

Housing Program Update

ISSUE

The creation of a new Housing Strategy is currently underway in order to align the City of Saskatoon's (City) role in Housing with identified strategic priorities, current trends, local housing needs, as well as Provincial and Federal programs and responsibilities. This report provides a variety of Housing updates, including a close-out report of the previous Housing Business Plan (2013-2022), an overview of the interim Housing work that is currently underway, an update on the current Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) contract and the first milestone update of the Housing Strategy project.

BACKGROUND

Housing Business Plan (2013-2022)

In 2013, the City's [Strategic Plan \(2013-2023\)](#) provided direction for Saskatoon's growth; housing was a key component of that Plan. The Quality-of-Life Strategic Goal identified housing as a priority, in part, with the following strategies:

- "Increase the supply and range of affordable housing options."; and
- "Ensure that policies encourage a mix of housing types across the city (i.e., ownership vs. rental)."

City Council, at its Regular Business Meeting on June 24, 2013, approved the [Housing Business Plan](#) 2013-2022. The Housing Business Plan was implemented as a direct result of the City's Strategic Plan and defined where the City could be the most effective in serving the community by meeting the increasing need for more affordable, purpose-built rental and entry-level housing.

Housing Strategy Project

Through the 2023 Business Plan and Budget Deliberations, City Council allocated \$245,000 for preparation of a new Housing Strategy.

This new Housing Strategy project (Project) is needed to bring the City's Housing Strategy into alignment with current housing needs, existing plans and strategies as well as other levels of government to ensure current community needs are being met and to provide guidance and direction to Administration by reviewing the City's role, as it relates to Housing.

Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership Service Contract

The current service contract with SHIP was approved for the period of September 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023.

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services (PDCS Committee), at its meeting on August 15, 2022, received a [report](#) regarding a 16-month service contract with SHIP. Along with the recommendation for approval of that contract, the PDCS Committee also resolved, in part:

- “3. That following execution of the contract and within six months, Administration report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services outlining more specifically the evaluation framework for the contract including specific key performance indicators with emphasis on implementation of the Homelessness Action Plan and any updates about learnings from coordinated access implementation.”

CURRENT STATUS

Interim Housing Program Operations

With the previous Housing Business Plan concluding at the end of 2022 and the new Housing Strategy not anticipated to be completed until mid-2024, the Housing program continues to operate in partnership with other levels of Government and Community Organizations. The interim housing, work which is currently in progress, includes, but is not limited to:

- Rapid Housing Initiative:
 - Round 2 – 20-year operational monitoring; and
 - Round 3 – finalizing project approvals, supporting development anticipated to be complete by November 2024.
- Housing Solutions Lab in partnership with SHIP;
- Housing Accelerator Fund application support;
 - A number of the identified initiatives will be implemented by the Housing team.
- Administering Capital Grants and Tax Abatements:
 - Reporting and monitoring; and
 - Preparing for potential Call for Proposals to be sent out this fall.
- Administering SHIP Service Contract:
 - Monitoring and overseeing contract deliverables.
- Participation on Community Advisory Board:
 - Including Government of Canada’s Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy funding adjudication.
- Participation in various other Housing related working groups:
 - Coordinated Access, Right to Home Municipal Working Group, etc.
- Regular on-going communications with various partners:
 - Federal and Provincial partners, City of Regina, Non-profit Housing and Support Service Providers, etc.

Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership Service Contract Update

For the term of the current contract, SHIP committed to continue facilitating meetings, provide staff support to committees and action teams, help develop and enhance programs, research solutions, evaluate and report on progress, foster collective action and ensure the 2016 Homelessness Action Plan continues to be implemented.

Since initiation of the current contract in September 2022, the following activities have occurred, which support the key deliverables outlined in the service contract:

- **Innovative Approaches to Housing and Homelessness Conference:** The conference was held on November 22, 2022, and included sessions related to housing and homelessness and brought together a wide variety of housing and homelessness organizations, front-line service providers, policy makers, elected officials and government administration.
- **The 2022 Homelessness Report Card:** Was provided by SHIP and has been included (see Appendix 1).
- **Saskatoon Cold Weather Strategy:** As part of SHIP's administration of the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy funding (Reaching Home), several Call for Proposals were issued to allocate funding to community agencies to support the Cold Weather Strategy. The City's service contract identified a supporting role for SHIP in the Cold Weather Strategy.

In addition to the above activities aligned to the service contract, SHIP's main function has been focused on their role as Community Entity for the Reaching Home funding, which includes, but is not limited to, the following activities:

- **Reaching Home Funding Adjudication:** The Community Advisory Board and SHIP work to adjudicate funding requests for Reaching Home, as well as other collective action items.
- **Coordinated Access System Development:** An information session was held, related to systems mapping work of the services available within the community, to support people experiencing housing instability and homelessness. A Call for Proposals was issued to identify a lead agency for the Coordinated Access System, which was subsequently awarded to Metis Nation Saskatchewan. Initial governance and planning meetings have begun by Metis Nation Saskatchewan and will be ongoing in the coming months. Several members of Administration are participating in these meetings.

In addition, in 2022, SHIP secured funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to undertake a Housing Solutions Lab. The focus of the Housing Solutions Lab is to answer:

“How can the Saskatoon housing sector find new ways of working together by addressing the needs of community members facing an intersection of challenges?”

The Lab is currently ongoing, with an expected completion in late 2023.

Future Service Contract is Not Currently Planned

Through development of the City's new Housing Strategy, consideration will be given to the roles and responsibilities the City can and/or should have in various aspects along the housing continuum.

This Housing Strategy may result in several changes from the previous Housing Business Plan, including where the City may take on new roles and where we may look for other organizations to provide assistance or take the lead. As a result, in December 2022, Administration advised SHIP that the City will not be entering into a new service contract with them for 2024 as it is unknown what services would be warranted/needed and subsequently who would be best suited for that role. Once City Council approves a new Housing Strategy, the City may issue a formal call for proposals for any new services, as required.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Summary of the Housing Business Plan (2013-2022)

The focus of the Housing Business Plan was to encourage and support an environment where the market was more likely to supply housing that is attainable, inclusive, innovative and integrated into all neighbourhoods. The City supported housing which may be outside the conventional market and worked in a collaborative manner to ensure a range of suitable attainable housing was made available across the community in a wide range of locations.

The priorities of the Housing Business Plan included:

- Creating attainable housing in all neighbourhoods;
- Accessible (barrier-free) housing;
- Neighbourhood revitalization;
- Safe and adequate housing;
- Housing that meets identified needs; and
- Innovative and energy-efficient housing.

Stemming from the priorities listed above, a wide range of business functions were established to achieve the goals of the Housing Business Plan, including the Innovative Housing Incentives Program and associated [Council Policy C09-002](#), Innovative Housing Incentives Policy, such as the Mortgage Flexibilities Support Program, capital grant funding, and Five-Year Property Tax Abatements for Affordable Housing.

The Housing Business Plan supported the total creation of approximately 3,310 units and an average of 300 units per year. A summary of highlights and tools from the Housing Business Plan is provided (see Appendix 2).

Housing Strategy Project Update

The Project experienced a delayed start date as Round 3 of the Rapid Housing Initiative and the Housing Accelerator Fund were announced in late 2022 and early 2023 respectively. Work associated with these Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation programs drew on the resources and capacity of the Housing team.

In addition to the \$245,000 funding allocated by City Council to the Project, an additional \$20,000 was received through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's – Encouraging Community Housing Options funding program.

The municipality is required to match the Encouraging Community Housing Options funding program, which is accounted for in the existing capital project.

The purpose of the Project is to develop a Housing Strategy for the City that describes the City's general role in housing. The City's role is anticipated to change and adapt given the current pressures surrounding housing in Saskatoon, while supporting the goal from the City's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan to:

“Align internal housing plans to reflect community gaps, community-level housing and homelessness plans, and Federal and Provincial investment strategies.”

The Housing Strategy will also help to define specific approaches for how the City is involved and for what purpose. The Housing Strategy is anticipated to guide City involvement in housing for the next five to ten years.

The Housing Strategy project aims to:

- Understand current housing trends and best practices;
- Identify the City's potential roles and responsibilities when it comes to housing;
- Better understand the community's current and future housing needs according to affordability, adequacy and suitability indicators;
- Identify the needs of support service organizations and the priority populations they serve in relation to housing;
- Identify opportunities for incentives, both financial and non-financial, to support housing; and
- Determine funding needs to support the implementation of the Housing Strategy.

The Project includes several initiatives to gather input and assess appropriate data to inform the development of a new Housing Strategy:

- Housing Needs Assessment – review and documentation of housing resources in Saskatoon, as well as an analysis of population growth and income trends to understand the current state of the housing continuum and potential future pressure points to be addressed in the new Housing Strategy.
- Best Practices Review – jurisdictional review of Canadian municipalities to identify options, leading practices and tools available to support housing goals in Saskatoon (see Appendix 3); and
- Engagement – targeted community consultation efforts and additional time to ensure rights holders and stakeholders can appropriately participate.

Based on previous Council direction, the Project is not anticipated to include the following:

- Research or recommendations in relation to City owned or operated housing;
 - Provincial or Federal government responsibilities other than potential advocacy and partnership opportunities; and
 - An update or review of Saskatoon's Homelessness Action Plan.
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Other significant City initiatives that include a Housing component, such as the Housing Accelerator Fund program and the Community Safety and Well-being Plan, are not included in the scope of the Project; however, Administration will coordinate the timing and scope to ensure other initiatives and this Project are in alignment.

It is anticipated that a draft Housing Strategy will be brought forward to the PDCS Committee and City Council for consideration in June 2024 (see Appendix 4).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Project received \$245,000 in the 2023 Budget from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures. An additional \$20,000 was received through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation's – Encouraging Community Housing Options funding program. The balance is currently sufficient to fund the Project as outlined in this report.

As the Project proceeds, any significant proposed additions or changes to the Project scope, either from City Council or as a result of the work, Administration will report back on implications to the Project schedule and/or budget.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

A Triple Bottom Line review was completed in Quarter 2, 2023 using the Triple Bottom Line Improvement Tool. Administration will report back as impacts and opportunities identified through the Triple Bottom Line review are considered or utilized.

There are no other implications associated with this report.

NEXT STEPS

A second Project milestone report is anticipated to be brought forth to the PDCS Committee in December 2023. The report is anticipated to include an Engagement Summary (Phase 1) - What We Heard Report.

APPENDICES

1. SHIP Saskatoon Homelessness Report Card 2022
2. City of Saskatoon Housing Business Plan 2013-2022 Close-Out Report
3. Municipal Housing Strategies: Best Practices and Common Themes
4. Housing Strategy Development Timeline

REPORT APPROVAL

Written by: Sarah King, Senior Planner
Blair Prima, Senior Planner

Reviewed by: Melissa Austin, Neighborhood Planning Manager
Lesley Anderson, Director of Planning and Development

Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services

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