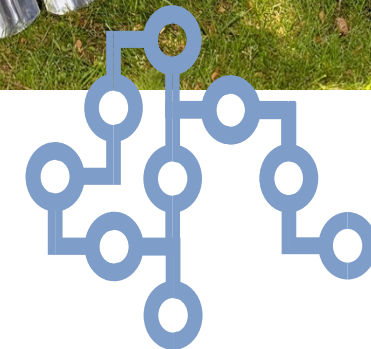


ST. THOMAS AND ELGIN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN


TAKING STOCK WORKING TOGETHER

2019 Progress Report



Introduction

The City of St. Thomas, in its role as the Service Manager for St. Thomas and Elgin County, is responsible for Delivering social and community services throughout the City and the County. These services are delivered by St. Thomas – Elgin Social Services Department. As part of its mandate, the Department administers and/or delivers a range of housing and homelessness programs including existing social housing, new affordable housing, rent supplements, housing allowances, portable housing benefits, home repair assistance, homeownership down-payment assistance, funding for emergency shelters and transitional housing, and other homelessness prevention programs including the Housing Links for People (HeLP) program. The City also owns and manages 544 units of housing, including 512 units of rent-geared to income housing.



Service Managers are required to report annually to the public on progress in achieving the recommendations in their 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plans.

The Social Services Department works in collaboration with the County of Elgin and area municipalities, with existing private sector and not-for-profit housing providers, with support services agencies, and with many individuals and organizations in the community to help meet the housing and homelessness prevention needs of residents of St. Thomas and Elgin County.

In the past, the Department has undertaken numerous reports and studies about community housing and homeless needs and has worked with organizations to implement many of the key initiatives from those studies.

As required in the *Housing Services Act*, City of St. Thomas Council approved a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan for St. Thomas and Elgin County in December 2013. The Plan was implemented on January 1, 2014. Service Managers are required in the *Act* to report annually to the public by June 30 on progress in achieving the recommendations in their Plans during the preceding year. In 2019 a 5 year review was completed on the 10 year plan and presented to Council at reference committee on December 16, 2019. The amended plan will inform our strategic direction and planning in 2020.

This is the 2019 Progress Report for St. Thomas/Elgin County.

Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County recognize the importance of having affordable, adequate and appropriate housing for its residents. In co-operation with not-for-profit and private-sector partners in the community, and with support from federal and provincial levels of governments, St. Thomas and Elgin County will work towards meeting the housing and support needs of the community, with the elimination of long term homelessness as a key goal.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4
Increase housing supply options to meet projected needs.	Provide supports to keep people in the sustainable housing they currently have.	Enhance the current service system to prevent homelessness, and when homeless “rapidly” move people into stable housing.	Pursue community partnerships and broaden community awareness while advocating to senior levels of government to ensure stable housing and poverty reduction for all residents.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Increase housing supply options to meet projected need

Progress in 2019

New Affordable Rental Housing

An affordable housing project was completed at 50 Locust St. in St. Thomas with occupancy in November 2019. This project has 9 affordable units and 3 market rentals.

Current Regeneration of City-owned Housing

Construction was completed on the new Social Services building at 230 Talbot Street in December 2019. 28 units were filled in January 2020. 4 of the units are 2 bedrooms and the remainder are 1 bedroom. 14 units are rent-geared-to-income (RGI) and replace 14 the City-owned RGI units which were sold. 8 units are new affordable units and 6 are market rent.

Future Regeneration of City-owned Housing

The City has received funding to pursue a micro apartment renovation at 614 Talbot Street, in the transit building. This will provide 16 self contained apartments with housing supports. This project will require the sale of some City-owned family units for which there is a substantially lesser demand.

Assistance to Community Groups

During 2019 the City has provided technical assistance and support to community groups in St. Thomas and Elgin to assist with the development of affordable housing.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Progress in 2019 (continued)

Rent Supplements

Rental subsidies provided under two Provincially-funded programs (Investment in Affordable Housing and Social Infrastructure Fund) enable individuals and families to find housing appropriate to their needs in the private rental market which they could not otherwise afford. Subsidies are modest, averaging about \$173 per month. An average of 67 households per month were served by this program in 2019

Portable Housing Benefits

The City of St. Thomas approved the creation and funding of a Portable Housing Benefit (PHB) rental subsidy program together with the policies for administering the program. 64 rental subsidies were delivered in the form of PHBs. They were offered first to those already on the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing, with a goal of reducing the waitlist. Average monthly benefit has been \$304.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

Progress in 2019 (continued)

Community Housing Forum

Planning was underway for a Community Housing Forum bringing together developers and builders to meet with representatives from various City Departments and CMHC. The Forum would provide resources and information regarding financial programs offered by various levels of government to assist in building affordable housing.

Target date for the Forum was April 2020.

Municipal Support

In 2019, Council authorized the preparation of a new Municipal Housing Facilities by-Law that permits, but does not compel, the granting of financial incentives by municipalities such as tax incentives, Development Charge exemptions, and other financial assistance at less than fair market value or at no cost as a means of increasing the supply of affordable housing.

City Staff from the Planning Department and the Social Services Department have been working together on changes to the existing rooming house bylaws.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Provide supports to keep people in the sustainable housing they currently have

Homelessness Prevention

\$357,642 in HeLP funding was allocated to assist low-income households with homelessness prevention supports. The funds were spent as follows:

- 34% for utility arrears
 - (219 households)
- 22% for last month's rent
 - (131 households)
- 16% for furniture
 - (130 households)
- 21% for rent arrears
 - (106 households)
- 8% for moving costs
 - (75 households)

Progress in 2019

Home Repair Program

\$38,153 from the IAH Home Repair Program helped 8 homeowners and one multi-residential landlord pay for new roofs (5), furnace replacement (2) and siding repairs (1).

Enhancing Tenant Capacity

Community-wide use of SPDAT assessment tool is increasing. The SPDAT has been an effective means to design individualized skills development programs for tenants and prospective tenants to increase their prospect of having successful tenancies.

Eviction Prevention

City Housing staff have continued working pro-actively with tenants to help them to avoid eviction. City Staff also participate in the Situation Table weekly meetings to assist individuals with collaborative interventions.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Enhance the current service system to prevent homelessness, and when homeless, “rapidly” move people into stable housing

Progress in 2019

Youth Homelessness Protocol

81 youth accessed services through the Youth Homelessness Protocol in 2019:

56% of these youth were 16-18

57% of those who applied for service had experienced a family breakdown.

14% were couch surfing

9% eviction by other

5% personal safety concerns

72% exited Housing Based Case Management

64% were connect with a YWCA Housing Based Case Manager or Youth in Transition worker

Inn Out of the Cold

In fall of 2019 Council approved and supported the operation of a year round shelter.

139 homeless individuals stayed overnight at Inn Out of the Cold for a total of 2494 bed nights from Oct/19 to Mar/20. This was an increase of 20 individuals.

Average stay was 18 nights. 31% were women. 9% were youth between 16-21. 49% of the women and 54% of the men stayed between 1-5 nights in total. 13 women and 28 men stayed just 1 night.

The Inn provided evening meals for all of its guests and supplies such as clothing, toilet paper, shoes, diapers, and baby items as needed.

Client-centred supportive housing

\$643,720 in CHPI funding helped agencies provide client-centred supported housing as follows:

YWCA Residence (17 beds)

Harmony House (3 beds)

Horizon House (3 beds)

Fairwinds (3 beds)

Unity House (3 beds)

Second Story (6 beds)

Fresh Start (10 beds)

CMHA residential care home program (avg. 60 beds)

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Progress in 2019 (continued)

Co-ordinated Access—Part 1

CMHA Elgin continued to operate a weekly housing drop-in centre which served as an “intake” point for many individuals who were homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness.

Co-ordinated Access—Part 2

In January 2019 the Housing and Homelessness Action Group established a committee to work on the design and implementation of a fully co-ordinated access system which would serve not only the homeless but applicants for transitional/ supportive housing, social housing, affordable housing (as defined under MMAH program guidelines) and private rental housing. Target start date is July 2020.

Women’s Homelessness

The Taking Action on Women’s Homelessness Advisory Group met regularly in 2019. Member organizations include agencies serving the homeless population across Elgin, health agencies, and the Ministry of Community, Safety and Correctional Services.

The YWCA contracted OrgCode Consulting Inc. to evaluate the local realities of women's experiences of homelessness, along with the existing system barriers and the improvements that need to be made.

A Literature Review and Community Survey Report informed the Advisory Group, who implemented the following 6 priorities:

1. Annual Housing and Homelessness Symposium
2. Community of Practice for Housing & Shelter Providers
3. Improved Access to Transportation
4. System Navigation for Women at Risk of Homelessness
5. Creation of Affordable Housing
6. Support Creation of Coordinated Access System

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Progress in 2019 (continued)

Following up from Homeless Enumeration

In 2018 a homeless enumeration was completed in our community, identifying 159 homeless persons, including 33 children. The consultant involved in designing and facilitating the enumeration process provided a number of recommendations for consideration by the community regarding how we could use available resources more effectively to address homelessness. These recommendations were consulted when completing the 5 year update to our 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Residential Care Homes

60 beds in three residential care homes benefitted from CHPI-funded bed subsidies tied to the home's requirement to meet detailed City standards.

Safe Beds

CMHA Elgin and the YWCA operated a total of 9 "safe beds" serving as temporary emergency shelter for individuals applying for transitional and/or supportive housing services from them, and moved individuals from those beds into appropriate housing when it became available.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

Pursue community partnerships and broaden community awareness while advocating to senior levels of government to ensure stable housing and poverty reduction for all residents

Progress in 2019

The Housing and Homeless Action Group meet on a regular basis and review the 10year Housing and Homelessness plan keeping the focus on the strategic priorities. The group consists of a wide range of community partners including members from CMHA, CCHC, YWCA, Inn Out of the Cold, Fresh Start, Poverty Coalition, United Way, Drug and Alcohol Strategy, Residential Care Homes.

City staff have continued their ongoing involvement in Ministry of Housing consultation sessions regarding changes being made under the Ministry's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy. In addition, City membership in OMSSA and City Staff's active participation in OMSSA discussions at various levels has contributed to OMSSA's lobbying efforts with MMAH

The Elgin St.Thomas Coalition to End Poverty has continued to develop in its capacity and strategy in advocating for poverty reduction and related policy changes by all who administer or come in contact with those in poverty. A media strategy was the focus of collaborative work in 2019.

www.povertycoalition.ca