

Report

Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness and Community Safety

February 2019

“We cannot be a community if we’re leaving people behind.”

Mayor Cam Guthrie, State of the City address, February 7, 2019

Executive Summary

Guelph’s Mayor, Cam Guthrie, announced in his December 3, 2018 inaugural address to Council that he would establish a Mayor’s Task Force to address issues of homelessness, addictions, and community safety.

The goal of the Task Force is to form an action plan that can be implemented quickly and make a measurable impact on the homelessness issue. The focus is on amplifying work that is already ongoing, including initiatives and solutions that have been assessed and planned but not implemented (or cancelled when funding ran out).

The Task Force includes representatives from the Guelph-Wellington Task Force on Poverty Elimination, the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy, the County of Wellington, Member of Parliament, Member of Provincial Parliament, and other agencies and leaders who are experts in both the problems and the potential solutions. A complete list can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Through two meetings in January 2019, the Task Force agreed on a priority list of five actions. They are:

- **Permanent supportive housing** to house 15 chronically homeless individuals with complex needs from the County of Wellington’s By Name List. The housing would be staffed 24/7 to support residents struggling with addiction, mental health, or chronic health issues, so that they can maintain housing. It would stop the cycle of more expensive interventions such as the shelter system, emergency services and hospital, police, and the justice system.

Cost: Annual costs estimated at \$915,000 (\$800,000 staffing + \$115 annual operation costs). Capital costs, assuming a new 15-unit build, would total \$4.5 million (\$300,000 per unit).

- Re-open a **Supported Recovery Room** for people experiencing addiction or mental health crisis, who are too sick to be in a shelter, but not sick enough to be in a hospital. The SSR would have a minimum of five beds, would be staffed by a registered nurse, addiction counsellor, and peer worker, and would meet sleep and recovery needs for clients for up to 72 hours. A pilot project ran successfully until funding expired, and a service plan and budget is already in place. A host building would need to be found.

Cost: Annual operating costs estimated at \$670,000. A host building would need to be found.

- Fund the **Welcoming Streets** outreach worker who supports individuals and businesses in the downtown. The funding for this pilot project expires March 31, 2019. The pilot was successful in connecting individuals to services and supports, and educating and empowering downtown businesses.

Cost: Annual operating costs are \$83,000, plus in-kind training and support from the Downtown Guelph Business Association, the Guelph Community Health Centre, and the Guelph Police Service.

- Re-start an **Addiction Court Support Worker** program, which provides a counsellor who connects people to addiction services and supports at a key moment: when they are in bail court. The pilot project, which ran in 2017, showed positive outcomes. Participants reported engaging with treatment (many for the first time) and having fewer, or no further, contacts with police.

Cost: Annual operating costs of \$100,000.

- **System and service improvements**, such as expanding service hours to evenings, weekends, and holidays; including peer supports in service delivery; and including homeless people and substance users in the design of services. It was agreed that moving to 24/7 service would be ideal. Service improvements will vary depending on what actions different agencies decide to take. Each agency will be responsible for initiating and implementing their own improvements.

Cost: Will vary depending on projects; costs could be absorbed within existing operational budgets.

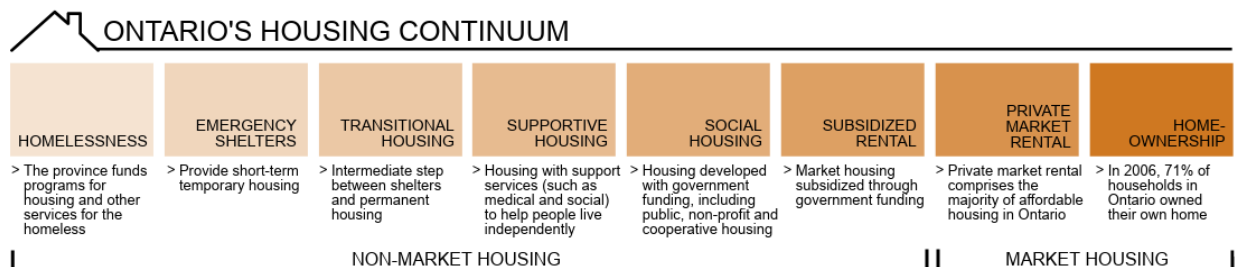
The Task Force agreed that the single largest barrier to achieving these priorities is lack of funding. Discussions are now underway to attempt to secure funding for the most immediate-term priorities: the supportive recovery room; Welcoming Streets; and addiction court support worker program. Discussions are also underway to find a host location for the supportive recovery room, once funding is secured. Because each of these programs existed previously, work plans and partnerships are already in place and can be re-started when funding is in place.

Permanent supportive housing is a medium- to long-term priority, with a goal of establishing it within the next four years, and funding requests will come to Guelph City Council and any partner agencies in 2020. Currently, City and County staff are collaborating to compile an inventory of options (including any potential buildings or land) and develop a project plan, so that the project could apply for funding as it becomes available.

Mayor Guthrie has committed to hosting further meetings of the Task Force as needed, and to keep the community updated on progress in achieving the priorities.

Report

Context



When it comes to housing affordability, communities can face challenges both in absolute terms with the price of housing, and in relative terms with the types of housing. Guelph struggles with both. Housing is expensive and, with limited stock, it can be challenging to find an appropriate option to meet needs.

- Guelph’s rental vacancy rate is one of the lowest in Ontario, at 1.4 per cent. 3 per cent is considered a healthy vacancy rate.
- 41 per cent of tenant households in Guelph are spending 30% or more of their household income on shelter costs. ¹
- 5,985 households in Guelph are in core housing need, meaning their dwelling is inadequate, unsuitable, or unaffordable and they can’t afford alternative housing. ²

Social and affordable housing

The County of Wellington is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager for social housing operations, and the City of Guelph provides ongoing, annual funding to the County for this. In its 2019 budget, the City has allocated \$15.9 million to the County’s social housing operations and capital investment.

The City supports affordable housing by investing in projects such as the remediation of 200 Beverley, a future affordable housing project, and through funding to cover Development Charges exemptions for new accessory apartments, which help increase housing supply. The City currently has \$900,000 in an Affordable Housing Reserve to support the implementation of the City’s Affordable Housing Strategy.

¹ Source: Guelph Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination

² Source: Guelph Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination

The City and County are working with community partners to identify potential social and affordable housing projects that could meet the funding criteria of the Government of Canada's National Housing Strategy (NHS), which is expected to be released in April 2019. Funding commitments from other levels of government are required to be eligible for NHS funding.

Though Guelph has affordability challenges across the housing continuum, the Mayor's Task Force is focused on the people who are most at risk in this crisis: people who are experiencing homelessness.

What we know about homelessness in Guelph

The County of Wellington and Poverty Task Force held a [Point-in-Time Count](#) in April 2018, which provided a snapshot of homelessness at that specific point in time. 325 individuals were found to be experiencing homelessness in Guelph-Wellington, and 81 per cent (or 261) of these individuals were living in Guelph.

- 136 individuals were temporarily sheltered (couch surfing, motel/hotel, public systems such as a hospital or jail)
- 71 were staying in emergency shelters
- 39 were unsheltered (sleeping in public or private spaces without consent or in places such as vehicles or makeshift shelters)
- 15 had an unknown location (the participant did not wish to share the location, or they did not know where they were going to stay at the time of the survey).

When asked what happened that caused them to lose their housing most recently, nearly one-quarter (22%) of individuals reported addiction or substance use.

When asked to name their most problematic health issues, 64% identified mental health issues and 61% identified addiction issues.

25% of respondents identified fear for their personal safety as the reason they choose not to stay in emergency shelter.

Guelph and Wellington has a quality By Name List, which is an ongoing and dynamic system to know every homeless person in the community by name. Guelph is the fourth community in Canada to have a quality By-Name List. The 15 individuals on the By Name List with the most complex needs have been homeless for an average of 27 months; 93% of them have mental health issues or concerns, 87% have substance use issues, and 33% have chronic health issues.

The County of Wellington has implemented a Coordinated Entry System, which is a streamlined process to improve access to housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. The County has adopted a Housing First approach, which is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centers on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing, and then providing additional supports and services as needed. The basic underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed.

Task Force: premise of work

The Task Force began its work by hearing from local experts, including the County of Wellington, Task Force for Poverty Elimination, and Wellington-Guelph Drug Strategy. They received the context and data provided above. To bring real-life perspective to the data, the Task Force also heard from shelter directors who shared the stories (using assumed names) of a local youth and adult who are experiencing homelessness.

Shelter directors and other agencies reported that there is capacity at Guelph's emergency shelters, even on the coldest nights, and that hotels and motels are used if shelters reach capacity.

The Task Force agreed that issues of homelessness, substance use, and mental health are all related, and that the majority of people in Guelph who are homeless are also experiencing issues with mental health and substance use. A solution requires more than simply adding beds; it involves addressing mental health and addiction needs so that individuals with complex needs are able to maintain housing. Addressing homelessness could also take pressure off other, often more costly services such as the hospital's emergency room, EMS, Guelph Police, corrections and court systems, emergency shelters and drop-in centres, and front line health and social services agencies.

Process for selecting priorities

The Mayor's Task Force determined its list of five priorities through two facilitated meetings in January 2019. A list of potential initiatives was assessed through two group prioritization exercises, and five priorities emerged: permanent supportive housing; Welcoming Streets; a supported recovery room; addiction court support worker program; and system and service improvements.

Participants met at in small groups to consider the priorities further using a work sheet that asked the following questions:

- **What is it?** What are the main parts of this project/idea? What are the deliverables that we expect to occur?
- **What should we consider?** What is relatively easy to deliver? What will be difficult? What similar experiences have we had with this project or another similar project/idea?
- **What do we need?** What are the main tasks involved in fulfilling this project/idea? What skills and resources do we bring? What or who do we need to bring in? What issues are known to us that will need to be resolved?
- **How can we do it?** If we take X months to implement this project/idea, what will need to happen the first month? 2nd? 3rd? What will need to happen in the 2nd quarter? 3rd? 4th? Is there anything missing that needs to be done? Who can do it?

After completing the worksheets, groups reported back to the entire Task Force.

Task Force members agreed that permanent supportive housing is the action that would have the greatest impact on the homelessness issue, but it is also the most expensive. With funding and partnerships, the group agreed it could be achieved in the medium- to long-term.

With funding, the supported recovery room could be achieved in the short term as long as a host building is found. Because a successful pilot project has already existed, partnerships and a work plan are in place and could be re-activated.

The Welcoming Streets and addiction court support worker programs could be implemented in short order. The Welcoming Streets program is already operating, and only requires funding to be extended past March 31. The addiction court support worker program ran in 2017; re-starting the program would require the hiring of one employee (a counsellor).

The timeline for completing various system and service improvements depends on the improvements chosen. For example, service providers could decide to modify their hours to provide service on weekends and evenings. The group also discussed the need for a low-barrier gathering place, where people experiencing homelessness could go at any time to warm up and access food and clothing.

Conclusions and next steps

The Task Force achieved consensus that the five priorities would have a positive impact on the homelessness issue, and could be achieved in the short to medium term.

The group agreed that the greatest barrier to achieving each of the five priorities is lack of funding. If funding is secured, work plans, staffing, and partnerships could be put in place relatively quickly.

Mayor Guthrie pledged to ask Guelph City Council to approve municipal funding for the priorities through the City's budget process; Council's budget meeting takes place March 5th. He also pledged to meet with other levels of government and funding agencies to advocate for funding.

"This is an issue that has to be solved. We cannot be a community if we're leaving people behind...No longer can I say 'it's their problem, it's the provincial government's problem or it's the federal government's problem' and a year goes by and another year goes by and another year goes by and the same people aren't getting help. We must step up."

- Mayor Cam Guthrie, State of the City, February 7, 2019

Appendix A
Mayor’s Task Force on Homelessness and Community Safety
Membership List



| Name | Organization |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Adrienne Crowder | Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy |
| Alex Goss | City of Guelph |
| Anthea Millikin | Legal Clinic of Guelph and Wellington County |
| Barbara Swartzentruber | City of Guelph |
| Brendan Johnson | Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition |
| Bruce Lauckner | Local Health Integration Network Waterloo-Wellington |
| Chief Jeff DeRuyter | Guelph Police Service |
| Chief Stephen Dewar | City of Guelph - EMS |
| Colleen Clack | City of Guelph |
| Councillor Cathy Downer | Guelph City Council |
| Debbie Bentley Lauzon | Wyndham House |
| Dominica McPherson | Poverty Elimination Task Force |
| Dr. Nicola Mercer | Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health |
| Eddie Alton | County of Wellington |
| Gail Hoekstra | Welcome In Drop In Centre |
| Heidi Letham | Homewood Health Centre |
| Helen Fishburn | Canadian Mental Health Association |
| Inspector Scott Lawson | Wellington County OPP |
| Jaya James | Hope House |
| Karen Armstrong | Mount Forest Family Health Team |
| Kerry Manthenga | Stonehenge Therapeutic Community |
| Kithio Mwanzia | Guelph Chamber of Commerce |
| Marianne Walker | Guelph General Hospital |
| Mayor Cam Guthrie | City of Guelph |
| MP Lloyd Longfield | Member of Parliament |
| MPP Mike Schreiner | Member of Provincial Parliament |
| Raechelle Devereaux | Guelph Community Health Centre |
| Ryan Pettipiere | County of Wellington |
| Sarah Haanstra | Toward Common Ground |
| Scott Wilson | County of Wellington |
| Shakiba Shayani | United Way |
| Sheila Markle | Family and Children's Services Guelph Wellington |
| Stuart Beumer | County of Wellington |
| Tina Brophey | Peer, Poverty Elimination Task Force |
| Warden Kelly Linton | County of Wellington |
| Wendy Noll | Peer |

Appendix B

Links to background documents

[What we know about the Need for Crisis Stabilization in Guelph](#)

[Safer Substance Use in Guelph handout](#)

[Supported Recovery Room – Final Evaluation Report](#)

[Addiction Court Support: Evaluation Report](#)

[2018 Guelph Wellington Point in Time Count](#)