
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Second Annual Report Card builds on findings and successes from the First.
- Trends in needs are showing similar, but worsening patterns.
- A number of solutions underway promise to address the most serious gaps identified and will do so in a sustainable manner for the clients served, but stronger senior government support remains a main priority.
- The Continuum of Supports model approved by Council provides a useful framework for assessment and program development.

1. Background

Council has directed staff to focus on initiatives designed to prevent homelessness and assist those at risk. This focus originated following the May 1999 release of the final report of the Region of Peel's Task Force on Homelessness. The direction of staff initiatives and those in partnership with community agencies and stakeholders has been toward increasing stability in the lives of families and individuals experiencing homelessness in Peel.

In 2001, the First Annual Report Card on Housing and Homelessness Initiatives provided a series of "one-pager" documents on trends and successes, as well as issues of relevance and concern. Since that time, reports have come forward documenting each subject covered in the "one-pagers". Reports will continue to come forward to Council on these issues and trends.

It was clear one year ago that, for most low-income singles and families in Peel, it was becoming more difficult to pay for the high cost of housing and other necessities on fixed incomes or salaries at the low end of the scale. Also problematic was the fact that affordable rental housing was declining in the Region. Members of Council have continued to lobby the senior levels of government for financial assistance to help municipalities assist those who are homeless and those rising numbers who are vulnerable to homelessness.

The attached Second Annual Report Card on Housing and Homelessness Initiatives builds on the First Annual Report Card of a year ago. It provides a reflection on how staff has worked within the Continuum of Supports Framework to both increase awareness of the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Peel and address gaps within the Continuum framework. This Report Card also provides updates on the initiatives undertaken in co-operation with our partners.

2. Report Overview

Working within the Continuum of Supports framework, staff is increasingly focusing on building capacity within the homeless and at-risk population. To do so, programs must be designed and appropriate housing developed which are directed toward stabilizing, enabling and mobilizing individuals and families. A failure to implement these three fundamental capacity building principles will result in the inability to address the root causes of homelessness and failure to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. In turn, this will prolong pressure for continued investment in short-term emergency responses.

The second annual report card begins with a summary of highlights, notably key trends, from the first report card. It then describes trends identified over the past 12 months with respect to service gaps, poverty, housing and shelter, and health trends and issues. Although our understanding of these trends is becoming more sophisticated, revealing depths of complexity which were just beginning to emerge a year earlier, the fact is that most observed trends represent a continuation, and a continued worsening, of what was seen the previous year.

The report then summarizes the Continuum of Supports framework, which has been approved by Council. An appendix provides a more visual depiction of this matrix.

The report goes on to provide an update on major initiatives, which are likewise depicted within the Continuum of Supports model. Those initiatives include:

- Outreach – Council has already seen more detailed information on the successes of the Outreach Program, which is a collaborative effort of the Human Services Departments and a number of external agencies.
- Shelters – Detailed information on shelter occupancy has been provided under a separate report to Council. As data gathering improves, more frequent reports are planned.
- Youth Village – To be located on Peel Living's Weaver's Hill property, and also approved in principle by Council, this 48-bed project would provide a range of housing options and programs for young people who are homeless or at risk. The emphasis will be upon community development approaches, education, life skills development and training. The project will require Regional operational funding, and staff will be reporting back to Council on the operating implications.
- Housing for Families in Transition – Regional Council has approved in principle a proposal for a 22-unit housing project for families in transition at Peel Living's Britannia Place site, as developed by the family housing working group over the past year and a half. This project is intended to provide a medium term solution for families in crisis, helping to pave the way from emergency housing to full integration.
- Efficiency Apartment Project – This proposed 55-unit apartment building would deliver small, self-contained apartments to provide an alternative to the apparent rise in the number of illegal basement apartments and rooming houses.
- St. Leonard's Rotary Resolve House – Building on their own successes, St. Leonard's is now trying to develop the next stage in their own continuum of supports,

with a 17-unit affordable housing addition to their facility. Staff will keep Council apprised of the development and the operating cost implications of the proposal.

- Community Economic Development (CED) – There are very few examples of community economic development targeted at unemployable persons in Peel, but there have been some successes, including St. Leonard’s workshop. Potential CED opportunities are being explored.

The report goes on to provide somewhat more specific analysis and descriptions of impacts with respect to income, housing affordability and health. For instance, there is a fairly stark depiction of the sheer impossibility of paying the going rental charges when Social Assistance or low end wages represent the main income. The long term impacts upon children and youth associated with poor quality housing and socially concentrated isolated neighbourhoods can be particularly devastating.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Most of the projects underway have been approved in principle, to at least allow investigatory work to proceed. Progress will be brought forward individually as they progress, such that financial (both capital and operating) and programmatic implications can be defined in more detail. The strong support of the Federal Government through the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative cannot go unnoticed. With the advocacy support of Council, staff will examine financial strategies within Provincial and Federal funding opportunities to maximize the potential for investment in the Region.

CONCLUSION

The Continuum of Supports approach continues to provide a valuable tool to assess gaps in services and move toward addressing the complex needs of a diverse homeless population. Each of the housing and homelessness initiatives is designed to meet existing needs identified by the community. While valuable partnerships between departments and with the community continue on each of the initiatives, it is clear that the Region of Peel has limited capacity to respond fully to the diverse needs which are emerging and will require long-term partnerships with other levels of government and with the community.

We need to ensure that the programs, policies and services we have jurisdiction over, are designed to move beyond emergency crisis responses. For those which are contributing to the cycle of poverty and homelessness and which are beyond our jurisdiction, we must advocate assertively to create change. We must ensure that that the programs and services currently applied are addressing the root causes of homelessness and are preventative in terms of stopping those at-risk from losing ground. We will continue to improve our evaluation methods to determine how our capacity building assistance is creating success, even incrementally, in the lives of our citizens.