

Homelessness, Encampments and Temporary Emergency Shelters

ISSUE

Administration has been approached by community groups who have expressed an interest in providing safe housing and/or temporary shelters, this winter, for those in need. This report provides an update on some of the work underway where the City of Saskatoon (the City) is involved, and how the City can potentially assist these community groups.

BACKGROUND

While the City does not have a direct delivery role in the area of social services, which is led by the Province often with partner organizations, the City does have the ability to remove barriers for organizations who work in this area. Connected to the City Council Strategic Priority of Community Safety and Wellbeing much work has been initiated over the past months.

CURRENT STATUS

Coordinated Approach – Incident Command Process

Numerous groups, including other orders of government are working towards solutions for the immediacy of the current situation to help provide housing needs. Given the recent situation in Regina with the “tent city”, Saskatoon Fire Department (SFD) has been in discussions with other larger cities. There are life, health, and public safety concerns associated with tent cities.

What is currently in process is, in response to three encampment fires and one abandoned campfire at inadequate and unsafe housing alternatives, identified as encampments, the SFD needed to take a proactive approach towards encampments that pose a risk to life safety and property. The SFD, enforces the Property Maintenance Nuisance & Abatement Bylaw 8175, 2003 and under *the Cities Act* and *the Fire Safety Act* needed to address risks as the weather turns colder. In a proactive approach, an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated as this is a community wide and collaborative concern not just a City of Saskatoon concern. Assisted by multiple partnering agencies, SFD is receiving reports of encampments, responding to assess and analyze the risks on site and engaging partnering agencies required to facilitate emergency shelter and other supports or needs for the vulnerable population.

Work will continue to coordinate in a collaborative and compassionate way on this important initiative while also completing an overall strategy to address extreme weather, disaster, and events that impact the community. Especially for those who are most vulnerable and less likely to have the supports many others have access to.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Temporary Shelters - Zoning Bylaw and Building Permit Regulations

In addition to the coordinated response approach outlined above, Administration has also been contacted about how best to support groups and organizations looking to establish temporary shelters for those in need for the coming winter months. This requires consideration in relation to both the Zoning Bylaw and Building Code requirements, while focusing on ensuring life and fire safety regulations are met for any facility being considered as a temporary shelter.

A team from Fire, Planning and Development, and Building Standards Departments along with the Solicitor's Office, has undertaken a review of what other cities have done to address similar situations. There are a few cities that have put measures in place to enable the provision of temporary emergency residential shelters.

In reviewing the approaches from other cities, key considerations are ensuring the temporary shelter arrangements are compliant with Fire Code, the Building Code, the Building Bylaw, and the Zoning Bylaw. All temporary shelters must be legally established to ensure they meet the above requirements.

To be in the best position possible to accommodate requests for temporary emergency residential shelters, Planning and Development will be submitting a proposal to amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide a definition for Emergency Residential Shelters and adding a new subsection to the General Regulations for this temporary use. Clear regulations for the application, review and approval process, and appropriate zoning districts will be outlined. Enabling their location under the Zoning Bylaw would just be one piece of the approval process and any occupancy for this purpose would require a development permit which complies with a number of regulations.

The life and fire safety regulations for a facility will be evaluated through an occupancy permit and coordinated with the Development Permit process.

Undertaking these measures would allow for the establishment of temporary emergency residential shelters and would provide one more tool to assist service providers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no current financial implications of this report. As more work gets underway, should there be any future financial implications, a further report would be provided to Committee and Council at the appropriate time.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The social implications of this matter of addressing homelessness in Saskatoon are identified above.

There are no privacy, legal, or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

At the November 22, 2021 Public Hearing of City Council, the Planning and Development Department will present a report on a proposal to amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide for a definition of Emergency Residential Shelters and add a new subsection to the General Regulations for this temporary use.

The process for the Zoning Bylaw amendment typically involves a number of steps including public consultation and consideration by Municipal Planning Commission, before advertising and then Public Hearing at City Council. Considering the urgent needs of the current situation and what has been seen in other communities, Administration is proceeding with a process that will not include all typical steps as noted but still meets all legal requirements to amend the Zoning Bylaw, which would include advertising as per the Public Notice Policy and then consideration at a Public Hearing.

REPORT APPROVAL

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