

Affordable Housing Strategy Update – Foundational Elements

ISSUE

Over the past year, the initial phases of development of a new Housing Strategy were undertaken to align the City of Saskatoon's 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 progress update on the work completed to date, the proposed foundational elements for an Affordable Housing Strategy and outlines the remaining steps to completion.

BACKGROUND

Through its 2023 Business Plan and Budget Deliberations, City Council allocated \$245,000 towards the preparation of a new Housing Strategy (Strategy). A new Strategy was needed to align 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 of Saskatoon's (City) role, as it relates to Housing. The City's role in housing was 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 Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its [meeting](#) on August 9, 2023, received an initial Housing Strategy milestone report that laid out the elements which would be required to support the development of a new Housing Strategy. These components included:

- Municipal Scan/Best Practice Review - review of Canadian municipalities to identify options, leading practices and tools available to support housing goals in Saskatoon;
- Engagement - targeted community consultation efforts; and
- 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.

CURRENT STATUS

Municipal Scan

A review of Housing Strategies from other Canadian cities was completed between July and December of 2023, to provide a greater understanding of the scope of housing related roles, programs and initiatives that other municipalities are involved in (see Appendix 1).

Engagement

Between November 2023 and April 2024, Administration invited numerous partners and stakeholders to participate in engagement activities including workshops, focus groups, interviews and surveys. Administration heavily relied on those with living and lived experience throughout the process.

Administration prepared a What We Heard Report (see Appendix 2) to summarize the engagement activities conducted during the initial phases of the Strategy development, as well as the feedback that was heard.

Housing Needs Assessment

Administration undertook a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment to better understand housing requirements of Saskatoon's most vulnerable residents.

A [Phase 1](#) Housing Needs Assessment was completed in the Spring of 2023, to support the City's Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) application. In the Fall of 2023, the Community University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) from the University of Saskatchewan was contracted to work in partnership with Administration to develop Phase 2 of the Housing Needs Assessment.

The deliverables for Phase 2 included:

- A literature review and environmental scan;
- Reviewing and documenting housing resources in Saskatoon;
- Analyzing population growth and income trends to understand the current state of the housing continuum;
- Interviewing key stakeholders and conducting focus groups;
- Hosting targeted Community Engagement events, and
- Updating the Phase 1 Housing Needs Assessment with 2021 Census data.

Phase 2 of the project commenced in January 2024, following approval for the project from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

Between January and March 2024, numerous in-depth conversations took place with 58 key stakeholders through nine focus groups and 39 interviews. Those consulted included tenants, the precariously housed to unhoused, housing and support service providers, lived experts, Elders, youth, seniors, Indigenous organizations and governments, newcomers, those living with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+, women fleeing violence, students, housing-related associations, health sector employees, police and protective services, builders, etc.

Between April and June of 2024, information and feedback was compiled and analyzed. The complete Housing Needs Assessment is currently being finalized.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Engagement

A significant amount of engagement was completed with a diverse number of stakeholders and rightsholders. Participation and the level of interest received through all engagement methods was significant. The quality of feedback received was more detailed than anticipated and it provided valuable insights into current lived experiences and opinions about affordable housing delivery in Saskatoon.

The feedback received from the onset of the project will be considered when finalizing the Strategy. Draft strategy materials will be circulated to stakeholders for input in the coming months.

Housing Needs Assessment

Following review of the draft Housing Needs Assessment, Administration determined that the available housing supply data required updating. While data is readily available to complete this task for certain portions of the housing continuum, other components require additional data compilation, which includes direct conversations with service providers in order to accurately depict the housing supply that is currently available (e.g. transitional and supportive housing units, waitlists, etc.). This data gathering will continue over the coming months to be able to accurately highlight the current state and system capacity, the demand for housing along the housing continuum and what it would take to bridge the gap. This information will be used to inform the affordable housing targets which will be included in the new Strategy.

Once the Housing Needs Assessment draft has been finalized, the draft will be circulated to stakeholders for their review and feedback. Preliminary findings of the Housing Needs Assessment have been summarized for reference (see Appendix 3).

Foundational Elements for the New Affordable Housing Strategy

To help achieve the City's Strategic Goal of aligning internal housing plans to reflect community gaps, Administration has primarily focused the development of the new Housing Strategy on affordable housing.

Affordable Housing includes a spectrum of housing options, including transitional housing, supportive housing, subsidized affordable rental housing and below-market rental and ownership. By focusing on Affordable Housing specifically, the Strategy is anticipated to identify effective strategies for reducing core housing need and increasing the supply of affordable housing across Saskatoon.

Foundational Elements for the Affordable Housing Strategy (see Appendix 4) provides an overview of the draft Mission, Guiding Principles, Vision, Goals and Municipal Roles.

The Foundational Elements will also be circulated to stakeholders for their review and feedback.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the process, there were numerous lessons learned including:

- Saskatoon is not alone in the current state of housing need;
- There is a need to align with partners across all sectors;
- The current housing affordability crisis is not going to be solved by a one-government approach; and,
- The need to be agile and adaptable is necessary to respond to unforeseen circumstances and new and emerging opportunities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications of this report.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

As noted above, the Strategy will not include plans to address homelessness. Administration is currently working with a number of community organizations to co-lead the development of a new community homelessness action plan. The work is in the early stages, and further reporting will come forward as it advances.

NEXT STEPS

Administration will continue to engage stakeholders on the items noted above prior to finalizing the Affordable Housing Strategy.

The completed Housing Needs Assessment and Affordable Housing Strategy will be presented to City Council for consideration in early 2025. The Strategy will include an implementation plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework which will be used to guide and track the progress of the City's proposed actions and investments.

APPENDICES

1. Municipal Scan Summary
2. What We Heard Report
3. Housing Needs Assessment – At a Glance
4. Foundation Elements for the new Affordable Housing Strategy

REPORT APPROVAL

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