

Winter Navigation and Warming Centres Update

ISSUE

Community partners in Saskatoon have been working together and have identified that there is a need for additional facilities and outreach support for the 2024-2025 winter to ensure the safety and well-being for those residents experiencing homelessness. Through a collaborative effort, a variety of locations and funding sources have been secured to support the needs for this winter, and a contribution from the City of Saskatoon is needed for the centres to operate for the season.

RECOMMENDATION

That City Council approve:

1. That the establishment of capital project Winter Navigation and Warming Centres, in the amount of \$1.2M, to be funded by \$200,000, from the Reserve for Capital Expenditures;
2. That the remaining funding of approximately \$1.0 M be received from the other levels of government, local community organizations and private contributions; and
3. That the capital project be increased for any additional external funding sources received, if necessary.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its [meeting](#) on December 6, 2022, received a [report](#) from the Fire Chief titled Saskatoon Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan. The report described the supports provided by the City of Saskatoon (City) to the plan and outlined activation levels for when the plan would be activated in Saskatoon.

In winter 2023/2024, The Salvation Army, Prairie Harm Reduction (PHR) and St. Mary's Parish Saskatoon worked together to provide overnight warming centre options from 5:00 pm to 7:00 am, running from December through April. PHR had a warm-up space open until 10:00 pm, at which time people moved over to the St. Mary's Parish Overnight Warming Centre. This year, PHR, as well as libraries are closed earlier, leaving no places for people to stay warm between 6:00 pm and 11:00 pm.

Over \$700,000 was provided through the Federal Reaching Home Program recommended by the Community Advisory Board (CAB) and ratified and administered by the Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP). The City and other community partners also contributed with in-kind resources.

St. Mary's Emergency Overnight Warming Centre, operating from a temporary location, provided a warm location for an average of 122 individuals per night last winter. During extreme cold weather events this number surged to 230. The previous year saw regular

attendance of 80 to 100 individuals. Both the Saskatoon Fire Department and Saskatoon Police Service, along with community partners, have reported a continuing rise in homelessness in Saskatoon in 2024.

Other relevant context relates to the increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness. Shelters are usually less occupied during the summer months and then fill up in the winter. This year, shelters have already been full throughout the summer. Encampments have increased from this time last year, with the estimated increase being between 200 to 400 new individuals.

The 2023/2024 warming centre was a low-barrier facility, welcoming individuals with complex needs who had no other options for overnight shelter. These individuals typically were not qualified to use or did not use enhanced shelters (the model now in place at Salvation Army – Crossroads, the Emergency Wellness Centre and to be in place at the Mustard Seed). Through interactions at the low barrier warming centre through the winter, some individuals were able to start accessing additional resources. There is currently no low-barrier shelter in Saskatoon that individuals who used the warming locations last year could use.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Saskatoon Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan

This spring, the City's Emergency Management Organization (EMO), which leads the Saskatoon Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan (Plan), completed its Year-End After Action Review and engaged with Advisory Committee Members and organizational leads.

Ongoing preparation work has been occurring and has included:

- EMO led a session on business continuity planning for community partners;
- Advisory team meetings to review current plans and provide direction and approval for the Plan revisions;
- A registration process for all partners for this winter as every year partners re-commit to this Plan;
- Meetings with St. Paul's Hospital to review current situation and winter planning;
- Meeting with Riversdale and Downtown Business Improvement District Executive Director, and Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce to review planning;
- An initial planning meeting with leads from each organization; and
- A planning meeting for all members was held on November 21.

The overall response that is coordinated through the Plan relies extensively on all the partners to participate in the enhanced communication and coordination. All partners are important to the success of the Plan and are engaged throughout the development, activations and post-activation.

Based on the review of last winter's operations and the continually increasing numbers of unsheltered individuals in Saskatoon, an increase in resources is being planned for this winter. The plan includes the following:

- 1. Primary evening warming location**
Hours: 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm
Capacity: 120 individuals (approximately)
Location: Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre
- 2. Overnight warming location for women**
Hours: 11:00 pm to 9:00 am
Capacity: 100 individuals (approximately)
Location: Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre
- 3. Overnight warming location for men**
Hours: 11:00 pm to 8:00 am
Capacity: 100 individuals (approximately)
Location: St. Mary's Parish
- 4. Overnight outreach support from Sawēyihotān**
Staffing: 2 outreach teams of 2 staff members
Hours: Midnight to 8:00 am

The Salvation Army operated the overnight warming location last year and has agreed to operate the St. Mary's location this year. The Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre will operate the evening warming location and the overnight women's location at their existing location on Wall Street. Sawēyihotān has agreed to operate overnight outreach services this year. There are additional partners who provide outreach throughout the daytime and evening hours.

Through review and planning, community partners have also noted that more service provision at these locations could further assist individuals to connect with services. Additional efforts will be made during this season to expand the centres to act as navigation locations, which can help to pilot this model for further exploration in Saskatoon.

Challenges in Securing Overnight Navigation and Warming Locations for this Winter

Although planning for this winter began in spring 2024, it was exceptionally difficult to find and secure locations for this winter for a number of reasons:

- Many community partners and locations were considered but there are very few facilities of sufficient size and set up available;
- Many community partners who considered providing a location also indicated they were already having challenges meeting their core services due to demand and could not risk expanding services; and

Winter Navigation and Warming Centres Update

- Due to the hours of operation required, a number of potentially suitable locations were also not available because many facilities already had programming for various events and activities that would have had to be relocated or cancelled in order to use their location.

Multiple organizations and individuals assisted in trying to find locations. Through a multi-party collaborative process, the two locations identified above have been secured. Administration and other community partners continue to assist both facilities to be able to address their particular needs as a result of the use of their facilities.

Partnerships and Funding Requirements

Sufficient funding that would allow the centres and outreach to operate for the entire season has also been sought during the planning process. Initial planning for a November 1, 2024, opening, and closure March 31, 2025, was used to establish budget and program requirements. With an updated expected opening date of December 1, 2024, the total funding requirement is approximately \$1.2M.

Funding to support operations for the entire season, including staffing and any location rental fees, needed to be confirmed. Funding will be used for:

- Staffing at each site, including operational, site security and emergency medical responders,
- Additional contracts for janitorial services, etc.;
- Program supplies;
- Administrative costs, and
- Costs for utilities, rent and potential repairs at each facility.

Outreach support, to be provided by Sawēyihotān, also needed to be expanded as last year the need for outreach and transportation of individuals exceeded the capacity to provide the services, with a particular need to cover the overnight hours. This year's plan includes this expanded overnight outreach support.

Extensive efforts have been made to secure funding and a variety of community partners have come to the table with resources to support these necessary services. This includes confirmed funding from the following:

Government of Saskatchewan	\$ 300,000
Reaching Home (Government of Canada) – through Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership	\$ 200,000
Métis Nation – Saskatchewan	\$ 200,000
Saskatoon Community Foundation	\$ 100,000
Greg Yuel	\$ 75,000
David Dube	\$ 75,000
Anonymous Donors	\$ 35,000
United Way of Saskatoon and Area	\$ 15,000
Total	\$ 1,000,000

The secured funding is not quite sufficient to meet the total expected costs of \$1.2M. A contribution of \$200,000 from the City is being recommended to help fill the funding gap. Administration has identified two potential funding sources:

- There is \$744,000 of available funding within the Reserve for Capital Expenditures (RCE), which City Council has the discretion to allocate to future priority projects or requirements. The City contribution of \$200,000 could be allocated as one time funding from RCE to support the winter resources required this year; or
- There is approximately \$322,000 of available funding within the Vacant Lot and Adaptive Reuse Incentive Reserve for the Downtown Housing Reserve component. The City contribution of \$200,000 could be allocated from the Vacant Lot and Adaptive Reuse Incentive Reserve to support the winter resources required this year. City Council would need to approve a one-time exception to [Council Policy C03-003, Reserves for Future Expenditures](#) to allocate the funding from this reserve.

In order for the project to proceed, approval of a post-budget capital project is required, with the funding source identified as RCE, Government Funding and Private Contributions. Although using funds from the Vacant Lot and Adaptive Reuse Incentive Reserve is an option, Administration is recommending using RCE as the Vacant Lot and Adaptive Reuse Incentive Reserve would require a policy exception for this project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A budget adjustment is required to fund the new capital project for \$1.2M, which includes funding of \$200,000 from RCE.

If future external funding sources are received, Administration has recommended that these amounts be added to the budget without needing to go back to City Council for approval.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

In related work, Administration has been working actively with community partners on the development of a new Homelessness Action Plan. Gaps identified through that work identify the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of those experiencing homelessness while also preventing the type of annual search for locations and funding to keep people safe in the winter. The plan outlined in this report is the emergency winter phase of a more robust year-round homelessness plan which is currently being developed in partnership with community organizations. With a comprehensive approach, the goal is that the plan will be supported with substantial and stable funding from the Federal and Provincial governments.

NEXT STEPS

The identified community agencies will continue to actively work towards opening these locations as soon as possible. Members of Administration will continue to facilitate and support as needed.

APPENDICES

1. Saskatoon Winter Emergency Response Plan
2. Saskatoon Winter Emergency Response Plan Activation Levels

REPORT APPROVAL

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