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Date December 2, 2020 **Report No.** 2020-576

To Chair and Members
Social Services Committee

From Aaron Wallace, Acting General Manager
Community Services and Social Development

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Item For Consideration	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.0 Topic Homelessness Shelter Diversion Strategy Pilot [Financial Impact: None]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report 2020-576 Homelessness Shelter Diversion Strategy Pilot BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT Staff BE DIRECTED to develop a shelter diversion pilot program for implementation in April 2021 until March 2022; and
- C. THAT Staff BE DIRECTED to refer to Estimates Committee as part of the budget process, the cost of implementing a shelter diversion pilot program in the gross amount of \$100,000 as an increase to the homelessness base budget as follows:
 - i. 2021 - \$75,000
 - ii. 2022 - \$25,000; and,
- D. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to incorporate the homelessness shelter diversion strategy into a Mid to Long Term Sheltering System Plan; and

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- E. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to bring the Mid to Long Term Sheltering System Plan report to Council in February 2021.

4.0 Purpose and Overview

To provide members of Social Services Committee and Council with information regarding shelter diversion programs in other communities and to seek approval to undertake a pilot program to implement and monitor a similar program locally.

5.0 Background

At its meeting on September 22, 2020 City Council adopted report 2020-275 Temporary Winter Emergency Shelter Final Report that directed staff to implement a cold weather alert motel/hotel strategy and to report back with comparator information on diversion practices for the December 2 Social Services Committee meeting.

City staff in partnership with the emergency shelters, have deployed a centralized diversion assessment questionnaire whereby individuals attempting to access an emergency shelter must first be screened through the Social Services Support Centre. The diversion assessment is based on OrgCode's recommended nine step diversion process and has been utilized by staff since late 2018. The nine step diversion assessment focuses on identifying every possible client sheltering option prior to entering the shelter. If the shelter is the only option, the client understands they must immediately begin a plan to leave the shelter given it is not a permanent option.

During the diversion assessment staff will also determine the residency of the individual. If it is deemed that the individual is not from, or has no meaningful ties to the Brantford-Brant and Six Nations community they are denied entry into the emergency shelter system and offered transportation supports to return to their community of choice. It is important to note that although non-residents may be denied entry to the emergency shelter system, this does not prevent those individuals from choosing to stay in the Brantford-Brant community where they may become part of the unsheltered homeless population.

An effective shelter diversion program framework goes beyond a nine step assessment questionnaire. A comprehensive diversion program coordinates and focuses homelessness prevention resources and support services in a strategic way dependent on the target population. A diversion program can potentially reduce demand on the emergency shelter system.

6.0 Corporate Policy Context

High Quality Of Life & Caring For All Citizens

Brantford will be recognized as a safe and healthy community – one that promotes and enables the well-being of its citizens, and supports access of all citizens to a full range of health and community services.

Examine the feasibility of proceeding with initiatives to enhance accessible community health and wellness.

7.0 Input From Other Sources

City of Brantford – Finance

8.0 Analysis

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness defines shelter diversion as the practice of preventing homelessness by providing supports before individuals or families enter the emergency shelter system. Shelter diversion is recognized as a best practice due to effectively reduce demand on the emergency shelter system through the identification of immediate alternate housing arrangements and connections to services. Diversion programs include conflict mediation, housing search support, providing financial assistance (rent, utility costs), and short-term service coordination with support agencies.

8.1 Shelter Diversion Program Examples

Staff researched shelter diversion program examples from other communities in Ontario. Those communities made targeted investments to create and evaluate a shelter diversion program. Examples of the best practices from the other communities include the following:

- 1) Diversion projects that provide prevention-focused outreach and intervention, connecting with families/individuals when they are at imminent risk of homelessness
- 2) Diversion that happens through conversations at emergency shelters when a client is seeking shelter as the first step to ensure all appropriate resources have been exhausted
- 3) If there are no available, safe, and appropriate alternatives, that families/individuals are not diverted from emergency shelter; shelters

instead have diversion focused case managers to work with the client to develop a support plan to achieve alternate housing arrangements (most often involving other local health, social, and justice service providers to support the client's housing plan)

A summary of shelter diversion examples from other communities, including the Regions of Niagara and Waterloo, Hamilton, London, and Peterborough, is provided below in "Table 1, Summary of Shelter Diversion Examples".

Table 1 – Summary of Shelter Diversion Examples				
City	Target Population	Framework	Lead Agency	Cost/Funding
Niagara	Youth shelter diversion program 2019	Shelter diversion conversation prior to intake into shelter	Niagara	\$60,000 provided from a local fuel provider (Gales) with other funding coming for a local community foundation
Waterloo	Youth shelter pilot 2017	Youth agency lead shelter diversion, centralized housing help line for adults	Argus Youth Shelter (pilot) Region of Waterloo (Service Manager)	\$492,600 received from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund (2 year pilot)
London	Family shelter pilot 2018 *ongoing hospital diversion pilot	Family shelter diversion, half-time to full time centralized shelter diversion worker	Rotholme Women and Family Shelter (implementation), City of London (Service Manager), LHRI (evaluation)	\$134,000 from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund (18 month pilot)
Hamilton	Youth and Families pilot 2018	Pre-screening for diversion prior to entry into emergency shelter	Good Shepard Family Shelter (implementation), City of Hamilton Service Manager)	Formalizing diversion practices through a \$100,000 pilot project.

Peterborough	Youth and Family shelter pilot 2018	221 phone line as centralized access point for shelter and diversion service access	YES Youth Shelter (pilot), City of Peterborough (Service Manager), Community and Counselling Resource Centre (implementation)	CCRC is a registered charity funded by local United Way, other public funds, and private donations.
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8.2 Proposed Diversion Program Model

After review of the diversion model examples staff recommends an adapted version of the City of Hamilton model be developed and implemented locally. The approach would include capability for evaluation of the program to be delivered through contracted services associated with the Housing Resource Centre (HRC) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) services which will be delivered by a third party provider

The local Homelessness Shelter Diversion pilot program will include the following parameters:

- Target population: individuals and families at imminent risk of becoming homeless, as well as street involved individuals not engaged in service
- Collaboration across the shelter system to ensure all intake follows the standardized diversion assessment procedure
- Adequate resourcing to develop, implement, monitor and adjust the program as needed; this includes linking ICM services with individuals and families entering shelter service to put together a plan for the clients to be quickly diverted to staying with friends, family, or other lodging that is safe and appropriate; exhausting all other alternatives to staying in shelter
- Outreach via school systems to students/youth who may be at risk of homelessness, with the potential to do case work with families to help prevent youth/family homelessness
- Diversion training for case management and applicable shelter staff
- In conjunction with City staff, development of an evaluation framework to demonstrate whether the program successfully diverts clients from

shelters, reduces the average time spent in shelters, as well as reductions to homelessness recidivism

Working with the contracted HRC and ICM services, the Shelter Diversion Pilot program will provide the additional financial resources to permit those services to provide immediate resources for clients presenting at shelter or requesting shelter services. The enhanced funding for these contracted services will have the targeted goal of diverting 30 per cent or more, of clients facing or experiencing homelessness from entering or remaining in shelter, ideally reducing the need for shelter beds in the community. Implementation of the homelessness coordinated access system “Homeless Individuals and Families Information System”, or HIFIS, will provide data support for the shelter diversion pilot program.

Mid to Long Term Sheltering System Plan

Subject to approval of this report, staff will incorporate the shelter diversion strategies into the Mid to Long Term Sheltering System Plan coming forward in February 2021. There are currently 30 temporary shelter beds in place until the end of April 2021. In November 2019 Council directed staff to include 10 of these beds into the 2021 operating budget estimates process as an increase to the base budget should there be a demonstrated, ongoing need for the 10 additional block funded beds. Staff anticipates the diversion strategy will reduce the client time spent in shelter, and part of the need for the ongoing shelter system beds.

Accordingly staff will include 10 of the temporary shelter beds in the 2021 operating budget process; however staff will not seek to increase the additional 20 beds currently in place until the end of April 2021. Alternatively staff will introduce other option(s) for emergency winter overnight sheltering system capacity for the winter of 2021/2022.

9.0 Financial Implications

Should Council approve the 1-year shelter diversion pilot program through the budget process the financial impact for the shelter diversion pilot program from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022 would be \$100,000. The 2021 base budget would include a gross base budget increase of \$75,000 (City - \$70,350; County - \$4,650), and the remaining cost of \$25,000 would be included in the 2022 budget.

10.0 Conclusion

Following the Shelter Services Review completed in 2018 staff have worked together with shelter operators and community partners to improve the local emergency shelter system.

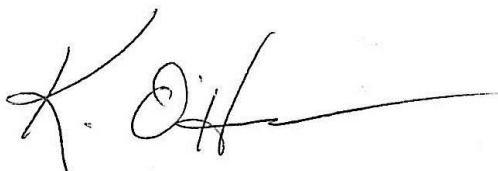
Building capacity and measuring successes in homelessness prevention is also critically important to achieving the goal of decreasing or ending homelessness. Shelter diversion programs have been demonstrated to reduce inflow into the emergency shelter system and ultimately reduce ongoing costs to the existing emergency shelter system.



Maryellen MacLellan, Director
Housing & Homelessness



Aaron Wallace, Acting General Manager
Community Services & Social
Development



Kevin O'Hara, Manager
Housing Stability



Anthony Labatt, Manager
Family & Income Support

Attachments: None

Copy to: N/A

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no
Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no
Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no