



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

Date: October 8, 2024
Time: 4:30 P.M.
Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

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

Regrets: Councillor Henderson - Chair, Councillor Nijjar

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

Also present: Members of the Public

1. Call to Order

The Vice-chair called the Meeting to Order.

Land Acknowledgment

Moment of Silent Reflection

Respectful Workplace Policy Statement

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 October 8, 2024, Social Services Sub-committee meeting.

3. Delegations

3.1 ADDED - Request for Delegation - Men's Homeless Shelter Action Plan

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Decision: THAT Kyle Alexander Dewdney be heard.

Carried

Sub-committee Discussion: Kyle Alexander Dewdney, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, requested an action plan be created to raise sufficient funding for a men's homeless shelter and to have the Hawker Peddlers Fee of \$401.00 waived to begin a door to door "Art For Housing" campaign. Highlights of the presentation included:

- "Art for Housing Canada Campaign" being a campaign to end the homelessness crisis in Stratford and across Canada;
- all capital raised to be used towards purchase of properties, equipment, labour and other requirements to provide housing;
- the campaign being door to door sales of products and services created by Mr. Dewdney to ensure all Canadians have the opportunity to own a home;
- Stratford having a youth shelter, Shelterlink, and a women's shelter, Optimism Place;
- Stratford needing a men's shelter for more than a decade to meet the demographic of the area and this being needed before winter;
- acknowledged the work of the Connection Centre, House of Blessing and local citizens;

- some locals being homeless for over ten years, some struggling with addictions, or leaving situations of abuses;
- purchase of housing units through funds raised ensuring no amortization period and would maintain safety, security and protection for all;
- requesting the peddlers fee for door to door campaigning be waived;
- the delegation being interested in running for public office to represent Millennials and Generation Z, to end homelessness in Canada; and
- commented everyone deserves a home, good food and water, and an education that breeds prosperity and not anxiety.

Discussion on this matter occurred between Sub-committee and the City Clerk. Highlights of the discussion included:

- process for door to door fundraising not being specifically outlined through the City;
- sale of goods and services being held accountable through the Hawker/Peddler business license from the City;
- there being a requirement to show the approved business license and an enforcement mechanism being through Stratford Police Services if the business is not operating in accordance with the Business Licensing By-law;
- corporations to register federally or provincially as charities and be assigned charitable numbers, interested parties could contact the ministry; and
- a member not being comfortable removing the peddler fee until charitable status is in place.

Members thanked the delegation and noted the presentation touched on the core tenants looked to for solutions in this sector, these being community and public buy in, community ownership of the solution, and how to afford public shelter assets long term in volatile markets.

4. Report of the Manager of Ontario Works

4.1 Ontario Works 2025 Provincial Allocation (SOC24-012)

Sub-committee Discussion: The Manager of Ontario Works presented the report, highlighting the following:

- 2025 provincial government funding allocation having been increased and this being the first increase since 2018;
- funding being frozen at 2018 levels and the caseload having increased 22%;
- the increase being allocated to administration costs to address the increase in caseload and not addressing rate changes;
- two program delivery funding portfolios being received by Ontario Works:
 - the 50/50 funding to cover administrative costs to operate the program, this being matched by the municipality and;
 - 100% provincially funded employment assistance portfolio;
- the 2025 increase being \$290,000, this being \$81,000 to the 100% program and a further \$208,600 to the 50/50 program for delivery of funding;
- the municipal 2024 budget having provided increased funding to address the stress on the Ontario Works division with increasing caseloads and this need now being recognized provincially;
- the current case load being 775 benefit units, each being individuals or families, representing just under 1,400 individuals;
- current case loads averaging 140-150 benefit units per case worker;
- case load continuously increasing, seeing immediate 2024 needs with high volume of intakes;
- the provincial government requiring case workers to meet with their entire case loads at 2-3 month intervals to complete an action

plan working towards employment, self sufficiency or the identified path;

- 100 applications monthly and daily requests for benefits making these deadlines nearly impossible;
- the program being administratively burdensome with a high amount of directives and legislation to be followed as well as clients being required to request approval for each benefit accessed through the program;
- with the 2025 fund increase being received, an expansion initiative for a new case worker being requested in the 2025 budget to address these issues;
- ministry predictions of a caseload increase resulting in more than 800 caseloads in our region with this being the highest number of caseloads since the data tracking began in 2012; and
- Ontario Works being in survival mode to address needs of clients and meet requirements of the stringent program.

Discussion on this matter took place between Sub-committee and staff. Highlights of the discussion included the following:

- members thanked staff for the essential work and noted the report being a critical lens to view the 2025 budget through with the high rise in cost of living, to keep the problem from intensifying;
- the program requiring a provincially mandated application into the lives and finances of each individual to assess eligibility for this assistance;
- caseworkers working with clients to develop an action plan to identify what the individual's needs are to become successful, for example, housing and stability, and resources for employment searches;
- benefits and counselling services becoming available to clients of the program as well as eligibility for referrals, connections and partnerships with agencies like Family Services Perth Huron who

provide front of the line services for clients on Ontario Works through a contract with the City, noted 10% of the program caseload is accessing supports through this program;

- clients do the work, but the caseworker walks alongside and make clients aware of available resources in the community;
- caseworkers can make discretionary benefits available through the program for employment or health related benefits, covering basic costs like a cast or crutches;
- partnerships with agencies like The Local resulting in a credit program being launched for the Friday Market for clients to access fresh fruit and vegetables, with feedback being provided that this was positive with clients feeling valued as individuals;
- some clients graduating to employment with no further requirement for assistance, and some clients requiring a return to the program receiving continued drive of the caseworker to work with the clients;
- former clients stop in to thank caseworkers for making them feel valued, this being what is strived for in every interaction;
- high case numbers forcing staff to change focus and programming to food security;
- numbers dictating how staff choose delivery of services, and how data is compiled;
- social assistance rates not having increased since 2018 with single people with full shelter receiving \$733, forcing hard choices to be made in how to counsel individuals on these choices;
- Ontario Works having contracts with CMHA and HPHA to support with addictions counselling and referrals to rehabilitation programs and case workers working closely to make connections and support clients with transportation and to meet needs before arriving with these organizations;

- beyond expansion request Council could advocate for social assistance rates and targets reflecting current needs; and
- staff noting financial support of \$733 for a single person being inadequate.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Sub-committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Ontario Works 2025 Provincial Allocation" (SOC24-012), be received for information.

Carried

5. Department Update

The following Department Update Infographics of August, 2024 were provided for the information of Sub-committee:

- Monthly Children's Services Report
- Monthly Homelessness Report
- Monthly Housing Report
- Monthly Ontario Works Report

Sub-committee Discussion: The Director of Social Services provided the department update, highlighting the following:

- the pictorials showing continued increase in numbers;
- the monthly reports in pictorials identifying current trends with a quarterly variance review to determine service delivery based on trends in the community;
- staff receiving tight deadlines for legislative changes between notice given and implementation;
- the province currently operating the Centralized Intake Program through the Intake and Benefit Administration Unit which grants majority of Ontario Works files;
- staff having to intervene with 100% of the files to correct mistakes or undeclared income as applicants working to navigate the online application;

- a significant legislative change having been made to in person services now having to be launched online, this change has been walked back to allow staff to continue launching applications locally;
- 2025 will see significant change to the Centralized Intake with the province launching all Ontario Works applications; and
- A further report on this update coming to Council in November 2024.

6. Next Sub-committee Meeting

The next Social Services Sub-committee meeting is November 13, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall.

7. Adjournment

Motion by Councillor Biehn

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

Carried

Meeting Start Time: 4:30 P.M.

Meeting End Time: 5:02 P.M.