

Walter, Penny

Subject: FW: Email - Request to Speak - Upcoming Winter Season Regarding our Homeless Population - CK 750-6
Attachments: letter_to_pdcs_re_emergency_overnight_sheltering.pdf

From: Web NoReply <web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca>

Sent: October 04, 2021 6:36 PM

To: City Council <City.Council@Saskatoon.ca>

Subject: Email - Request to Speak - Upcoming Winter Season Regarding our Homeless Population - CK 750-6

--- Replies to this email will go to [REDACTED] ---

Submitted on Monday, October 4, 2021 - 18:35

Submitted by user: [REDACTED]

Submitted values are:

Date Monday, October 04, 2021

To His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

First Name Sherry

Last Name Tarasoff

Phone Number [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Address [REDACTED] Peterson Cres

City Saskatoon

Province Saskatchewan

Postal Code [REDACTED]

Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable)

Subject Preparation for the upcoming winter season regarding our homeless population (new issue)

Meeting (if known) SPC on Planning, Development and Community Services

Comments

Please accept the attached document as my submission. I am also requesting to speak about it. Thank you.

Attachments

[letter_to_pdcs_re_emergency_overnight_sheltering.pdf](#)

Will you be submitting a video to be vetted prior to council meeting? No

TO: Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services
RE: Preparation for the upcoming winter season regarding our homeless population

Attention: Mr. Chair, Your Worship and City Councillors

My name is Sherry Tarasoff. Thank you for this opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the upcoming winter season. In summary, this is my request. Further details are provided below.

- That the City of Saskatoon have an Emergency Overnight Sheltering Plan in place
- That the City of Saskatoon, as a member of the Cold Weather Strategy Committee, request a review of the threshold for Cold Weather Alerts

There is no doubt about it – Saskatoon has a serious homelessness issue. One that is not just about a roof over your head. There are many underlying issues that contribute to homelessness that require wraparound support services from both the provincial and federal governments. My concern today is about **Emergency Overnight Sheltering** for the upcoming winter season, which is different than a long-term, permanent plan to address to homelessness. Does the City of Saskatoon have options for evenings when other community locations are closed or at capacity during a Cold Weather Alert? There is a possibility that people may actually FREEZE TO DEATH while waiting for solutions (in January 2021, there were two freezing deaths in Saskatoon). When the mercury drops, action will be required IMMEDIATELY. There will be no time to wait for budgets, plans or policies.

As a refresher, the last winter season was intense – record snow fall, blizzards, extreme cold and windchills. It was on February 1, 2021 that the Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) wrote a letter to the Mayor and Council:

“Today, we are asking that you consider an expanded partnership by exploring the potential of triggered emergency use of a designated civic facility for overnight sheltering. We understand that such a solution is far from simple, and that many partners would be required to operate any new facility, even if only for a couple of nights at a time. We also understand that any emergency use of facilities would have an impact on regular civic operations and programs. We do not make this request lightly, and believe that with all partners at the table, we will reach the solutions needed to prevent unnecessary future tragedies.”

<https://pub-saskatoon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=131015>

In response, at the February 22, 2021 Regular Business Meeting of City Council, City Administration provided an Information Report:

“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 Cold Weather Strategy Update 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.”

<https://pub-saskatoon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=131013>

The current Cold Weather Strategy indicates that a Very Cold Temperature Trigger will occur

“When the air temperature or wind chill is expected to reach minus 30°C within a 24-hour period

according to the Environment Canada Website Hourly Forecast Page.” An Extreme Cold Warning Trigger will occur “When the air temperature or wind chill is expected to reach minus 40°C for at least two hours.”

<https://pub-saskatoon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=131014>

There were both Very Cold and Extreme Cold Triggers between February 1st (SHIP’s request for help) and February 22nd (Council meeting). The following story was shared in the Community Support Program Supervisor’s Report to the Street Activity Subcommittee in March 2021.



Community Support Program Report
Street Activity Subcommittee
Rob Garrison - Supervisor

February 2021

It was a very cold February evening when we were called to a recycle bin in the Downtown area. A community member was taking out their recycling and had found two people huddled inside. We quickly arrived on scene and located the couple. The couple told us they are homeless and were planning on spending the night in the bin. We explained to the couple how cold and life threatening it would be to stay in the bin. The couple eventually agreed to us helping them find shelter. We were able to contact a family member for the male and he went to stay with his mother for the night. His mother also told us her son is battling cancer and is concerned for him. We assisted the couple out of the bin, and they were very stiff from the cold. We suggested that they be seen by paramedics, but they refused. We provided them with winter clothing and warming packs to put in their mitts. The female had nowhere to go. Thankfully, because the Cold Weather Strategy had been activated, we were able to get her funded for a hotel. We contacted another outreach team to transport the couple to their respective accommodations for the night.

CSO #1695

There is an opportunity for the City of Saskatoon to be pro-active with an **Emergency Overnight Sheltering Plan**, instead of re-active. A prepared Plan could give SHIP the necessary support that they requested earlier this year and will most likely need again. Extreme cold is becoming more common for our winters and, unfortunately, COVID-19 does not look like it has run its course yet, so that will continue to cause challenges.

Consider this: The City has developed a formal Roadways Emergency Response Plan for clearing roads after extreme or unusual snow events. The activation of this Plan may happen only once every ten years. Meanwhile, MULTIPLE Cold Weather Alerts will certainly happen EVERY year. Shouldn't an **Emergency Overnight Sheltering Plan** be at least as important as a plan for clearing roads?

Saskatoon's Winter Strategy Implementation Plan was received as information on May 10, 2021. One of the action items is "*Build on Saskatoon's Cold Weather Strategy to develop a Winter Emergency Response Guide*". When will this Guide be developed? If it will not be in place for this winter, other options must be explored. In addition to the Safe Bus, even having overnight buses, like the City of Edmonton does to serve as warming spaces and to transport people to shelters, could help to avoid unnecessary tragedies. Perhaps this is a situation where an electric bus could serve as the overnight bus.

https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/community-services/planning-development/wintercityyxe_strategy_implementation_plan_april_final.pdf#page=23

I understand that between the Safe Community Action Alliance and the Community Safety and Well-Being Partnership, there are complex issues to work through for those experiencing homelessness. As I have already stated, the imminent winter season will not wait for policies, funding or system changes. An **Emergency Overnight Sheltering Plan** must be ready for implementation in a few months. Lives depend on it.

One final note of concern. Has the threshold for the Cold Weather Alert Triggers been reviewed lately? Health Canada considers extreme cold to be wind chill values below -27. That is when the risk of windburn and frostbite increases. Health Canada also notes that homeless people are at greater risk for frostbite and hypothermia. Personally, I have the privilege to avoid being out in that kind of cold for any length of time, and when I am required to venture out, I am dressed appropriately. This privilege is not available to everyone. I request that the threshold be reviewed using a lens for our homeless population.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/environment/extreme-cold.html>

I truly hope that pro-active planning by the City of Saskatoon can help prevent another winter from claiming any lives.

Thank you for your consideration,
Sherry Tarasoff