



The Corporation of the City of Stratford Social Services Sub-committee MINUTES

Date: June 13, 2023
Time: 4:30 P.M.
Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

Sub-committee Present: Councillor Briscoe - Vice Chair Presiding, Councillor Biehn, Councillor Nijjar, Councillor Wordofa

Regrets: Councillor Henderson - Chair

Staff Present: Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Alex Burgess - Manager of Ontario Works, Jeff Wilson - Manager of Housing, Jodi Akins - Council Clerk Secretary, John Ritz - Supervisor of Homelessness and Housing Stability, Tatiana Dafoe - Clerk

1. Call to Order

The Vice Chair called the Meeting to Order and stated that Councillor Henderson provided regrets for the meeting.

Land Acknowledgment

Moment of Silent Reflection

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature of Pecuniary Interest

No disclosures of pecuniary interest were made by a Member at the June 13, 2023, Social Services Sub-committee meeting.

3. Delegations

3.1 Request for Delegation by The Local Community Food Centre

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Decision: THAT the delegation of Karen Wood, on behalf of The Local, be heard.

Carried

Karen Wood, Community Advocate at The Local Community Food Centre (The Local), referring to a PowerPoint presentation, provided the following information:

- she is presenting on behalf of EPIC, the Local's advocacy working group;
- a Disability Justice Forum was held in February 2023 to discuss ending disability poverty in our community;
- one of the solutions discussed at the Forum is one that can be implemented by municipal government;
- The Local is asking the City to make free transit passes available to all recipients of the Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);
- to support the proposal, The Local conducted a survey with 75 community members;
- the responses demonstrate a clear desire for accessible transit options for community members;
- statistics from the survey were provided, with respondents believing that access to public transit would increase trips to obtain healthy foods, decrease sense of isolation, have a positive effect on mental wellbeing and foster a greater sense of belonging;
- it being suggested that by addressing the above social determinants of health, there was the potential to reduce the number of mental health calls received by police services, which would allow them to allocate resources elsewhere;

- that the voices driving this advocacy effort come from those with lived experience, with 36% of survey respondents being recipients of OW or ODSP and 32% self identifying as low income;
- it being argued that the cost to the City to provide transit passes would be minimal as buses often run empty during off-peak hours;
- by filling empty bus seats, they can ensure that transit remains efficient and accessible for all residents;
- the environmental aspect of the proposal being noted and including encouraging transit use as an alternative to personal vehicles, decreasing traffic congestion and carbon emissions;
- data from institutes such as the Tamarack Institute and 80 Cities being provided, and it being noted that accessible and affordable transportation is a key factor in reducing poverty and social isolation; and
- it was requested that their proposal be considered, taking into account the survey results and the arguments presented.

Karen Wood was thanked for her presentation, noting it was well-researched and well-presented.

It was questioned whether there are any programs already up and running that could be better utilized. The Director of Social Services provided information on programs and services currently available as follows:

- OW recipients can receive a transit pass if they are involved in activities that are employment related, such as job searches, basic education, or volunteer work;
- OW and ODSP recipients can receive a transit pass for medical needs;
- ODSP clients that are voluntarily participating in employment activities may qualify;
- Social Services staff work with partner agencies and give bus passes to help facilitate participation in community programs;
- low income families can access a bus pass at a reduced rate through the City; and

- with these initiatives, staff are hoping to reduce barriers to transportation as much as possible.

The Manager of Ontario Works stated that OW mandates are shifting away from being purely employment focused. OW clients may be eligible to receive a pass to enable them to participate in the community to access stability supports.

A question and answer period between Sub-committee and staff took place as follows:

- caseworkers can assess whether bus tickets or a pass should be given out based on the client's needs;
- to fulfill the request by The Local it would require the issuance of roughly 2,168 passes per month for Stratford recipients of OW or ODSP (this number would not cover those OW and ODSP recipients living outside of Stratford);
- it is hoped that the current processes for obtaining a transit pass are simple, but if there are barriers, staff could look at how processes could be streamlined;
- an example being provided of The Local where passes can be given out to community members and the names and pass numbers matched up by staff, instead of those community members having to go into the Social Services offices to receive a pass;
- it was noted that when OW clients access transit passes through their caseworkers, they are paid for by provincial funding;
- caseworkers can also provide passes or tickets to ride the PC Connect bus outside of Stratford;
- caseworkers work with the client to identify the best transportation solution for them, which may mean taking cabs or paying mileage to a neighbour with a personal vehicle;
- the financial impact of issuing approximately 2,100 annual transit passes with a value of \$60 monthly equates to \$1.5 million dollars annually;
- it was noted that costs would be less if it was an opt-in program, as not everyone may want one;

- if not available for a legislated reason through a case plan, transit passes could be provided under the Discretionary Benefits program, but that funding is capped;
- an example was provided of passes being provided using the Discretionary Benefits fund to those experiencing homelessness for housing searches; and
- staff would have to investigate if there was any provincial or federal funding programs that could be used on a large scale.

A question and answer period took place between Sub-committee and Derek Barnes, Manager of Community Outreach at The Local Community Food Centre, as follows:

- a relationship with Tamarack Institute could open doors for research pilot projects;
- The Local is not a member of the Institute directly, but they are part of regional advocacy groups who are;
- the United Way Social Research and Planning Council is a member of the Tamarack Institute and The Local has a relationship with them;
- Derek cautioned against equating the full value of the transit ticket price with equating to lost revenue;
- not everyone is going to want to obtain a free transit pass but denying the chance to others to use the system for free is not going to translate to receiving that \$60 as municipal revenue;
- The Local is seeing an increase in the number of people just trying to get by; and
- it is not realistic to expect that people can find that \$60 for the reduced rate transit pass.

It was questioned whether there are people who do not know what options are available and whether the City can address the matter by making that information more widely available. The Clerk suggested several options for consideration by Sub-committee:

- staff could develop an educational campaign promoting the various programs and how community members can access them;

- refer the request to staff for review to bring back a report on what is currently being provided, existing costs, information on additional costs for program expansion, and how they could be funded; and
- refer the request to the 2024 budget deliberations.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the request from The Local to provide free transit passes to all recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program be referred to staff for review;

AND THAT staff bring back a report to the Social Services Sub-committee on programs currently being provided which offer free transit passes to recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, existing costs for these programs, information on additional costs for an opt-in free transit pass program for all recipients of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, and how that program could be funded.

Carried

4. Report of the Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor

4.1 Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts (SOC23-016)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Homelessness and Housing Stability Supervisor provided the following highlights from the staff report as follows:

- the City's Social Services Department received a letter of recognition on April 6, 2023 from the Director of Built for Zero Canada;
- a key milestone in ending homelessness is achieving 10% below baseline on the number of people experiencing homelessness;

- Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys met and held that milestone between December 2022 and February 2023; and
- Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys are the 7th community participating in the Built for Zero campaign to accomplish this milestone.

The Chair provided congratulations to staff, noting it is an incredible milestone. A question and answer period took place between Sub-committee and staff as follows:

- the end of homelessness for Stratford looks like reaching functional zero, which means solving of homelessness for the population and if anyone enters into homelessness, they are rapidly rehoused;
- it being noted staff are doing a lot of good work in the community, but there are still many experiencing homelessness and the encampments located downtown were provided as an example;
- the Director advised that the practice is to look at long term housing solutions by rapidly rehousing those experiencing homelessness, finding permanent solutions for them and ensuring supports are in place;
- most community members who are rehoused are placed in individual units, however, staff continue to pursue a supportive housing build;
- it was questioned what the process is for someone coming to Stratford from elsewhere with nowhere to stay;
- there being local policies in place regarding homelessness and case plans are put in place on an individual basis to address individual needs; and
- it was noted that often people have supports in place where they are originally from, and staff will look at whether they can be reintegrated back into the community where they have family or friends in place as a support system.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the letter titled, "Recognition of a Chronic Homelessness Reduction in the Built for Zero Canada Campaign," be received for information;

AND THAT the report titled, "Chronic Homelessness Reduction Efforts" (SOC23-016), be received for information.

Carried

5. Report of the Manager of Housing

5.1 2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys (SOC23-020)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Housing provided the following highlights of the staff report:

- this is the 9th year of the 10 year Housing and Homelessness plan;
- 55 households were moved from the centralized waitlist into permanent rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing in 2022;
- staff continue to work with all levels of government to leverage funding to maintain and repair housing stock; and
- continued construction is taking place at the affordable housing project at 200 Britannia Street and staff have been accepting applications for the past two (2) months.

A question and answer period between Sub-committee and staff took place as follows:

- 1 bedroom units continue to be the most popular;
- it was questioned whether staff could find out what the target would be for stock to increase to meet future demand;
- staff are seeing a demand for all types of units, including multi-bedroom units;
- 1 bedroom units make up most of the current housing stock, but there is a need for all types;
- the need for affordable and RGI housing outpaces the supply;
- a big change over the 9 years of the plan is the move to an evidenced based approach;

- the Social Services department has a data analyst in-house and staff will take an evidence based approach to figure out what the needs are in terms of housing type;
- there is a strong increased need for supportive housing based on current needs;
- there continues to be a significant demand for accessible units, in part due to an aging population; and
- as to whether increased need for beds to support those leaving domestic abuse will be needed, it was suggested that leadership at Optimism Place and the Emily Murphy Centre would be better equipped to respond.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2022 Annual Report (Year 9) – Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys" (SOC23-020), be received for information.

Carried

6. Report of the Director of Social Services

6.1 Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 returns (SOC23-018)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services advised that the City of Stratford coordinated the annual income tax clinic for low income residents, an initiative that has been ongoing since 1989. Famme and Co. Professional Corporation and McCutchen & Pearce Professional Corporation were thanked for their participation in providing this service.

For 2022, 132 participants had their returns completed. It was noted this year refugee claimants and those experiencing homelessness were served

through engagement with community supports to enable them maximum access to all resources available.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Annual Community Income Tax Clinic for Completion of 2022 Returns" (SOC23-018), be received for information;

AND THAT Social Services issue a thank you on behalf of the City of Stratford, to all businesses that offered and provided their support and services.

The Vice-chair stated this is such an important program as it enables access to increased financial benefits and enfranchises members of the public as they are automatically registered to vote in elections.

The Vice-chair called the question on the motion.

Carried

6.2 Transitioning the Supportive Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) (COU23-019)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services provided the following highlights from the staff report:

- the SHOPP program launched in February 2018 as a collaborative Housing First intervention aimed at supporting individuals and

families experiencing homelessness in Perth County, St. Marys and Stratford;

- there is a scattered site and fixed site component to this program;
- the scattered site component is where staff are recommending service delivery changes;
- the program has had many successes but there have been some challenges as well;
- it is believed that the proposed new model will address many of the challenges being experienced; and
- staff are looking at using the months of July, August, and September to transition this program.

The Director of Social Services reviewed the staff recommendation.

It was questioned whether bringing this program in-house would enhance data collection and the Director confirmed it would.

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program operations be transitioned to an in-house model;

THAT authorization be given to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies, whose mandates meet the needs of the City's most complex clients to help support the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program;

THAT the Chief Administrative Officer or the Director of Social Services be authorized to enter into memorandums of understanding with support agencies that have been prepared by or reviewed by the City Solicitor;

AND THAT authorization be given to hire two full-time Outreach Workers to support the operations of the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) program.

Carried

7. Report of the Manager of Ontario Works

7.1 2023 Ontario Works Service/Business Plan (SOC23-017)

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/ Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Ontario Works provided the following highlights from the staff report:

- the 2023 service plan was attached to the Sub-committee agenda;
- the plan was written in accordance with the template provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services;
- this contract and budget have already been negotiated, which is early based on their usual timeline; and
- the service plan covers several topics including: the Ontario Works mandate and how the local office plans to meet those priorities, a review of the transition plan from the current employment focused model to a stability support model, a comprehensive caseload review, local labour market information, as well as an overall overview of how the program is managed locally.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2023 Ontario Works Service/ Business Plan" (SOC23-017), be received for information.

Carried

8. Next Sub-committee Meeting

The next Social Services Sub-committee meeting is July 11, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall.

9. Adjournment

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Sub-committee Decision: THAT the Social Services Sub-committee meeting adjourn.

Carried

Meeting Start Time: 4:30 P.M.

Meeting End Time: 5:20 P.M.