

Potential Roles and Responsibilities for the City of Saskatoon – Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon's involvement in addressing homelessness has historically been limited in scope. However, complex challenges of poverty and social inequalities have been rising, contributing to the increasing number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon. The City of Saskatoon has been working with community partners to develop the community-led Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan. This initial report provides a preliminary overview of the plan and potential considerations for the City of Saskatoon as it reassesses its role in responding to homelessness.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its Regular Business [meeting](#) held on January 29, 2025 unanimously resolved:

“...that the Administration be directed to report back no later than March 2025, with an evaluation of, and potential role for the City, with respect to the new plan to address homelessness in Saskatoon that is currently under development; and

That the Administration be directed to develop and bring forward a comprehensive process to ensure the community has the opportunity to have their voices heard by Council regarding the plan; and

That the Administration be directed to bring forward a proposed Terms Of Reference and governance model for a Council Sub-Committee, whose mandate would be to activate partnerships to accelerate the plan.”

This report addresses the first recommendation regarding the City of Saskatoon's (City) potential role, with respect to the new plan to address homelessness in Saskatoon.

CURRENT STATUS

Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan (SHAP)

The previous SHAP concluded at the end of 2023. To address the evolving needs and priorities of the sector, a new SHAP was necessary.

In summer of 2024, a SHAP Executive Council was created with representatives from the Saskatoon Tribal Council, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) and City Administration. Their role is to lead and oversee the governance and development of a new SHAP.

In fall of 2024, a SHAP Advisory Committee was established with approximately 30 organizations and individuals including representation from the following groups/sectors: education and awareness; Elders; finance; health; housing; justice; those with lived experience; newcomers; poverty; prevention; support systems and integration and youth. Key responsibilities of the Advisory Committee include providing expert guidance, supporting engagement and the development of strategies, promoting collaboration and advocacy.

The vision, mission, priorities and objectives of the SHAP were identified and developed through a series of consultations in 2024. These included the SHAP Forum, Housing Needs Assessment focus groups and interviews, Advisory Committee meetings and SHIP's Community Approaches to Housing and Homelessness conference.

Appendix 1 provides an outline of the SHAP draft foundational elements completed to-date. An advisory committee meeting was held on March 5, 2025, to further identify key action items and address gaps. These action items are currently being compiled and will be included in future reporting.

The City's Current Response to Homelessness

In addition to supporting the development of SHAP, the City's current response to Homelessness also includes:

- Affordable housing development - recently supported the creation of 757 new affordable rental housing units in Saskatoon;
- 2024 Point-in-Time Count (PiT) - leading efforts to assess homelessness in the community;
- Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan - securing and coordinating winter warming locations;
- Expanded Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water - including the Public Washroom Trailer Pilot project;
- Community Encampment Response Plan – recently adopted to enhance winter warming, public washrooms, expanded outreach, investment in a permanent emergency shelter, new supportive housing units and a feasibility study for a Community Navigation Centre;
- 1500 Block 20th Street West – engagement project;
- Housing Needs Assessment;
- Identifying shelter sites in collaboration with the Province;
- Overdose Outreach Teams – Saskatoon Fire Department with the Saskatchewan Health Authority;
- Encampment outreach and inspections by the Community Risk Reduction teams; and
- Community Safety and Well-being framework – in development.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The PiT Homelessness Count, 2024

Saskatoon's PiT Count was conducted on October 8, 2024, as a community-level measurement of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. The information gathered helps to identify overrepresented populations, understand pathways into homelessness, strengthen prevention efforts, improve cross-sector collaboration, build public support and allocate resources effectively.

A few highlights from the 2024 Saskatoon PiT Count:

- Individuals without permanent shelter totalled 1,499, including 315 children and 175 youth.
- Those experiencing unsheltered homelessness or in encampments totalled 472 individuals.
- Individuals reported as being sheltered in emergency shelters or in hotels/motels in lieu of shelter space totalled 216.
- Those reported as being sheltered in transitional homes totalled 442 individuals.
- The number of individuals experiencing "hidden homelessness" totalled 339.
- Insufficient income was cited as the major reason for housing loss (32.8% of survey respondents).
- Roughly half of all survey respondents reported welfare or social assistance as their source of income.
- Most respondents indicated that having more money (88.2%) and getting help to find affordable housing (81.6%) were most important. Other needs included assistance with housing applications (71.7%), help with transportation to view housing (69.8%), and help getting identification (59.1%), giving a strong sense of the barriers those in poverty face.
- A total of 82.3% reported dealing with a substance abuse issue, 60.6% had a mental health issue, 57.3% managed an illness or medical condition, and 52.9% experienced residential school / intergenerational trauma.

It is anticipated the full 2024 PiT Count report and Community Version will be released publicly in April 2025.

Information from Other Municipalities

Municipalities across Canada assume a diverse range of responsibilities related to homelessness programs, spanning a broad spectrum of critical functions. These include the provision of essential services, administering housing and homelessness programs, overseeing urban planning, enforcing building standards and enacting bylaws. Appendix 2 provides more specific examples of these responsibilities and roles.

Assessing a New Role for the City in Addressing Homelessness

Given the current pressures in Saskatoon, the SHAP presents an opportunity for the City to reassess its role in addressing homelessness. Evaluating this role supports the City's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan by aligning internal plans to reflect community gaps, community-level housing, homelessness plans and Federal and Provincial investment strategies. The aim is for the City to define a clear set of functions that will contribute to on-going efforts within the community.

There are a range of potential roles that the City could include in its work to further support affordable housing and homelessness solutions. The following are preliminary options for consideration, organized according to the SHAP priorities identified by the community.

SHAP Priority No.1 – Increase Affordable Housing Supply

Potential City role:

- Affordable Housing Strategy and Program Development;
- Support in exploring a community land trust;
- Incentives;
- Land development efforts (e.g., acquisition and disposition of City-Owned Land for affordable, supportive and transitional housing, land leases, etc.); and
- Land-use planning to ensure zoning and development policies support housing solutions.

SHAP Priority No.2 - Addressing Systemic Barriers to Prevent Homelessness

Potential City role:

- Advocacy to Provincial and Federal Governments (e.g., SIS/SAID, low-barrier shelter, etc.);
- Undertake a feasibility study for a community navigation centre; and
- Educational materials and resources (e.g., housing handbooks for tenants).

SHAP Priority No.3 - Increase and Support Community Collaboration

Potential City role:

- Data Gathering, Monitoring and Sharing (e.g., dashboard, housing needs assessment, PiT Count, etc.);
- Coordination of specific city-wide homelessness initiatives (SHAP implementation, Emergency Management Organizations emergency response activities);
- Partnership Development and Collaboration; and
- Homelessness Project Development and Innovation – (Public washroom pilot, Community Navigation Centre, Tiny Homes).

Certain SHAP actions could be led by the City, while others may involve the City in a supportive or partnership role. In some instances, a combination of approaches could be taken.

Appendix 3 outlines a detailed list of the City's current roles. It also more broadly identifies additional areas where the City could assume a leadership role, collaborate as a partner or provide support.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As outlined above, the City expends significant resources through many programs and initiatives related directly to homelessness in Saskatoon.

The Attainable Housing Program, funded through the Housing Reserve, provided \$135,000 annually from 2017 through 2023, via a service contract with SHIP, towards the implementation of the previous Homelessness Action Plan. Since the end of 2023, no financial allocations for the implementation of a Homelessness Action Plan have been made.

Current activities led or supported by the City have been achieved through pilot projects, assembly of related projects and capital funding and through in-kind support within various City departments.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no other implications associated with this report

NEXT STEPS

This is the first of a series related reports that will be brought forward to City Council throughout 2025. Upcoming reporting will include:

- Finalized SHAP for consideration and possible endorsement by City Council;
- Proposed Implementation Plan of the City's portion of the SHAP
- Affordable Housing Strategy report that will include a Housing Needs Assessment

Through these reports, and the work that is planned to be done by the Council Subcommittee on Homelessness, options for the City's potential future role in supporting the SHAP will become more clearly defined throughout 2025.

APPENDICES

1. Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan Foundation Elements
2. Information About Roles of Other Municipalities
3. Overview of Potential City Roles in Homelessness

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