

Approach to Siting and Defining Shelters

Provisions to Address Urgent Need for Shelter Spaces

City Council, at the Public Hearing [meeting](#) held on November 22, 2021, approved an amendment to the Zoning Bylaw to add a definition and general regulations for “Emergency Residential Shelters”.

The Zoning Bylaw defines an “Emergency Residential Shelter” as:

“a facility where emergency temporary lodging is provided with no charge, to persons who are homeless due to poverty or disaster, operated by a public or non-profit agency, and where on-site supervision and support services are provided at all times when such shelter is occupied”.

The general regulations were created to allow an Emergency Residential Shelter to be set up as a temporary facility in emergency situations, in a safe and controlled environment, for a period of no longer than six months within a 12-month period. City Council, at the Public Hearing [meeting](#) held on May 24, 2022, approved a text amendment to the Zoning Bylaw which allows for an Emergency Residential Shelter to be located at an approved location for a period of up to 18 months, subject to approval by City Council for the length of time of operation.

Administration developed the definition and general regulations for temporary Emergency Residential Shelters to address an issue of life safety due to increasing levels of homelessness and inadequate shelter spaces in Saskatoon. Winter in Saskatoon presents safety hazards for people without adequate shelter. The provisions added to [Bylaw No. 8770, Zoning Bylaw, 2009](#) (Zoning Bylaw), in 2021, and amended in 2022, established regulations to outline life safety requirements in a suitable facility on a temporary basis to meet this need.

Applications for Emergency Residential Shelters are handled administratively similar to how all other permitted uses are handled with the exception that City Council approval is required for the length of time of operation. City Council can approve the recommended length of time or put forward a motion for an alternate time period between 1 and 18 months.

The regulations provide a process which does not require full building upgrades to meet the National Building Code, or other changes to meet Zoning Bylaw regulations, which would otherwise be required for any facility to be established as a permanent use. Through the application process, the agency proposing the use also confirms their operational plan for the facility, including on-site support services when the shelter is occupied, the number of people being accommodated and the timeframe for the use.

Describing and Defining Shelter Facilities

City Council, at its [meeting](#) held on February 28, 2024, City Council requested:

“Would the administration report back on a potential definition for “shelters” using criteria based on current day operations of the 6 overnight

shelters currently providing services in Saskatoon.
That the Administration report back on maintaining and clarifying the existing distributed approach to siting.”

During discussion at City Council on February 28, 2024, it was clarified that the request for a definition was to help assist in general understanding of the type of facility or operations commonly associated with shelters for those experiencing homelessness. As Administration continues to seek appropriate sites and/or buildings for a new shelter location, the definition would be a description to guide Administration and communicate to members of the public.

The proposed definition is not for the purpose of regulating any current or new facility under the Zoning Bylaw. Under the Zoning Bylaw, the City of Saskatoon has the jurisdiction to regulate land use. We cannot regulate people. Based on conversations with provincial representatives and understanding the expectations for services to be provided at these facilities, they will continue to be considered a “Special Care Home” under the Zoning Bylaw for permanent facilities. Based on the services to be provided, this would be the appropriate land use and consistent with other services provided under this land use.

Any changes to the Zoning Bylaw would require careful consideration and further analysis, including a review of the appropriate case law. It is not the intention of Administration to undertake this analysis, at this time.

The temporary Emergency Residential Shelter regulations will be used to allow a temporary option up to 18 months, if needed.

Service Provision

In the fall of 2023, the Government of Saskatchewan issued a Request for Services (RFS) to secure a service provider or providers for the new shelter spaces in Saskatoon. The Province of Saskatchewan (the Province) referred to the services required as “Enhanced Emergency Shelter Services” and the RFS described how the sites would be operated. The services are explained as follows in the RFS:

“Through the supply of coordinated service delivery, the Services will: assist individuals experiencing homelessness to meet their immediate shelter and meal needs; co-ordinate wrap-around support to clients through case planning; and will support client transition to become successfully housed along the housing continuum, with the goal of improving client’s overall health and wellness.

Client Description:

- Experience chronic or periodic homelessness.
- Do not have resources or supports for other shelter options (i.e., no financial means to pay for accommodations or no option to stay with family or friends).

- Would benefit from integrated and wrap-around human service assistance to secure transitional or long-term accommodation.
- Episodic or chronic issues related to mental health and addictions may be present.
- Require temporary accommodations to enhance sense of safety and security.
- Most likely to have previous connections with government systems, including the criminal justice system, income assistance and child and family programs.
- Require trauma-informed approaches to service delivery.”

Through its contracts/agreements with service providers, the two other main shelters in Saskatoon are now also considered to be “Enhanced Emergency Shelters” and all are funded under similar service agreements by the Province. This has established a consistent operational approach across the larger shelters in the city.

Describing Shelter Operations and Use

Saskatoon has had shelters of various types for many years, which have been classified as various uses under the Zoning Bylaw, according to how each shelter was being operated. The City has never had a definition of “shelter” in the Zoning Bylaw prior to the 2021 amendments to define an Emergency Residential Shelter, which as described above, was developed to provide for an Emergency Residential Shelter as a temporary use on an urgent basis.

Since November 2021, when the temporary Emergency Residential Shelter regulations were added to the Zoning Bylaw, there has been much discussion of the terminology related to shelters. Administration has had many communications from residents requesting clarification and there has been a great deal of confusion regarding definitions, operations and who regulates which aspects of shelter operations. There has also been misinformation circulating in the community, which has increased confusion and concern.

For this reason, Administration does not recommend creating an additional, separate description or definition. Given the existing language from the Province through their agreements with service providers for Enhanced Emergency Shelters, which will guide the operations of the new facilities, Administration recommends using the description from the RFS. This will provide as much consistency as possible in describing the facilities. The difference between this description and the definition of uses in the City’s Zoning Bylaw will remain, which would have also been the case if the City developed an alternative description.

Approach to Siting and Distribution

Concerns have been noted regarding the impacts of people experiencing homelessness throughout the community, with increasing concerns as the situation has continued to worsen.

Administration has, to date, investigated site options throughout the entire city, with no areas being excluded from initial consideration. Sites of adequate size, with or without a suitable building, have been identified in many areas of the city. Where possible, appropriate existing zoning was also sought, however; sites that would also need rezoning were also considered.