

City of Saskatoon's Response to Homelessness

ISSUE

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon has increased significantly in recent years. The City of Saskatoon traditionally plays a convening role in efforts to address homelessness through involvement in both City of Saskatoon-led and community-led working groups and committees, as well as through advocacy, strategy development and programming. Multiple civic departments are also impacted by increased responses and unbudgeted operational pressures.

BACKGROUND

While the specific jurisdiction for responding to homelessness is shared between the Government of Canada (Federal Government) and the Government of Saskatchewan (Province), the impacts of homelessness are being felt directly at the municipal level. Addressing the complexities of homelessness requires collaboration across all levels of government and with community partners.

The City of Saskatoon (City) has previously presented several related reports that inform this conversation:

- May 24, 2022 - [Housing Continuum: Information Regarding Shelters and Affordable Housing Inventory in Saskatoon](#)
- May 24, 2022 – [Community Response to Downtown Safety and Well-Being](#)
- December 6, 2022 – [Saskatoon Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan](#)
- October 11, 2023 – [Proposed Roles and Next Steps for the City of Saskatoon Regarding Shelters for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- May 15, 2024 – [Saskatoon Police Service – Current State to Future State - Community Policing to Community Governance](#)
- May 29, 2024 - [Expansion of Access to Public Washrooms and Drinking Water](#)
- November 27, 2024 – [Winter Navigation and Warming Centres Update](#)
- December 12, 2024 – [Proposed Community Encampment Response Plan](#)
- March 26, 2025 – [Potential Roles and Responsibilities for the City of Saskatoon – Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan](#)
- March 26, 2025 – [Terms of Reference – Council Subcommittee on Homelessness](#)
- April 9, 2025 – [Shelter Status Update](#)

Additionally, the City has made significant investments in affordable housing through incentives and the sale of City-owned land to support the development of new affordable housing units.

CURRENT STATUS

The 2024 Point-in-Time Count, conducted on October 8, 2024, recorded 1,499 individuals experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon. This total includes 315 children and 175 youth. Among those surveyed, 81% identified as Indigenous.

Historically, the City has taken on a coordinating and supportive role in community efforts to address homelessness. However, the sharp rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness has required the City to take on a broader role, including more responses to encampments, safety concerns and other social challenges tied to homelessness.

Like many other Canadian municipalities, the City is facing financial limitations that impact its ability to respond to homelessness. While recent measures such as the opening of the temporary shelter on Pacific Avenue are steps forward, the number of people becoming homeless continues to grow faster than housing solutions can be made available. There remains a shortage of appropriate housing and supports for individuals with complex needs and those experiencing chronic homelessness.

In addition to delivering the City's Affordable Housing Program, the City is also responsible for ensuring that public spaces remain safe and accessible for everyone.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Strategic Programs and Solutions

The City approaches homelessness with a strategic lens – engaging in advocacy, participation in both City-led and community-led working groups and committees and the supporting initiatives that aim to prevent homelessness. This work is carried out across multiple departments and includes:

- Providing grants and tax abatements to community organizations;
- Supporting low- and no-cost access to Leisure Centres;
- Offering Indigenous youth programming at no cost;
- Partnership with the White Buffalo Youth Lodge; and
- Assisting low-income residents to improve access to essential services.

The City is also involved in implementing initiatives focused on long-term systems to reduce homelessness:

- Development of a Community Safety and Wellbeing framework;
- Developing a new Affordable Housing Strategy;
- Supporting delivery of several Rapid Housing Initiative projects;
- Administering the Housing Accelerator Fund Incentives, including:
 - Affordable Housing Incentives; and
 - City-Owned Land Initiative;
- Working with partners to conduct the annual Point-in-Time Count;

- Collaborating on the development of the new Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan;
- Conducting a Housing Needs Assessment;
- Building internal capacity; and
- Implementing the City's Community Encampment Response Plan.

More information regarding ongoing and future initiatives is provided in Appendix 1.

Emergency Responses to Homelessness

The City's emergency response efforts to homelessness are centered on ensuring the safety and well-being of people experiencing homelessness. These efforts, coordinated across several departments, are primarily focused on addressing immediate and visible issues connected to homelessness, such as:

- Encampment clean-up and response;
- Responding to individuals and communities impacted by homelessness and the overdose crisis;
- Addressing community safety concerns in shared and public spaces; and
- Activating emergency responses during extreme weather or other urgent situations.

The City also works with community partners to improve basic living conditions of those experiencing homelessness. This includes needs-based initiatives such as coordination efforts around warming centres, expansion of drinking water access, the 2024 pilot navigation hub project (sometimes referred to as the pilot washroom project) and others.

Planning beyond immediate needs has involved engaging with a variety of community partners and includes, but is not limited to, work with partners to develop the Saskatoon Homelessness Action Plan (SHAP). Roles for the City through this plan will be brought forward to the Governance and Priorities Committee, or Council, in June, as the overall plan continues to be finalized with partners.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The City has begun tracking expenditures related to homelessness and have identified service level impacts due to the response to homelessness, but do not have detailed cost tracking at this time. Administration is currently gathering information to summarize both operating and capital costs associated with the City's response to homelessness, with the aim of identifying the total cost of activities that are currently unfunded across all departments.

One example of service level impact was the cost of encampment cleanups. The estimated total cost in 2024 for encampment cleanups was approximately \$600,000. These cleanups typically require significant staff time from Fire Bylaw Inspectors, who engage directly with individuals living in encampments, in addition to costs associated

with the cleanup and debris removal. This estimate does not account for the time inspectors are pulled away from other duties in their regular workplans.

Encampment cleanup efforts affect multiple departments. Staff from Parks Department are often called upon to remove debris or hire contractors to assist with cleanups. The Roadways Department is also impacted, handling the removal of materials from roadways, walkways and pedestrian tunnels. These activities frequently exceed the funding allocated for standard service levels.

A preliminary cost estimate covering various departmental efforts related to encampment cleanup is provided in Appendix 2. Administration continues to work on developing a more detailed and consistent approach to tracking homelessness-related costs across all City departments. A summary of service level impacts, with some known data, across other City departments is included within Appendix 3.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy, legal, social or environmental implications.

NEXT STEPS

Administration will continue to provide regular updates to City Council, including progress on key initiatives, the City's changing role in responding to homelessness and any related funding considerations. As part of preparations for the upcoming budget cycle, work is underway on a 2026/2027 Business Plan and Budget Option that will outline financial pressures, staffing needs and impact on service levels connected to the City's homelessness response.

Addressing homelessness will require a coordinated and collaborative approach. This includes ongoing cooperation between City departments and continued partnerships with the Province, Indigenous organizations and community organizations.

APPENDICES

1. Current and Ongoing Actions related to Homelessness
2. City of Saskatoon Cost Impact Tracker - Encampment Cleanups, 2024
3. City of Saskatoon – Service Level Impacts Due to Homelessness

REPORT APPROVAL

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