

Homelessness

Recommendations

May 23, 2023



The City of Spruce Grove

Executive Summary

The City of Spruce Grove has been faced with a marked increase in homelessness and those on the verge of homelessness on a scale that has not been seen in the city previously. While many of the root causes and solutions to address this issue are traditionally not municipal responsibilities, the city and its citizens are the ones most directly impacted.

City Council has provided direction on several actions since the middle of 2022 for Administration to review, analyze, and provide recommendations on short- and medium-term strategies.

Following feedback from partners, members of the community, and businesses, as well as significant research and analysis of other jurisdictions and best practices, this report has been prepared for consideration of City Council and to provide the community with information and rationale for the recommendations within.

Administration is recommending the continuation of the Late Night Café (Winter Emergency Response) in its existing location on a temporary basis, closing and shifting the Community Hub to a mobile outreach model, and expediting the steps and approvals for a permanent supportive housing facility.



Previous Council Reports

August 22, 2022

January 9, 2023

March 20, 2023

This report will attempt to build on previous reports that have been provided to Council regarding homelessness. Where necessary, information may be repeated to provide further context to recommendations and options for consideration.

As has been mentioned in previous presentations and information to Council and the community, the issue of homelessness is highly complex that requires significant investments in both time, resources, expertise, and collaboration.

While a great deal of work and research has been completed by community partners and administration, by no means does this report adequately provide detailed solutions and analysis for the highly complex issue of homelessness.

The work to date over the last year, including this report, is meant to respond to an increase in individuals classified as homeless or on the verge of homelessness in the interim as we work with other agencies/partners and the community for more meaningful and sustainable solutions.

FAIL FORWARD

“Ending homelessness requires us to take risks and try new things. We’ll move forward despite the possibility of failure. If we suffer failure or setbacks, we use them as points of learning and use that learning as stepping stones towards success.”

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

Perfect Storm City of Spruce Grove

Low Vacancy (less than 1%)

Lack of Affordable Housing Stock

COVID 19 Pandemic

Economic Conditions

Lack of Investment in Mental Health/Addiction Support in Tri-Region

Significant and Rapid Growth

Background

As has been mentioned many times before, the homelessness landscape across much of North America and beyond has changed dramatically over the last several years. Spruce Grove has not been immune to this. In fact, in speaking with municipal partners in and around the Edmonton region, Spruce Grove has in many cases seen a larger increase in unsheltered populations than others. In addition to the influential factors identified on the previous page, Spruce Grove effectively serves as the Tri-Region's service centre for a variety of services, as well as being the first and largest urban municipality west of Edmonton.

While the City has made some investments in poverty and homelessness strategies over the last several years, gaps have clearly started to surface which has contributed greatly to the current situation. To be clear, many of the root causes of homelessness and poverty are not municipal responsibilities; however, as has been communicated on many occasions the issue is felt most acutely in municipalities, many of which are not equipped to deal with the complex challenges and opportunities that exist. Some of the gaps that have become more apparent include:

- Lack of a housing strategy to help guide and promote investment.
- Lack of investment by other levels of government and staff capacity to investigate grant opportunities.
- Lack of coordination between multiple agencies.
- Lack of support and community development assistance for groups and organizations.
- Lack of clarity related to responsibilities and actions in previous plans (i.e. Social Sustainability Plan, Pathways Home, Tri-Region Plan, etc.).
- Lack of a qualified housing authority in the Tri-Region with an affordable and/or overall housing mandate.

It is very important to point out that there has been and continues to be many great things that are happening in our community by incredible groups, organizations, and individuals to support poverty and homelessness needs in the city. This has been in response to many of the gaps identified above. People saw a need and are doing everything they can to fill some of those gaps. The City is extremely grateful for the efforts of so many in our community in this regard. Where the opportunity exists is in better coordination, focus, clarity, and investments to maximize these past, current, and future efforts.

While this report provides some overall context around housing and homelessness, the focus is on recommendations to address the immediate identified needs and concerns. This issue is highly complex and requires significant analysis and strategies, by multiple agencies and levels of government, to effectively address root causes (proactive/preventative) and sustainable solutions. The City of Spruce Grove would be considered in the reactionary stage and this report, along with the recommendations within, attempts to provide more efficiency in responding to immediate needs while allowing and supporting the multiple preventative and proactive actions needed.

In response to increased concerns directed to City Council and administration, City Council asked for short-term and immediate recommendations in the summer of 2022. The concerns expressed came from both those uncomfortable with an increase in visible homelessness but also from those concerned for the wellbeing of these individuals and asking what the City should and could be doing for them.

August 2022 Actions

Administration provided a report and recommendations to Council on August 22, 2022. During this meeting Council passed motions to take some immediate and short-term actions. The following indicates what was directed by Council and some additional context:

THAT the public budget submission of the Winter Emergency Response Committee be pre-approved in the amount of \$27,750 annually for five years commencing in 2023

The Winter Emergency Response Committee had submitted a public submission seeking additional financial contribution from the City to run the Late Night Café, which provides overnight temporary accommodations from November-March at severe temperatures. Normally, public submissions are considered and approved as part of the Corporate Plan deliberations in early November; however, Council approved this in advance.

THAT administration be directed to proceed with necessary renovations, establishment, and implementation of a temporary community space/hub for those homeless or on the verge of homelessness at 410 King St. funded from existing budgets.

This direction led to the establishment of the Community Hub at 410 King St. As can clearly be identified in the motion, this was only planned to be on a temporary basis. The intent of the Community Hub was to collect data and understand the specific needs of users of the space, as well as to provide supports to individuals. Information related to this intent is included later in the report. While not referenced in the August 2022 meeting, an update provided in January 2023 indicated that the Community Hub was “a temporary initiative slated to end June of 2023”.

THAT the City proceed with securing up to two temporary community outreach social worker’s or similar resources, funded through existing budgets.

This was completed; however, the requirement became more than two workers. The Community Hub was and has been staffed appropriately based on the demonstrated need. Funding has been supported through existing budgets, Corporate Plan approvals, and other emergency authorities under the City Manager Bylaw.

THAT the City proceed with procurement to secure a consultant to update the City's Social Sustainability Plan funded from City Manager Contingency.

The intent of this update was to provide greater clarity on actions and accountabilities from the previous Social Sustainability Plan. This has been completed and at the time of writing this report is planned to be presented to City Council on May 15, 2023 for information and feedback.

January 2023 Council Update

Administration provided a detailed update to City Council on January 9, 2023. Additionally, at the same meeting several community members came forward to express both concern and support for the Community Hub. Administration was able to provide an update on some of the successes and challenges that had been experienced by individuals accessing service and members of the community in the surrounding areas. No additional direction was made during this meeting.

March 2023 Actions

Administration returned to City Council at Committee of the Whole (now titled Governance and Priorities Committee) on March 20, 2023 to provide additional information related to data collection, research, and analysis that had been ongoing since the creation of the Community Hub. This information led to additional direction provided to Administration by Committee. The following motions were passed:

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.

The approved motions provided greater clarity to both administration and the community in terms of narrowing the focus of options. To accomplish the direction provided, three phases were identified.

PHASES

PHASE ONE

Determine a different location that better serves the residents using the Community Hub

PHASE TWO

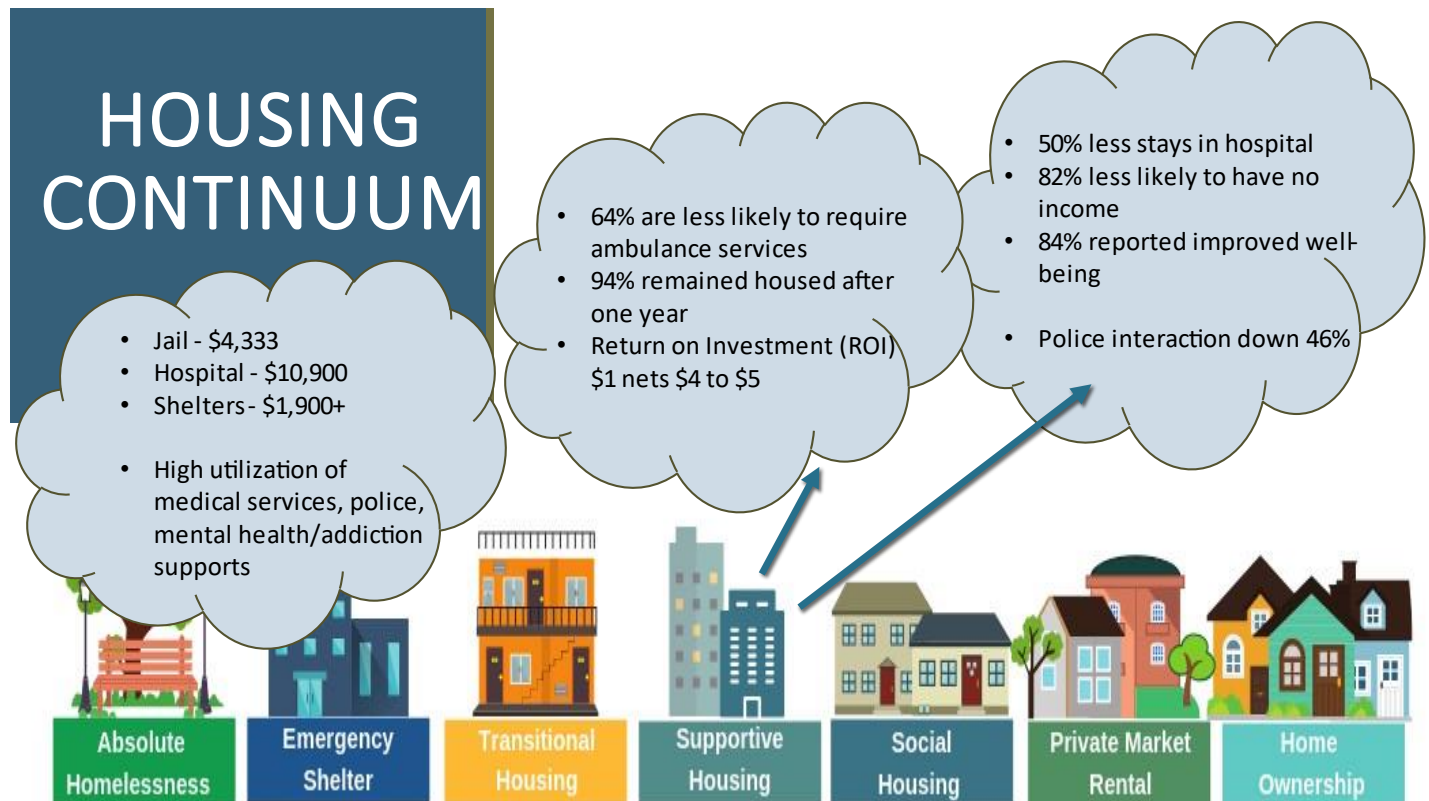
Look to merge the Community Hub and Late Night Café (Emergency Shelter) for the winter of 2023/2024 in the new location

PHASE THREE

Determine the model, location, partner and financial implications of supportive housing.

This report provides an update and recommendations to phases one and two, as well as the first motion approved on March 20, 2023. It should be noted that any recommendations related to the Community Hub and Late Night Café are still intended to be temporary in nature. Throughout the analysis and exploration of various options and other jurisdictions, it has become even more evident that putting as much time, energy, and resources towards the pursuit of a longer-term supportive housing facility is critical.

As a recap of the presentation and information presented to Council and the community in March, the following illustration shows the return on investment that a supportive housing facility has been proven to provide. Similarly, it shows the return on investment, or lack thereof, for some of the other models in the housing continuum, most notably an emergency shelter.



The concept of a supportive housing facility is to combine temporary emergency accommodations, wrap around supports, and paid affordable housing in the same facility. These are attractive developments where users and residents take great pride in integrating more appropriately in the area where they are located. This provides greater options for sites; however, still requires significant engagement and careful consideration.

Other advantages of this type of model includes having a community organization partner and operate this facility which increases the possibility of funding supports from other levels of government and decreases the reliance and burnout of unpaid volunteers. In fact, a key driver in pursuing this model with great urgency is the continued and new grant opportunities that have recently been announced. Research also indicates the operating costs are generally lower than municipal run facilities. The figure below, which was also presented in March of this year, shows some illustrations of a few of the models along the housing continuum.



Alignment with City Plans

Spruce Grove City Council approved an updated Strategic Plan in 2022. There are several components of that plan that align with and support many of the actions that have been undertaken to date, as well as the recommendations included later in this report. Below, you will find specific goals and objectives that directly tie to providing support to those unsheltered, or on the verge of being unsheltered, but also recognizes an overall balanced approach to community wellbeing and safety for all residents. Each of the goals/objectives also have specific actions associated with them; however, have not been included in this report.

GOAL 1: The City has an inclusive approach to community development that values community knowledge, diversity, and wisdom.

Objectives:

- Integrate a Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Belonging (DIEB) lens into decision making, planning, and service delivery.
- Support community groups through advocacy, capacity building, and grant funding.
- Honour diversity within the community to create a sense of belonging.

GOAL 2: Barriers are reduced, access is improved, and participation increases for City facilities, programs, and services.

Objectives:

- Determine the best approach to delivering social programming and services.
- Reduce accessibility and affordability barriers to housing, programming, and transportation services.
- Facilitate access to supports for residents who are unsheltered, homeless or at risk for homelessness.

GOAL 6: Safe, livable, and sustainable neighbourhoods for all residents that contribute to a high quality of life.

Objectives:

- Continue supporting safe communities while ensuring the well-being of residents as a shared responsibility.

Without going into specific detail, actions and recommendations to support the unsheltered in our community also aligns with principles found within many other plans and strategies such as the Social Sustainability Plan, Tri-Region Plan, Municipal Development Plan, Cultural Master Plan and others.

Statistics and Successes

The original intent of the Community Hub was twofold. The first was to provide much needed supports and basic needs in a coordinated setting. Second, the Community Hub was identified as a temporary program where the City could collect data and better understand the need in the community in order to make recommendations that best responds to those needs.

Since its inception, the Community Hub has seen 120 unique users. Approximately 59 are still active in terms of receiving supports. We have therefore “closed” over 61 files regarding individuals who are no longer utilizing the services of the Community Hub. This can be the result of a variety of reasons. These can range from negative examples as severe as death or incarceration to positive examples of entering treatment programs, being housed, moving to another community, or having access to services elsewhere in the system.

In many ways, this is a new service level and experience for the City. As such, there is no doubt that we need to mature in the area of data collection and reporting. This will be important in any model that the City pursues in order for City Council and the community to have a clear line of sight to successes and opportunities. The following provides further information regarding some of the opportunities and supporting data that we have been able to provide users of the Community Hub:

- 10 individuals have been housed (either directly by City or through referrals).
- 3 individuals have been successful in being entered in addiction treatment programs.
- A total of 25 individuals have secured funding from various sources (AISH, CPP, Alberta Works, Seniors Benefits, etc.).

- We have supported 5 residents through legal/court matters.
- We have supported 2 residents through domestic violence.
- Several individuals have been re-connected with family members.
- Medical care and other health care services have been provided. 10 mental health and 17 physical health referrals/supports have been accessed.
- There has been at least 1 resident successful in securing employment.
- 16 individuals have been able to secure personal identification for the first time in many years which also is a key factor in being able to access additional supports.
- We have assisted 7 individuals with transportation support to another community (where they are from originally or have family supports).

Staff believe there have been additional successes that are unknown. In many instances individuals do not communicate back to staff; however, we do know of examples where this is the case through relationships and communication with others. We simply have not been able to formally verify. Additional demographics have shown that 70% of our unique visitors identify as male and approximately 80% are considered Spruce Grove residents.

Staff have identified the following common issues and themes throughout the Community Hub's existence:

Lack of affordable housing in the Tri-Region and larger region

Addictions

Mental health challenges

Lack of sustainable income

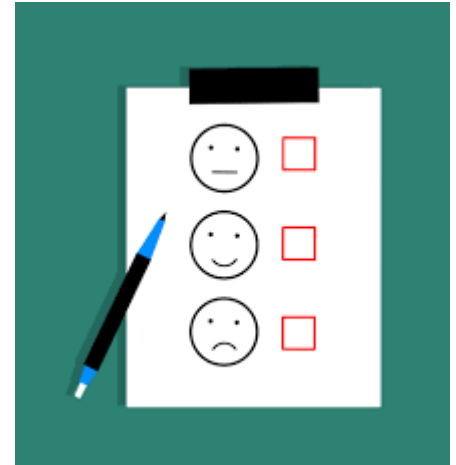
Additionally, other challenges have continued to surface including lack of resources that are readily accessible, such as significant wait lists for several services. Relationships and connections take time to build with the unsheltered. A process of gaining trust and supporting residents in real time is critical to moving the needle.

Sadly, we know that our community has also not been immune to the tragic loss of life that has gripped many communities through addiction, exposure to elements, mental health challenges, and more. Therefore, a coordinated effort from the community, all levels of government, and partner agencies must be maximized to minimize severe negative outcomes.

Feedback

The issue of homelessness can and at times has been divisive in our community. In speaking with many other jurisdictions, and through research, we know this is not unique to the City of Spruce Grove. Opinions can run the full spectrum from intolerance and anger to housing as a human right that should be afforded to all regardless of circumstance and/or choice.

City Council and Administration has received a great deal of feedback ranging along the entire spectrum that has helped inform actions and recommendations. While not a fulsome representation of all the feedback, the following provides a snapshot of the consistent themes and messages that have been compiled and received through a variety of means.



Issue	Detail
Concentration of unsheltered in one area with both Late Night Café and Community Hub in close proximity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On one hand it provides better opportunity to address issues, gather real time data, serve through readily available resources. 2. On the other hand it does increase visibility and presence of unsheltered in immediate area, raising concerns and questions.
Location of the Community Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Significant concerns expressed over the location and its proximity to a residential area, schools, and community amenities (Agrena, Library). 2. Conversely, opinions have been shared about the importance of proximity to amenities such as the library. 3. Feedback from businesses in the area have ranged from significant concerns over increased numbers to offering supports and assistance.
Nimbyism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consistent feedback has been received from many in proximity to the Community Hub that they are understanding of unsheltered individuals receiving access to supports; however, have also expressed that these should be provided elsewhere in the community.
Safety and increased crime	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concerns over increase in social disorder, especially visible. 2. Reports regarding increased thefts and perception that unsheltered individuals are responsible. 3. There has also been increased violence committed against the unsheltered in our community.
Importance of supporting unsheltered	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. While there have been a number of negative concerns expressed, administration and City Council have also received feedback on ensuring that we continue and enhance supports for the unsheltered in our community. 2. This has included community groups and organizations that are also serving unsheltered; however, it has included general community members themselves.

Analysis and Considerations

Administration has been working diligently on exploring options to meet the direction provided by City Council in March 2023 to look at alternative locations for a combined temporary Community Hub and Late Night Café (Winter Emergency Shelter). This exploration has included, but has not been limited to:

- Discussions with other municipalities and industry partners regarding their experiences (both positive and negative).
- Engagement with Late Night Café.
- Engagement with community partners, staff, and residents of the Community Hub.
- Analysis of the feedback and direct discussions with residents and businesses in and around the Community Hub and throughout the community.
- Exploration of a variety of options and locations.
- Details around zoning, Alberta Health regulations, fire/building code requirements, site servicing, budget, and program options have been examined for several options.

Co-locating Community Hub and Late Night Café

As has been mentioned previously, co-locating both services would provide enhanced synergies in service delivery to those that require such services. It would also provide increased ability to partner with a variety of groups and organizations to work within and share the space. Coordination of wrap around supports has been identified as a gap or barrier. Co-location helps in this regard.



At the same time, consistent feedback from our experience since opening the Community Hub, as well as input from other jurisdictions, indicates that having most services in one particular location or area tends to bring with it increased congregation in that area. The concerns around crime, social disorder, safety, etc. are therefore magnified, especially when it is on a reactionary or temporary basis.

By co-locating both services in a new location there is a strong likelihood that the City would simply be transferring the concerns expressed from those around the current location to another area, regardless of where this may be proposed. The City should be acutely aware that no potential location would be without criticism and possible negative feedback from those in an around said location. For example, co-locating to a commercial or industrial area would eliminate concerns about locating in a residential area; however, would bring strong feedback from businesses who have already been expressing increased concerns over social disorder. History in other jurisdictions has proven this time and time again.

In communities where there has been a high degree of success, which generally has meant acceptance of a permanent wraparound supports facility within a particular area, a significant community engagement process was implemented many months in advance. The City has been speaking to those jurisdictions and agencies and compiling key learnings as we develop future engagement strategies.

Space Requirements

A detailed space needs assessment was first undertaken in order to narrow down suitable locations. It was determined that approximately 7000 sq ft of facility space was required and an overall footprint of between 0.40 – 0.50 acres. This includes:

- Reception
- Day Program Space
- Mat (evening) Program Area
- “Community Kitchen” food prep space and storage
- Client Washrooms
- Staff Washroom
- Storage Space
- Laundry
- Cleaning Storage
- Some parking and outdoor space

City Owned Sites

Administration has reviewed and analyzed several City owned sites when exploring the option of co-locating both services in one location. The City is very limited with its existing inventory. Three properties were identified for evaluation. No site or option was considered that had an existing building available. Therefore, all sites would need to utilize temporary trailers to accommodate both programs.



The benefits of trailers are that they are generally considered temporary in nature with relative ease in procurement and set-up and options around purchase or leasing. There are several jurisdictions that have utilized this model of delivery with varying degrees of success.

Administration can say that the majority of those we spoke to indicated that trailers have been problematic for a number of reasons. First, trailers have the look and feel of a shelter which is something that is not recommended by Administration nor supported by City Council thus far. Second, there are set-up and servicing costs that normally do not have a future benefit to the municipality so are largely throw away costs. Finally, trailers often have negative perceptions around aesthetics and quality for both staff and participants. They would require additional considerations related to building/fire code regulations.

The following table outlines additional information regarding the three properties that were analyzed.

Site	Planning Considerations	Servicing Considerations	Size
110 Manitoba Court (Transit Storage Site)	Zoning and/or LUB amendment required	Water/sewer at property line Power/gas services required Est. \$200k to bring services to back of site	0.40 acres
50 Diamond Ave. (Eco Centre)	Zoning and/or LUB amendment required Major pipeline corridor present (approval or permit required)	Water/sewer available Power/gas services available Moving existing Eco Centre est \$400k	1.15 acres
21 Century Close (Old PW site)	Zoned as "Government Services" so is a permitted use Pipeline corridor present (approval or permit required) Old landfill may create significant setback issues	No services to site Approximately \$400k for servicing	8.5 acres* *subject to setbacks

In regard to costs, the City received estimates around \$11,000 per month for leasing of trailers which would total \$132,000 annually. Additionally, estimates indicated another \$275,000 in one time installation, dismantle (lease end), and delivery and return charges. Therefore, the cost of trailers (excluding servicing) for a 12-month period is estimated to be \$407,000. For a 24-month period the estimated costs would be \$539,000.

With servicing costs ranging from \$200-\$400k and staffing/operations costs estimated at \$475k, the total one-year costs of trailers on one of the existing City owned sites is between \$1.08 million and \$1.28 million.

Building/Land Purchase

Administration also explored the commercial real estate market in the industrial/commercial area of the city. The opportunities with this option include:

1. If the building was used temporarily the City would have an asset that could be sold at a future date to recoup the original investment with the potential that the value could have increased over time.
2. The building and/or land could potentially be used for a permanent supportive housing building site (either build new or convert).

The potential risks or challenges with considering a building or land purchase immediately include:

1. Significant upfront costs (estimated between \$1.25-\$2.5 million).
2. Initial costs do not include any required renovations.
3. Zoning and other LUB amendments will likely be required.
4. Servicing requirements are unknown and may need to be brought in.
5. Competitive market and time delays in finding the appropriate building in an appropriate location.
6. Significant time and energy in a temporary solution (delay of long-term facility).

Recommendations

After careful consideration of all the research and analysis to date, Administration is prepared to make recommendations to Council for their consideration. These recommendations are somewhat of a departure from the March 20, 2023 motion of Council to have Administration explore alternative locations for co-locating the Community Hub and Late Night Café. The information provided in this section will explain the rationale behind this departure to both Council and the community.

Recommendation #1

Maintain the Late Night café in its existing location until a permanent supportive housing facility is secured.

In discussions with the Winter Emergency Response Committee (WERC), it was communicated to Administration that the preference of the group was to relocate the Late Night Café to a new location along with the Community Hub. The group was prepared to support and continue operating within a new facility. At the same time, it was also shared with Administration that continuing in its existing location and general format temporarily until a new permanent facility could be secured was something they were prepared to work with the City on.

The Late Night Café has been operational in their current location since November 2020, well prior to the opening of the Community Hub. Their public budget submission, which was approved by Council in August of 2022, included a proposed five-year window of operations and funding. Administration believes that with some additional support in volunteer training, outreach assistance by qualified professionals (more on this below), and other resources, the WERC has the competencies and willingness to continue to operate a successful winter emergency evening program for the unsheltered in our community. This includes already established protocols and code/regulation considerations.

While the numbers of individuals accessing the Late Night Café over the past winter has increased, along with some other complexities, City Council and Administration heard very little concerns expressed from the community in the years prior to the Community Hub opening up. As mentioned previously, the biggest contributing factor to a significant increase in complaints from residents and businesses in the area was undoubtedly due to the fact that the Community Hub was opened in close proximity to the Late Night Café. This meant that the majority of individuals accessing both services remained in the area for most of each day/night. This led to an increase in the visibility of the unsheltered and both perceptions and reality of rising social disorder.

In prior years, those accessing the Late Night Café dispersed more evenly throughout the entire community during the day or in times when it was not activated. This didn't change the fact that there were concerns expressed from residents and businesses in other areas of the city but simply that there were not high concentrations of complaints coming from one particular area.

While the rationale for co-locating both services (night/day program) into one location does realize certain benefits, Administration believes that without significant engagement and a truly viable site option, the concerns and negative feedback that has been shared with the City over the last several months would only be transferred from one area to another. A tremendous amount of time and effort has been spent by staff and Council in reacting to this feedback and the risk in moving forward with co-locating is that this will only continue. This will take away from vigorously pursuing a more permanent solution and from providing the necessary supports to those in need.

Although exact timing is unclear at this time, it should be noted that this recommendation is still considered temporary in nature until there is a clearer projection as to when a permanent facility and partner will be secured and operational. If the recommendations in this report are approved by Council, Administration believes that a realistic timeline for completion of a permanent facility is approximately 24 months compared to a minimum of 36 months if not approved.

Administration is extremely grateful for the partnership with the WERC to not only support members of our community, but also in working with the City in providing exceptional advice, service excellence, and a willingness to be at the table for the past, present, and future. To work in partnership with them has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Recommendation #2

Transition the Community Hub from a permanent, physical location to a mobile outreach model of service

As mentioned previously, one of the biggest stumbling blocks to co-locating, or even having a stand alone day program, has been finding a suitable location and accepting significant throw away costs. Additionally, the very likely scenario of eliminating the majority of concerns in one area and simply transferring them to another adds to the complexity of setting up a different physical location. Administration did consider maintaining the Community Hub in its existing location for the short-term based on some feedback and analysis of the various options; however, the direction of Council and significant number of concerns expressed from those in the area outweighed any potential benefits in doing so.

The best way to outline how this model will be implemented and to answer questions that are likely to come from members of Council and the community, is to present an overview below in the form of key questions and answers.

Question #1 – How does this outreach model work?

Generally speaking, instead of staffing a physical location on a full-time basis, the idea is to hire qualified professional mobile social outreach workers to be active in the community from both a community relations perspective, but also to work directly with individuals requiring services throughout the city. In the world of social services this is consistently referred to as “meeting people where they are”. A high-level explanation of this philosophy basically means providing individualized care when and where they need it. Sometimes people are ready to change and sometimes they aren’t. Some people are willing to take one or two baby steps and others are ready to jump in full force.

Trying to force individuals to make changes and access services can leave a person feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, judged, and frustrated; however, we can help people facilitate movement from one stage to the next stage. While many of these principles are not black and white in terms of only being facilitated in just a physical location or vice versa only in a mobile outreach model, there are significant benefits to the latter when it comes to the concept of “meeting people where they are”.

For further context, the concept includes building meaningful relationships with individuals in our community and providing access to supports and services that are unique to them. This may be done through simple conversations, but also specific one on one appointments, both in a variety of locations and formats throughout the community. Mobile staff would be armed with laptops and various location options to assist the unsheltered with basic needs but also with things like completing forms, ID requests, and potential transportation needs (i.e. appointments).



Mobile staff will be driving and walking throughout the community, focusing on spaces/sites where the unsheltered frequent, including their encampments. Consistent touch points with the unsheltered will happen in real time, one on one rather than in a collective space (current Hub).

In addition to working with individuals desiring services, one of the most significant benefits of this model is from a community relations perspective. A large component of the outreach workers responsibility is to be out and about in the community. This includes, but is not limited to, proactively talking to, and building relationships with businesses, walking through the park and trail systems talking with members of the community, or responding on a reactive basis to calls of concern.

As an example, if there is a complaint made by a resident or business, outreach staff will be dispatched to the site of the complaint to connect with the source, as well as the unsheltered, and attempt to navigate or address the immediate issue. An important piece is the on-going communication with the source of the call to ensure they are aware of all efforts being made to rectify the situation. Disseminating communication to the broader community will be important so that in time, the mobile outreach team is seen/viewed as a first step when an issue of social disorder or other concerns arise.

The following information comes from the City of Grande Prairie website regarding their Mobile Outreach program and provides a high-level overview of the intent and benefit of the model.

The City of Grande Prairie's Mobile Outreach is a diversion program focused on mitigating the impacts of street-level social disorder, addiction, and public intoxication. The program assists businesses and residents in handling their concerns related to the street-engaged population. Concerns may include trespassing, loitering, disturbances, public intoxication, needle debris, and encampments.

Mobile Outreach is intended to provide immediate support for a client's basic needs and navigation through local service systems such as emergency shelters, health care, addiction treatment, and housing.

Services Mobile Outreach provides include:

- ***Response to community***
- ***Improved access to social services***
- ***Transportation to a safe place***
- ***Connection of clients to community resources (addictions and mental health services, housing resources, etc.) and supplies (water, snacks, information)***
- ***Assistance with client appointments, regular check-in with clients, and positive relationships.***

There have been incredible successes from those utilizing this model (more detail below). At the same time, one of the significant drivers behind Administration researching and recommending this model surrounds the ability to fund a large portion of the staffing costs through a grant opportunity. The City was identified as being eligible for the *Building Safer Communities Fund* through the Government of Canada. At the time of writing this report, our application is currently under review; however, the City has been working closely with grant administrators on the specifics of our

application and initial indications are highly favourable. Also, other municipalities have already received approval and are utilizing this grant with identical programs as the City intends.

It is estimated that the City will be eligible to receive approximately \$298,000 in fiscal year 2023/2024 (Apr 1-Mar 31), \$298,000 in fiscal year 2024/2025 and \$170,000 in fiscal year 2025/2026. It is important to note that the grant cannot be applied to existing programs and services. In other words, since the City has already been providing services at the Community Hub in a physical location model, staffing and other costs would not be eligible if the City continued this model of service. Similarly, the grant could not be applied to additional policing or enforcement services personnel. The grant will not cover all the proposed expenses of the model. This is identified in more detail later in the report.

Should this recommendation be approved by Council, the intent would be to close the Community Hub at the end of June 2023. This date is important in order to have proper communications and preparations for the transition. Administration would immediately begin recruitment of the outreach workers.

Once the grant has been approved, staff would transition to the outreach model immediately. It is likely that there will be a few weeks after the Community Hub closes before the grant will be approved. In this scenario, staff could still begin community relations, research and analysis, and further implementation planning. Individual services can still be provided through our existing Community Social Development department and/or other community partners. Initially, the model will follow a traditional Mon-Fri 9-5 service delivery but the ability to flex schedules will be explored when needed. Additional hours and availability would be cost prohibitive at this point and based on the experiences of others is not efficient when looking at availability of resources and calls for service.

Question #2 – Hasn't this already been happening?

The answer to this question is both yes and no. As mentioned earlier, there have been many community partners that have stepped up to fill gaps in our community over the years. The City is extremely grateful for this. At the same time, there are still several limitations and gaps in service delivery that remain. This may be due to budgetary implications, volunteer capacity, non-profit society status, or professional qualifications of some of those groups or individuals that have been providing service. Staff who will be hired under this model must have experience and education in this field to ensure professionalism and accountability in meeting outcomes and grant requirements (which are reported upon).

The City itself has not provided any outreach workers as part of community service delivery to date. The intent of this model will be to more closely align and coordinate work between multiple agencies vs. duplicating anything that has and will continue to take place by other groups and organizations in our city. The parameters of the proposed grant requires that the City oversee and administer the program vs. handing it over to an outside agency. Again, this is due to the fact that the grant cannot be applied to any existing program/service. If approved, Administration envisions many scenarios where outreach workers are directly working together with other partners.

Question #3 – How has this worked in other communities?

In speaking with many jurisdictions who have implemented a mobile outreach delivery model, each have identified significant successes. There was also consistency expressed in terms of expectations

and patience, especially in the first several months. It will take a few months to build the understanding and awareness in the community.



The City of Grande Prairie indicated that following the first few months of service delivery and community relations, there was a significant drop in calls for service to the Police and Enforcement Services. Community members, businesses, and partner agencies referred calls to outreach workers who can respond in real time and who are more acutely qualified and prepared to address situations and individual needs.

Every community that has outreach workers has indicated that not only does it allow for services and supports to individuals, perhaps the greatest benefit realized relates to community relations. While this model will not eliminate negative interactions within the community, other jurisdictions reported high levels of satisfaction from members of the community and businesses with the model. Residents can see tangible and timely action and feel more “heard”, even if outcomes are not much different than previous situations or cannot be immediately addressed.

There are times when outreach workers will be paired with members of our enforcement teams (RCMP and Spruce Grove Enforcement Services). This has also proven to be highly effective and efficient in other jurisdictions. Our local detachment and City staff have engaged with some of their counterparts and have received similar endorsement and positive feedback regarding the model. As such, they are highly supportive of the proposed mobile outreach program and feel it will not only provide increased response, but also enable them to be freed up to deal with more urgent policing matters. Of course, at any time if there are significant criminal or safety concerns, the RCMP will still need to be called and provide a response.

Question #4 – What will happen in extreme weather conditions?

As mentioned previously in this report, it is being recommended that the Late Night Café continue in its existing location. This provides temporary overnight accommodations between Nov-Mar during extreme winter temperatures. Since, October of 2022 the Community Hub has effectively served as a place to access services but also to congregate during difficult weather conditions.

With the proposed closing of the Community Hub as a physical location, this will require the City to develop, partner, and activate facilities to serve as “warming” or “cooling” locations during the daytime for extreme weather conditions. Administration has already begun conversations and analysis of possible locations and will formally develop and communicate once compiled. The likely scenario will see a combination of City owned and community partner locations and services.



This will require extensive communications and engagement with the community. Outreach workers will play a significant role in this. Administration will ensure that lessons learned from the City’s and others’ experiences will be factored in. For example, avoiding warming/cooling locations that are concentrated in one area over an extended period of time will be one such principle. A detailed implementation plan will be

developed and shared with Council and the community once complete. This will include not only locations but also issues such as transportation assistance and will mirror closely with what many other municipalities have in place.

Question #5 – Is this a degradation from what is happening today?

The answer to this question is more nuanced than perhaps one might think. If examining this question purely from the standpoint of having a physical location to access supports and services 5-7 days a week and 8-12 hours a day, then the answer is yes. A physical location also has provided opportunities for having services and multiple partners co-located and centralized. This will be a temporary gap with a purely mobile outreach service delivery model.

As has been mentioned many times previously in multiple forms, the response from the community surrounding the unsheltered is often quite divisive. Advocates for the unsheltered in the city will undoubtedly have concerns about moving away temporarily from a fixed physical location for community supports.

It is important to point out that the Community Hub, in its current location and form was considered temporary in nature while we evaluated and considered what the specific needs were and how best to deliver on them. The physical location concept has only been in place for approximately 7 months. As such, closing a physical location (until such time as a permanent facility has been completed) does limit in some ways the services provided. At the same time, implementing a significant outreach model will provide far greater access to services and improved community relations at a much higher level in the city than what was in place prior to October 2022.

Moving to this model will require creativity and continued commitment from multiple community partners to not only take advantage of the increased service opportunities that the mobile outreach workers can provide, but also in addressing service gaps until a permanent facility can be realized.

Administration does recognize that providing both is more ideal; however, the ability to do so immediately comes with significant costs and implementation challenges, many of which have been identified in this report. In short, in some respects there will be reduced service levels but in others the service levels will be significantly increased with a mobile outreach program.

Question #6 – Is this mobile outreach model temporary?

Administration's research and analysis has indicated that this model provides significant benefits on an ongoing basis. Combining outreach with a supportive housing model/facility has helped other communities respond to the challenges of homelessness in a fulsome way. By utilizing the grant funding for this model, the City will be able to minimize costs and evaluate the successes and opportunities for improvement throughout the life of the grant. Ideally, the City would be able to secure a partner and supportive housing facility prior to the completion of the grant funding to better understand the benefits of the two programs working simultaneously.

Based on successes elsewhere, it is anticipated that there will be a strong recommendation from Administration to continue the outreach model following the conclusion of the grant funding. This will need to be presented to Council however as a future business case in the Corporate Planning process as there would then be a larger cost implication to the City.

Recommendation #3

Significantly increase the pursuit of a partner, location, and funding for a permanent supportive housing facility.

One of the things that has not been mentioned thus far in the report is the incredible amount of time and effort it has taken to research and analyze temporary options. This is further rationale to support the other recommendations of maintaining the existing program/location for the Late Night Café and not pursuing a temporary physical day program facility. If the City were to focus on a physical location for one or both programs, it would require significant human and financial resources. This would involve several departments putting in extensive analysis and commitment to deliver on a proposed October or November start date.

As we have already been experiencing, focusing so much effort on a temporary solution will impact our ability to analyze and pursue a more permanent supportive housing facility that has been identified by Council as a priority. This impact will undoubtedly delay such a project and put potential grant opportunities at risk. Again, if the recommendations in this report are approved it is estimated that realistically a permanent facility could be in place within 24 months. If not, this timing would be delayed to a minimum of 36 months.

If the recommendations are approved, Administration will be able to focus on far greater detail, in a much quicker fashion, on options and opportunities related to potential partners, locations, grants, advocacy, etc. The intent would be to initiate a “Request for Proposals” public process to seek a potential future operator and partner of a supportive housing facility. This would be done in tandem with the pursuit and analysis of a potential location and grant opportunities. Any significant requirements or investment from the City would come back to Council for their consideration. In short, the faster the City can focus on this option the faster that any service delivery gaps can be addressed.

Financial Implications

Co-located Community Hub and Late Night Café = **\$1,080,000 to \$1,280,000** (12 months)
(excludes previously approved \$27,750 annual funding for the Late Night Café)

Mobile Outreach Program = **\$177,000** (annually)
(\$475,000 operating budget less \$298,000 grant)
(excludes previously approved \$27,750 annual funding for the Late Night Café but does include additional budget for transportation, supplies, materials, communications, etc.)

Administration has been focusing on the potential temporary facility and has yet to spend adequate time and resources to understand the potential financial implications for a permanent supportive housing facility. This will come back to Council for information and approvals.

Next Steps

If the recommendations proposed in this report are approved by Council the following steps will be taken as part of the implementation:

1. Continue development of a communications plan and update website (May 24)
2. Signal to the community, partners, and facility users of the closure of the Community Hub by June 30, 2023. (May 24 start)
3. Immediately begin recruitment process for mobile outreach workers. (May 24 start recruitment with intention to start employment July 3)
4. Once staff have been secured, analysis, research, planning, and community relations work to begin as soon as possible. Outreach work will commence as soon as the grant has been approved. (Estimate for grant approval July 15-August 15)
5. Create and post “Request for Proposals” for a community partner to operate and facilitate a supportive housing facility. (Estimate for creation, posting, and evaluation of submissions 2 months)
6. Continue and accelerate analysis and recommendations for location options for a permanent supportive housing facility and report to Council for information or necessary approvals. (August 21, 2023 or sooner)
7. Prioritize grant analysis and applications for supportive housing funding. (Immediate – report/decision of Council TBD)