Administration to come back to Council with a recommendation on closing the Community Hub sooner than the planned date of June 30, 2023.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT:

Administration will work closely with the committee of the Late Night Café to deliver on the motions contained in this Request for Decision.

Administration continues to respond to all verbal and written comments, concerns, and communications received. Administration is also actively meeting with various service providers to consider models and approaches that would align well to Spruce Grove.

IMPLEMENTATION / COMMUNICATION:

Communication briefings have been created for various audiences and information has been posted on the City's website and will be updated as necessary.

IMPACTS:

Administration being directed to investigate alternative locations for the operation of the Community Hub and Late Night Café will help alleviate concerns from residents in the area and provide more suitable space for the resources required to support the unsheltered.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The current service delivery model is sustainable until June of 2023 and other financial implications of alternative options will be provided in the next update to Council.