



To: Chair and Members of the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee
From: Paul Skinner, Interim Director of Housing Services
Date: Wednesday, September 11, 2024
Subject: 2024-25 Winter Response Plan for People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness

Background:

This report is in response to the following resolution adopted by Guelph City Council on May 28, 2024, and forwarded to the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee on June 12, 2024, with respect to a winter response plan to support people experiencing homelessness:

That Guelph City Council respectfully requests that if the County of Wellington Housing Services staff determines that the Tiny Homes Coalition proposal is not viable, that the County provide an alternative accessible solution be presented to address people living in encampments in Guelph, including a winter plan to support people experiencing homelessness, and that County staff report back to the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee in appropriate timing to accommodate people for winter 2024-25.

Update:

Wellington Guelph By-Name List

The Wellington-Guelph By-Name List (BNL) is a real-time list of all people experiencing chronic homelessness in Wellington-Guelph. The monthly average of the number of people on the BNL is a result of the number of people entering (inflow) and exiting (outflow) experiences of chronic homelessness. Staff monitor BNL information on a monthly basis to review outreach and diversion strategies to help reduce inflow as well as local permanent housing strategies to help increase outflow.

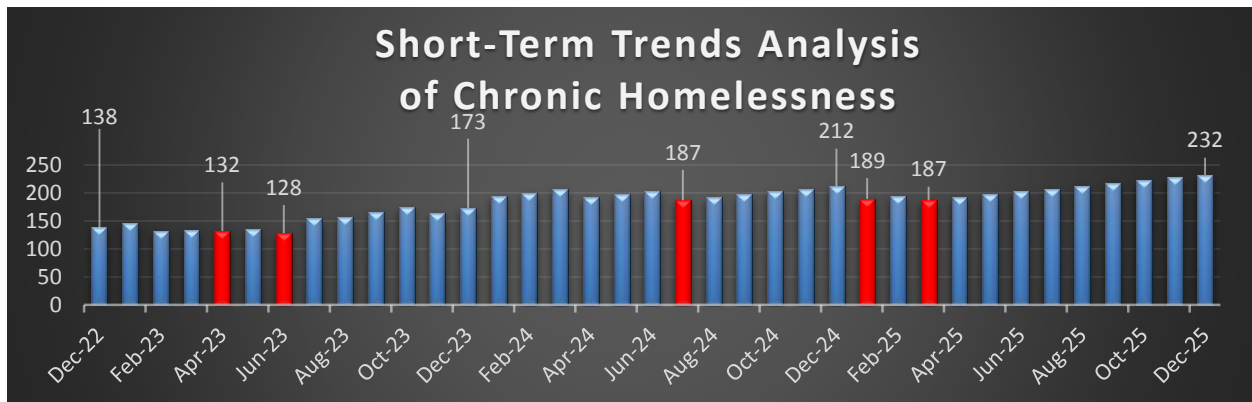


Figure 1 This bar graph shows the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness on a monthly basis over a 3-year period, and projects the impacts of new supportive and transitional housing on the By-Name List during that time. The red bars identify months where a supportive or transitional housing project has or will come online.

Experiences of homelessness are complex and often caused by external factors such as financial strain, intimate partner violence, family breakdown, discrimination, lack of affordable housing, impact of colonialism, among other factors. Homelessness also predisposes individuals to live in sheltered or unsheltered conditions. Sheltered homelessness is described as accessing the emergency shelter system, living in unstable situations with friends or family members, staying at a temporary accommodation site such as 128 Norfolk, or at a transitional housing site such as 65 Delhi or 23 Gordon St. Unsheltered homelessness is described as 'living rough' in the community, often referred to as encampments.

Wellington-Guelph data over the past 3 years show that approximately 93% of individuals on the BNL experienced sheltered homelessness and approximately 7% on the BNL experienced unsheltered homelessness.

For the purposes of the 2024-25 Winter Response Plan, staff based cost estimates on accommodating up to 25 individuals during the period of October 1, 2024, to April 30, 2025 (10% of the average number of people on the BNL from January to June 2024 (chronic and non-chronic)).

2024/25 Winter Response Plan:

The commitment towards our community's winter response for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness attempts to provide sheltered accommodations and, as per the Housing Services mandate, prioritize housing permanency so that individuals do not return to homelessness.

During the month of September, staff will support the implementation of intensive and coordinated outreach responses that include housing focused conversations with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness with the goal of assessing housing readiness that centres on self-choice.

The individuals may be offered accommodations commencing October 1 at the Norfolk Temporary Accommodation site or at a local hotel. The Norfolk Temporary Accommodation site is a low barrier site that can accommodate singles and couples and where regulated pets may also be accommodated. A low barrier site is defined as a site where people can safely use substances in designated areas on the premises that are not in public view and where people can safely abstain from substance use. Only individuals with permanent housing plans and regular engagement with health supports (if needed) will be accommodated in hotels.

Individuals who need to remain in unsheltered homelessness will be offered tangibles such as tarps, tents, sleeping bags, pillows, warm clothing, etc. The costs of temporary accommodations and tangibles are combined in the cost estimates.

The need for safe and accessible storage of encampment belongings was highlighted in the 2023-24 Winter Response plan for people who moved from their encampments to temporary accommodations over the winter months. As such, rented storage units have been budgeted to store encampment belongings at a location that is readily and easily accessible.

Consistent with the 2023-24 Winter Response plan, approved transportation costs, limited access to food, and hygiene products will also be made available to people experiencing homelessness both in sheltered and unsheltered situations over the winter months.

The cost estimate for the 2024-25 Winter Response Plan is located below:

Item:	Total (7 months)
Temporary Accommodation and Tangibles	\$560,000
Accessible Storage	\$6,800
Transportation	\$8,000
Food Security and Hygiene Products	\$87,500
Total Cost	\$662, 300

Health and Housing

Like the need for intensive and coordinated outreach responses at the onset of the winter response plan, there is also a need for increased intensive housing first workers dedicated to securing permanent housing for people while they are at winter temporary accommodations.

Case planning for individuals staying in hotels or at the Norfolk site will include continued housing-focused conversations, assessing housing readiness, and emphasizing permanent solutions as an end goal towards continued health and housing stabilization.

To realize this goal, dedicated resources from the health system are needed to support the primary, mental health and addiction needs of those being supported within the capacity of the housing stability system and those currently housed. Housing stability is not possible without responsive health supports. An important piece of the Wellington-Guelph tertiary homelessness prevention system includes timely access to supports and being recovery oriented as a core principle of a housing first system. The planning and coordination of outreach responses, housing first workers, and health support services will be planned through the Wellington-Guelph Health and Housing Community Planning Table.

Financial Implications:

The total projected cost to provide the proposed winter shelter response for the period of October 1, 2024, to April 30, 2025, is estimated to be approximately \$662,300 (\$66,200 County and \$596,100 City), with \$283,800 (\$28,400 County and \$255,400 City) falling into 2024 and \$378,500 (\$37,800 County and \$340,700 City) being required spending in 2025.

In June 2024, staff estimated that housing would experience in year savings of approximately \$350,000 (\$85,000 County and \$265,000 City). Based on this estimate, in year savings would be available to cover the 2024 impact of the winter response plan. An updated variance projection will be brought forward to Committee and Council in October to confirm available savings to offset in year winter response requirements.

The 2025 cost will be included in the County's 2025 Budget and Ten-Year plan process. At this time, it is unclear what Federal funding may be available to offset the cost of winter response and as such, the 2025 cost of \$378,500 (\$37,800 County and \$340,700 City) will be reflected as 100% municipal funding. Staff will continue to seek funding to offset the municipal impacts where possible.

Strategic Action Plan:

This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County's Strategic Action Plan:

- Making the Best Decisions for the Betterment of the Community

Recommendation:

That the Joint Social Services Land Ambulance Committee recommend to County Council and Guelph City Council to approve the report, 2024-25 Winter Response Plan for People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul Skinner

Interim Director of Housing Services