

# Cold Weather Strategy Update

## ISSUE

The Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy resources have been significantly impacted by COVID19. The Community Services Division and the Saskatoon Fire Department received a request from the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership to expand the City of Saskatoon Partnership in the Cold Weather Strategy by providing a designated civic facility for overnight sheltering.

## BACKGROUND

In 2012 a partnership of agencies joined to develop the Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy. The guiding principles of this strategy are:

- No one should sleep outside on a cold night;
- Individual dignity must be respected even in emergency situations: each person should have a space to safely social distance and be should be provided appropriate PPE if required; (updated 2020)
- Shelters will do their best to ensure everyone is allowed access to emergency shelter including intoxicated persons or those previously placed on a Service Review List; If an individual is not admitted, shelters are responsible for making a referral;
- Health and safety of staff and other residents is a priority and admission to a shelter must take into account both the health and safety of staff and residents; and
- Everyone will work to ensure that individuals and families experiencing or at-risk of homeless are aware of safe, available sleeping options.

Members of the Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy include:

- City of Saskatoon – Emergency Management Organization
- Community Support Officers (CSO)
- CUMFI
- Egadz
- Ministry of Social Services
- The Salvation Army
- Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Services Inc
- Saskatchewan Health Authority
- OUT Saskatoon
- Friendship Inn
- Prairie Harm Reduction
- Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership

- Saskatoon Indian Metis Friendship Centre
- SWITCH
- The Bridge on 20<sup>th</sup> Street
- Westside Community Clinic
- YWCA of Saskatoon

The Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy contains triggers for activation, a communication strategy, and a list of warm-up locations.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

COVID19 has had a significant impact on the resources available through the Cold Weather Strategy. Congregate emergency shelters have had to adjust the number of spaces available for use to follow COVID19 safety requirements. In addition, the number of warm-up shelter locations are limited by physical distancing requirements.

The City of Saskatoon (City) provides the following resources during Cold Weather Activations:

- **Saskatoon Transit Safe Bus:** Developed in partnership with Child & Youth Friendly Saskatoon in June 2000, Safe Bus was designed to assist anyone, of any age, that needs immediate shelter or needs to contact emergency services. By simply and safely flagging down a bus or going to a parked bus, transit operators are required to immediately contact emergency services directly through the on-bus radio system and give the person in peril a safe place to wait.
- **Saskatoon Emergency Management:** The Cold Weather Strategy partners are alerted to an activation through the Notifynow emergency notification system.

Since the onset of the COVID19 pandemic's impact in Saskatoon, City Administration has reached out to support the community in their response. A number of City employees have supported the Inter-Agency Response to COVID and through this have provided ongoing operational support to Emergency Shelters and other members of the Cold Weather Strategy. This includes:

- **March 2020 ongoing**
  - A City employee has been providing logistical leadership for supply chain for COVID19 related personal protective equipment (PPE) for the Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID19. This includes: procuring PPE and critical supplies, placing and receiving orders, coordinating delivery to agencies, liaising with member agencies to identify their supply burn rates, tracking inventory counts, managing expense claims, and when an Outbreak is declared in a member agency ensure a timely response to any change in PPE requirements. This employee has been assigned full-time to this task.

- A City employee has been assigned the role of Safety Officer to provide COVID19 health and safety supports and coordination to member agencies, ensures proper safety procedures are in place, maintains situational awareness regarding safety, current Public Health Orders, changes to the Saskatchewan Re-Open plans impacting member agencies, and provides critical updates to members.
- March 2020 – December 2020
  - A City employee provided communications support to the Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID19. This employee provided ongoing internal communication support, administrative support, liaison between the contracted graphic designer and member organizations, facilitated meetings, monitored the Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID19 email and arrange meetings.
  - A City employee provided Planning Section Chief support for the Incident Command Structure established by the Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID19. This included assisting in the establishment of the Incident Command Structure, attending meetings, coordination of supports and ongoing planning requirements.

While these City employees are not directly providing support to the Cold Weather Strategy, they have provided indirect support through their work with the Saskatoon Inter-Agency Response to COVID and provide support to emergency shelters and emergency food organizations that assist in mitigating the impact of COVID19 on these services.

In addition to the above supports, at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge which is a City owned facility, and operated in partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council (as the Managing Partner), Central Urban Metis Federation Inc. and Saskatchewan Health Authority, has been providing programs and services including sheltering services for youth in the area, throughout the COVID response. City Administration have also been providing additional staffing supports to the operation of White Buffalo Youth Lodge throughout the pandemic response.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

#### **Request for City Facility for Overnight Sheltering**

The Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) is requesting that the City of Saskatoon consider expanding its role within the Cold Weather Strategy by providing a designated civic facility for overnight sheltering.

Social services are under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. The City does not have a legislative responsibility to provide emergency social services. However, *The Cities Act* does allow for a wide range of purposes of cities including providing

services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary and desirable for all or a part of the city, to develop and maintain a safe and viable community, and to foster economic, social and environmental well-being.

At this time, the province has not requested the use of designated city facilities for emergency shelters.

During a Cold Weather Strategy activation residents requiring emergency shelter can access Emergency Social Services After Hours support through The Salvation Army Saskatoon. The Salvation Army Saskatoon works with the Ministry of Social Services in the providing these services to residents of Saskatoon.

### Implications of Considering a City-owned Facility for Overnight Sheltering

There would be both operational and resourcing implications to providing a civic facility for emergency overnight shelter services during Cold Weather Strategy activations. To provide emergency overnight shelter services, infrastructure and the appropriately trained human resources would be required for the designated civic facility. Financial and service level implications would include, but are not limited to:

- a. Closure of an existing civic facility to its normal use, unless only a portion of that facility were made available. In the example of a leisure centre, closure and loss of recreational programming and the associated revenue. If only a portion of the facility were made available for the shelter area (i.e. the gym at Cosmo Civic Centre), then not all programming or activities would be impacted.
- d. City staff are not trained in the skills required to operate as an emergency cold weather overnight shelter. There are specific skills related to physical and mental health conditions that are often present in individuals requiring shelter. Appropriately trained staff or contractual resources with the required skills and training would be required along with the associated cost to provide the level of service.
- e. If the full facility were repurposed for sheltering, current civic staff would see a reduction in hours that would require communication with associated unions.
- f. The City does not have the required supplies to operate a facility as a shelter (blankets, cots, etc.), so these would need to be procured or supplied by others.
- g. There would be incremental operating costs with operating a facility outside normal hours, additional security costs, facility cleaning, additional COVID protocols, and costs to transition between normal operations and shelter operations would be new costs to the City.
- h. Other than the main library, and City Hall the majority of civic facilities are located outside of the downtown area, so transportation to any other civic facility would be a requirement.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As note in the above section of the report, if the City were to consider using a City owned facility for overnight sheltering, there would be significant financial implications to consider, both in potential lost program revenue and in additional expenses to operate the overnight emergency shelter. The magnitude of which would depend on the facility, whether it is the full facility or a portion of the facility, the duration of the provision of overnight shelter services and the additional support resources needed. If directed to consider this option, Administration would undertake to do a more detailed review and report back further on financial implications.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Cold Weather Strategy partners have agreed to a review and updating of the Cold Weather Strategy. Through this review the City of Saskatoon can evaluate the current supports that City Administration has in place and will determine if there are any additional supports that can be provided within our jurisdictional responsibilities.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy
2. City of Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy Request from Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership

### Report Approval:

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