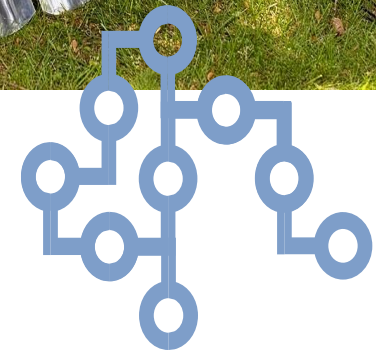


ST. THOMAS AND ELGIN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

TAKING STOCK WORKING TOGETHER

2014 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 the St. Thomas – Elgin Ontario Works Department. As part of its mandate, the Department administers and delivers a range of housing and homelessness programs including existing social housing, new affordable housing, rent supplements, housing allowances, funding for emergency shelters and transitional housing, and other homelessness prevention programs including the Housing Links for People (HeLP) program.

The Ontario Works 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 in support of its residents.

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.

Most recently, 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 on progress in achieving the recommendations in their Plans during the preceding year. The first public reports on progress in 2014 must be submitted no later than June 30, 2015.

This, then, is the 2014 Progress Report for St. Thomas/Elgin County.

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

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

Objective 1.1: Increase the mix and supply of housing options, including the number of affordable rental units, market rental units, condo units, and affordable homes in the City of St. Thomas and the County of Elgin.

Actions:

- Encourage municipalities to work with private and non-profit builders/developers to ensure the construction of a mix of new housing and/or conversion of existing buildings with a focus on new units in the areas of highest demand and for the types of housing in areas of highest demand. This should include a portion of ownership housing priced below affordability levels and a specific focus on building one bedroom rental units in St. Thomas, including accessible rental units.
- Encourage City and lower-tier municipalities to establish municipal incentives that promote the development of mixed density neighbourhoods.

TARGETS

- Increase the supply of affordable one-bedroom rental units
- Increase the supply of accessible apartments
- Increase the supply of affordable condo apartments, townhouses and single family homes
- Establish new multi-residential tax class
- Reduce or eliminate development fees and other charges for new affordable housing

MEASURES

- Number of new 1-bedroom apartments created
- Number of new accessible apartments created
- Number of new affordable condo apartments, townhouses and single family homes



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1 - 2014 Progress Report:

- Extension of the federal/provincial investment in Affordable Housing program was announced in 2014. \$4,513,200 has been allocated to the St. Thomas/Elgin area over six years from 2014 to 2020. \$3,136,300 has been earmarked for new rental housing development. An RFP process in 2015 will determine the new projects to be constructed over the 6-year program. One-bedroom units with supports are targeted.
- In the last few years, a greater mix of housing is being developed by private builders in St. Thomas (i.e. townhouses, apartment buildings). Previously, the majority of new housing development consisted of single-family homes and semi-detached homes. A greater mix of high and low density housing in residential areas offers residents a greater range of housing options and increases the overall supply and the opportunity for more affordable and accessible accommodation.
- There is an opportunity for City of St. Thomas Council to consider incentives for the construction of new affordable housing during the current review of development charges. Similarly, lower-tier municipalities in Elgin County are encouraged to consider incentives to support the development of new affordable housing or the sustainability of existing social housing.
- In 2014, the Council of the Corporation of the Municipality of Central Elgin approved a reduction in municipal property taxes for its two social housing providers – Bel Parc in Belmont and Kettle Creek Villa in Port Stanley. Property taxes were reduced from the Multi-Residential rate to the Residential rate as a show of support for affordable housing. Council recognizes that while it is important to encourage new affordable housing development, it is also essential to consider the ongoing financial viability and sustainability of existing affordable housing projects that serve the community.

\$3,136,300
has been earmarked for
new affordable housing
development from
2015-2020





STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

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

OBJECTIVE: Ensure that a coordinated system of supports is available to those currently in sustainable housing.

Actions:

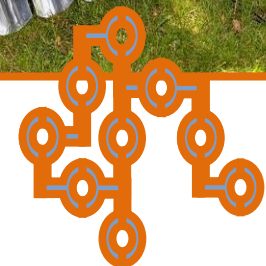
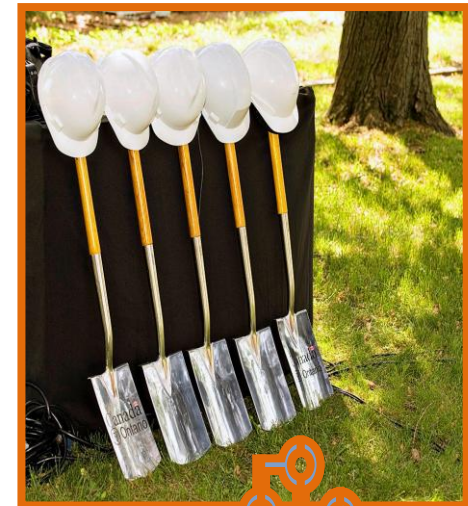
- Continue to fund existing programs that help people maintain housing, evaluating effectiveness, enhancing where needed, as funds become available (such as Focus Fairview).
- Establish a Community Work position to be shared between the public housing corporation, non-profits and co-op housing providers to provide residents with connections and assistance to access community support agencies with the objective of preventing evictions and promoting successful tenancies.
- Continue to provide, and expand where possible, funding for low to moderate income home owners to undertake emergency or essential home repairs to allow them to continue to live in their own homes.
- Evaluate the current St. Thomas Home Repair Program for its effectiveness prior to 2015. If deemed effective in keeping homeowners in their homes, continue/expand the program as federal/provincial funds become available.

TARGETS

- Improve understanding of the importance of housing stability
- Increase the number of successful tenancies by reducing evictions
- Continue to offer homelessness prevention assistance
- Continue to offer home repair assistance

MEASURES

- Number of evictions averted due to intervention
- Number of residents who have retained housing after receiving assistance





STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2 - 2014 Progress Report:

- The HeLP (Housing Links for People) program was initiated in January 2013 within the Ontario Works Department to help low-income households with rent and utility arrears in order to prevent eviction/homelessness. The HeLP program is funded through the provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). \$460,000 in CHPI funding was allocated for this much-needed program in 2014.
- Two Housing Programs Coordinator (HPC) staff in the Ontario Works Department provide HeLP assistance to Ontario Disability Support Program and non-social-assistance applicants. Ontario Works caseworkers process HeLP applications for their clients.
- The HPC job description was modified to include a community outreach component to assist social housing providers by providing eviction prevention interventions.
- The St. Thomas-Elgin Home Repair program which ran from 2012-14 provided \$100,877 to 21 households in St. Thomas and Elgin County for emergency or essential repairs, mainly roof and furnace replacements or repairs.
- \$50,000 per year has been allocated to continue the home repair program from 2015-16 to 2019-20 through the provincial/federal Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) 2014 Extension program's Ontario Renovates component.
- In Year One of the IAH Extension program, \$328,240 was allocated to ten residential care homes in St. Thomas and Elgin County for the installation of sprinkler systems to comply with mandatory Fire Code requirements and to help ensure vulnerable residents continue to have a safe and supported place to live.

Home repair assistance was provided to **21** households.

\$328,240
in funding was allocated to **10** residential care homes for new sprinkler systems.

\$460,000
was available to help with rent and utility arrears.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

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

Objective 3.1: Ensure that emergency and crisis services are accessible to persons experiencing episodes of homelessness, with a view to immediately setting goals, with supports, to move into stable, sustainable housing.

Actions:

- Ensure existing programs and services that help people maintain housing and prevent homelessness continue, new programs and services are developed according to client-centred (not system centred) principles, evaluating effectiveness, and enhancing where needed, as funds become available.
- Evaluate how attendance at Inn Out of the Cold, particularly for people regularly staying at the Inn, is affected by the opening of Second Story transitional housing and examine the need for increased services for the population served, including an evaluation of daytime programming, extending the season and the need for additional transitional or supportive housing.
- Determine how Second Story is addressing the transitional housing needs of men in the community and what service gaps continue to exist for this population.

TARGETS

- Continue to offer homelessness prevention assistance.
- Shorten length of stay at homeless shelters by rapidly housing people
- Reduction of gaps in services

MEASURES

- Track housing retention of assistance recipients
- Quantitative/qualitative evaluation of shelter use





STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3 - 2014 Progress Report:

- A new residential care homes delivery system was implemented on April 1, 2014 through a partnership between the City and Canadian Mental Health Association Elgin Branch. This has resulted in an increase in the number and availability of subsidized residential care beds from 30 beds at just one home in the past to currently 77 beds at four homes for individuals who require assistance with their daily living activities. A dedicated CMHA support worker is assigned to resident placement and ongoing monitoring of Standards of Care. Benefits of the new delivery system include improved relations with homes operators, better opportunities to house residents in appropriate care settings in the community, more residents now receiving affordable supported housing, fewer resident visits to hospital emergency, and fewer police interventions.
- CMHA purchases a number of crisis beds in the community to quickly house people in need of shelter and support.
- An inter-agency protocol was established through the Children's Action Network in 2013 to coordinate service provision for homeless youth. During the first year of operations in 2014, 44 homeless young people between the ages of 15 and 24 accessed resources through the protocol. 2/3 of the homeless youth were males. The majority of youth were living with family or friends where conflict was escalating or in temporary situations (i.e. couch surfing). Long-term housing was secured for 13 youth (30%). Protocol agencies continue to work collaboratively to improve the service.
- The Ontario Works Department's Housing Programs Coordinators are able to access various programs and resources to help people find or sustain housing.

S's Story

S. was kicked out of her home by her mother on Christmas Eve for dating an older man. She was pregnant and staying at the Inn Out of the Cold. S. was referred to the Youth Homelessness Protocol by a volunteer at the shelter. An emergency bed was accessed for her at the YWCA and discussions were undertaken with her step-mother to determine whether S. could live with her. After a few days in the emergency shelter, S. moved permanently in with her step-mother.



- 61 individuals (17 women and 44 men including four families) stayed at Inn Out of the Cold homeless shelter during the 2014/15 season between mid-October to mid-April for a total of 706 bed nights. On average four people used the shelter each night. Length of stay ranged from one night to 78 nights. Volunteers provide hot suppers, breakfasts, and bagged lunches. Staff works with Second Story and YWCA to refer guests to transitional or other housing. CMHA and Oxford-Elgin Legal Clinic's social worker is closely involved with guests' welfare. CHPI funding helps support ongoing operating costs.
- In addition to the 61 overnight guests at Inn Out of the Cold, volunteers and staff served hot suppers to another 150 individuals. A number of churches and community groups throughout the City and County also host free fellowship lunches and suppers throughout the year.
- Second Story on Talbot provides transitional housing for adult men. The program is operated by YWCA in a building owned by CMHA at 657 Talbot Street, St. Thomas. Second Story opened in November 2013. Built with IAH funding, Trillium Foundation funding, federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding, and the City's Community Improvement Funding, Second Story offers 7 bedrooms with communal kitchen, living, washroom areas. 22 residents were housed at Second Story between November 2013 and December 2014. Five residents were referred from Inn Out of the Cold, six from CMHA crisis supports, and eleven were referrals from family, self, psychiatric hospitals, YWCA programs, the Salvation Army, or through the youth justice system. 18 of the residents were on Ontario Works assistance, four were on ODSP/CPP assistance. The average age of residents was 38 years, ranging from ages 16-69. CHPI funding helps support ongoing operating costs.
- The Fair Winds program provides supported transitional housing for young men ages 16-24 in a 4-bedroom house rented from Elgin and St. Thomas Housing Corporation on Fairview Avenue in St. Thomas. Fair Winds is home for three residents plus one live-in Residential Advisor. Supports are provided by YWCA. During 2014, seven young men moved through the Fair Winds program. All were previously homeless. The income source of most residents was Ontario Works assistance. CHPI funding helps sustain operations.
- Harmony House provides supported transitional housing for young women ages 16-24 in a 4-bedroom townhouse rented from Eastwood Non-Profit Housing Corporation. Harmony House has capacity for three residents plus one live-in Residential Advisor. Supportive programming is provided by YWCA. Four young women moved through the program during 2014. Most residents are on Ontario Works assistance, and all were homeless before moving to Harmony House. CHPI funding helps support ongoing operations.
- 20 bedrooms are available at the YWCA residence on Mary Street, including three emergency beds. Of the 42 women served at the YWCA Residence in 2014, 23 made use of the emergency beds, 12 reside at the Residence in long-term housing, and seven are in transitional housing within the residence. The main income source of residents is Ontario Works or ODSP. CHPI funding helps support ongoing operations.

61
individuals stayed at
Inn Out of the Cold in
the winter of 2014/15

22
men used
Second Story
transitional housing

77
subsidized residential
care home beds
are available

42
women were served at
the
YWCA residence



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

Objective: 4.1. Increase community partnerships and collaborations and actively advocate for a reduction in poverty and increased housing stability for all residents of St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Actions:

- Examine opportunities for further service integration of health and social services and support community agencies in pursuing additional funding through the LHIN to address housing and support needs of persons with mental illness, addictions and undiagnosed mental illness.
- Expand collaborative priority-setting through the Housing and Homelessness Action Group (HHAG). Effective planning of homeless-related mental health and addiction services, and housing supports, will require enhanced collaboration between the LHIN, the City and other community support organizations, including the Aboriginal community, Violence Against Women agencies, and accessibility committees.
- Investigate ways to expand outreach of housing/homelessness services to the County. Model may become a rural virtual “hub” shared by many community services.
- Increase opportunities for information sharing and cross-training across agencies and volunteers to enhance knowledge, understanding, and communication.

TARGETS

- Initiate and monitor the implementation of the 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan including a review at five years.
- Increased inter-agency training.

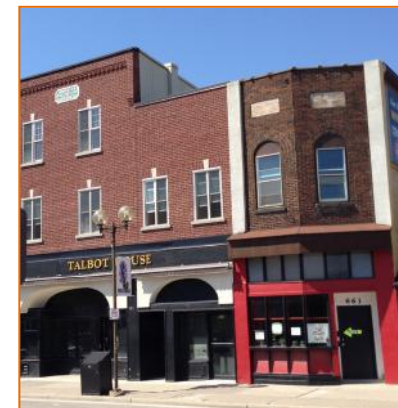
MEASURES:

- HHAG reports annually on Housing and Homelessness Plan progress through an Annual Report Card.
- City reports annually on Provincially-prescribed Performance Measures.
- Improved services to rural and remote areas in Elgin.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4 - 2014 Progress Report:

- The first meeting of the new residential care homes network was held in early 2014. The group meets quarterly to share information, make connections with community support agencies, and hear presentations. As a direct result of the network's activities, Central Community Health Centre's mobile unit now visits homes regularly to provide such services as foot care and flu shots, connections have been made with agencies such as Elgin St. Thomas Public Health (i.e. nutritious menu planning assistance), Oxford-Elgin Legal Clinic (resident and operator rights and responsibilities) and other community services.
- Community partners meet quarterly at the Housing Homelessness Action Group (HHAG) table to network, evaluate programs, and identify needs for additional services. HHAG is actively working to engage the LHIN.
- Community consultations took place in the fall of 2013 to develop local Residential Care Homes Standards of Care. The new Standards of Care were approved by City Council in December 2013. Residential care homes receiving CHPI funding are required to comply with the Standards.
- The Ontario Works Department opened its first satellite office in Aylmer in September 2014 to improve access to services for residents in east Elgin and reduce transportation barriers.
- \$80,000 was included in the Ontario Works operating budget to support the Bridges Out of Poverty initiative, a community-driven strategy designed to improve the lives of people living in poverty and to help create sustainable communities. Staff at the Ontario Works Department work closely with Bridges organizers and participants.



A new residential care homes network was established

The Housing & Homelessness Action group meets quarterly

Ontario Works opened its 1st satellite office in Aylmer