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Item No. 15.1.7
Halifax Regional Council
November 18, 2025

TO: Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council
FROM: Brad Anguish, Acting Chief Administrative Officer
DATE: November 18, 2025
SUBJECT: Updated Framework to Address Homelessness in HRM, 2026-28

ORIGIN

March 15, 2023, Halifax Regional Council Motion

MOVED by Councillor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to explore on behalf of the municipality, bilateral or multilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), to support homeless and precariously housed individuals and increase housing supply; and
2. Direct the CAO to return to Council with a MOU-negotiation-report outlining the nature of the proposed collaboration, what the parties hope to achieve, and how desired results are to be reached.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

And

May 3, 2022, Halifax Regional Council Motion

MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Stoddard

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

7. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a staff report on negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Province of Nova Scotia on supporting Unsheltered Residents of HRM. The report should include defining the roles of each order. of government and specific actions to support and prevent homelessness within the HRM.

MOTION AS AMENDED PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past several years, HRM has faced a growing homelessness and housing crisis. Based on the 2024 Point in Time count, homelessness has grown by 92% since 2022 and by over 400% since 2018. At one point during this period, over 200 people were sleeping rough in municipal parks and event spaces, and no shelter or temporary housing beds were available. Unfortunately, the number of people experiencing homelessness is expected to continue to grow in the coming years.

While the number of people experiencing homelessness has been increasing, the number of people sleeping rough in the HRM has dropped by 50%, to approximately 100 people. This is mainly through the commitment of the Province of Nova Scotia to open more beds for sheltering and temporary housing. As of September 9, 2025, there are more than 81 beds available between shelters and temporary housing options.

With ongoing vacancies in the shelter and temporary housing system, the situation in HRM has changed dramatically from when the initial Framework to Address Homelessness in HRM was approved by Regional Council in 2023. Therefore, HRM staff are recommending updates to *The Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality (2023)*, including the strategic actions referenced in this report.

Summary of Strategic Actions

In summary, the strategic actions recommended for approval in this report include: close all designated encampment locations in HRM within 18-24 months; continue collaboration with the Nova Scotia Department of Opportunities and Social Development (OSD) through a shared Statement of Commitment; change the focus of our homelessness outreach and compliance team from emergency and survival support to an assertive housing outreach focus, including use of the By-Name List and the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and bringing complex individual cases forward for existing case management processes; continue collaboration to support the Planning and Development Business Unit's efforts related to affordable and deeply affordable housing; implement new designated encampment policies and procedures to increase safety and security for residents within, and those neighbouring, designated encampments; adopt a project management approach to this new strategy that is data-informed and includes a detailed project plan that allows for tracking, monitoring and reporting on our project's actions, timelines, deliverables, interdependences, risks and achievements; and integrate best practices associated with the Functional Zero Homelessness approach.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council approve the updated Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and the related strategic actions, both as set forth in the Discussion section of this report.

BACKGROUND

Collaboration with the Nova Scotia Department of Opportunities and Social Development (OSD)

While delivery of shelter, housing and social services are primarily provincial responsibilities, individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in our community are fellow citizens of the HRM and sheltering in HRM parks and green spaces—and in places both private and public. Actions to address homelessness must incorporate both provincial and municipal approaches. Our new shared Statement of Commitment with the Nova Scotia Department of OSD is now in the final stages of approval and will help further our productive collaboration by clarifying our specific roles and responsibilities and better defining how we will work together to respond to homelessness in the HRM.

The Role of the HRM Homelessness Team

Over the years since our framework was first endorsed in 2023, HRM's Homelessness team has been supporting citizens who are living rough and responding to the needs of neighbourhoods impacted by those living rough. The team, made up of outreach and compliance staff, intervenes when individuals present in the community in need of connection to services and support, when they shelter in inappropriate locations, contribute to safety or public health concerns, struggle to find indoor shelter or housing, require transportation, or need assistance with storing belongings while awaiting housing and/or shelter. Our team supports individuals living rough not only in designated locations but everywhere in the city, with the goal of connecting people to needed services. Finally, our team repairs damage and cleans sites throughout the region where garbage and unclaimed belongings have accumulated. Many of these activities are not ones that fall under the mandate of provincial agencies or provincially funded service providers and will continue to be needed for the foreseeable future.

As the need for HRM designated encampments decreases and indoor options increase, our outreach and compliance team will need to remain alert, active in the community, and even more responsive in identifying and intervening with individuals newly establishing in tents and living rough. The goal will be to intervene quickly, connect individuals with other available options and services, and prevent encampments from becoming established.

The Impact of Encampments on Well-Being and Safety

The negative impacts of unhoused individuals living rough are many and include declining physical and mental health, increased risk of problematic substance use, social isolation, loss of employment and employability, and loss of access to income support programs and other needed social services, including access to housing programs.

Encampments also negatively impact their neighbours. Long-term sheltering on municipal green spaces and parks reduces opportunities for sport and fitness, community connection and recreation. It also increases maintenance, restoration and security costs for parks. The impact of encampments on their neighbours have included increased trespassing, vandalism, theft, crime, and exposure to public health and safety risks. Some of the individuals living in encampments struggle with substance use concerns, and increased open substance use, and the detritus from such use, in public spaces in and near encampments, has created additional safety concerns for residents.

Right to Shelter on Municipal Land

Throughout the homelessness crisis, there has been considerable debate concerning where people can stay when they are unable to utilize an existing shelter or temporary housing options. Recent legal precedents in Canada in relation to municipal land suggest that if someone has no other option, they have the right to shelter there. However, these rulings do not give people the right to shelter anywhere they choose on public lands, at any time. These precedents also do not suggest there is a right to continue sleeping rough on municipal land when appropriate shelter or housing options are available.

Current Approach to Homelessness

Starting in 2022, HRM adopted a survival-based and civilian-led approach to addressing homelessness centering on the presence of designated encampments. During this time, with no options available for those sleeping rough to move inside, the municipality's focus was on helping people survive and remain safe while living outside.

Having designated spaces for encampments, during a time when indoor shelter spaces were non-existent or severely limited, had some advantages. Designated encampments allowed support efforts to be

coordinated better, allowing our outreach team to build rapport and trust—and thereby better connect people with needed services. Designated encampments also allowed for a higher level of support to be provided, including the delivery of potable water and access to portable toilets, thereby reducing some of the negative public health risks associated with living rough. In addition, designating spaces for encampments was viewed as preferable to undesignated encampments, with tents spread out over many areas and constantly moving around. Based on ongoing encampment counts, 65-70% of those sleeping rough in HRM have used designated locations.

The new approach set out in the 2023 framework also included a defined process to close encampments. The encampment closure procedure endorsed by council and HRM has successfully been used to peacefully close the encampments at Meagher Park, Grand Parade, Victoria Park, University Avenue, Geary Street, the former Correctional Ball Field in Sackville and others. HRM will continue to use this process to close any future encampments.

The past year has brought significant changes to the homelessness landscape in the HRM. These changes warrant updates to our current framework, which are outlined in our strategic actions (below).

DISCUSSION

Functional Zero: Managing Homelessness so that it is Rare, Brief and Non-recurring

From a practical perspective, homelessness will never end in HRM or any other community. There will always be people who become homeless due to sudden and unique circumstances. Functional zero is a community-level milestone where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. It means that the system in place is able to respond quickly and effectively to prevent long-term or repeated homelessness.

Functional Zero relies heavily on the use of community data to monitor and inform a municipality's homelessness work. It is our goal, through the updates to our existing framework outlined in this report—and in collaboration with our partners—to work toward Functional Zero for the HRM, embracing a data-informed approach to our homelessness work.

Phasing Out Encampments and Carefully Monitoring the Impacts of Closures

With changes in the availability of shelters, temporary housing, and increasing opportunities for permanent housing, HRM needs to change its focus from helping people survive in tents to empowering them to transition into indoor shelter and temporary and permanent housing.

Over the coming 18-24 months, the closure of designated encampments will be phased over a reasonable period to allow the outreach team to work with each individual to ensure appropriate indoor options are available that match the person's specific needs. Close monitoring of the impact of closures on other sites (designated and undesignated) will be an ongoing part of our work. Taking a measured, carefully phased, and person-centred approach to closures will ensure that encampment closures do not lead to significant increases in undesignated encampments. HRM's designated encampment closures will take place using our existing, well-established process, which has worked well in recent years.

Advance Planning for Seasonal Variations and Implementation of Encampment Management Processes

Encampment numbers naturally decline by about 50% in the colder winter months, based on our own HRM data from recent years. In the spring, numbers of those living rough have tended to grow considerably. For this reason, HRM's homelessness team will develop specific plans to address seasonal variations and actively monitor community locations when the warmer weather arrives to ensure that those living rough are quickly connected to indoor shelter and temporary housing options.

HRM's Homelessness Team will also implement a variety of encampment management processes and procedures to ensure constant flow from encampment to indoor shelter and housing options. For instance, HRM will ensure that each person sheltering at designated sites is registered and connected to an outreach worker. Numbers of campers and size of sites will be controlled and maintained and other safety concerns better managed. This will ensure ongoing flow out of encampments to shelters and housing options, allowing the remaining spots at designated encampments to be available for those who need them as a short-term, emergency solution.

Integration with Provincially Endorsed Homelessness Information System

To be successful in matching individuals living rough to appropriate shelter and temporary housing opportunities, HRM staff will participate in the By-Name List and the Homeless Individual and Families Information System (HIFIS). HRM outreach efforts are now, for the first time ever, fully integrated with these systems. Developed by the Government of Canada, HIFIS is a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) that is designed to support the day-to-day operational activities of Canadian homelessness service providers. As a comprehensive data collection and case management system, HIFIS enables participating service providers within the same community to access, collect, and share local real-time homelessness data to ensure individuals and families accessing services are prioritized and referred to appropriate services at the correct time.

Using provincially approved information systems enables HRM outreach staff and service providers to collaborate more closely, know where vacancies exist and who matches the vacancies, and facilitates suitable referrals--ensures that a housing opportunity matches a client's needs. This data will support also support decision-making by identifying gaps and barriers, that can be shared with our partners and the province.

Planning and Development Affordable Housing Programs

HRM's Planning & Development department is primarily responsible for the municipality's affordable housing initiatives. The most important aspect of preventing homelessness and reducing the need for encampments is to rapidly increase affordable and deeply affordable housing.

In 2025-2026, HRM, through the support of the Housing Accelerator Fund, is engaging on the development of a Housing Strategy to improve the effectiveness of programs in relation to identified housing needs and the actions of other orders of government. HRM's Homelessness team will continue to collaborate closely with Planning & Development as they advance the Housing Strategy.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR 2026-28

The goal of the Municipality remains that every resident of the Halifax Regional Municipality has a safe, supportive, and sustainable home. We continue to support a Housing First approach and principles, while acknowledging that temporary housing options are necessary during a housing crisis of the scope the HRM is currently experiencing.

The general updates to the Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality that have been outlined above will span the years 2026-28. These general updates have been distilled into following strategic actions that will be undertaken by the HRM Homelessness Team:

1. Close all designated encampment locations in HRM within 18-24 months (starting from the time of adoption of this report) using a measured, person-centred and phased approach within a reasonable period to ensure closures do not lead to proliferation of undesignated encampments.
2. During the period before all designated encampments are closed, implement new designated encampment policies and procedures to increase safety and security for residents within, and those neighbouring, designated encampments. Use a designated encampment registration process to

ensure flow out of encampments to indoor shelter and housing options, allowing space for those newly unhoused to shelter for a short time in emergency situations.

3. Continue to collaborate with the Nova Scotia Department of Opportunities and Social Development through the signing of our shared Statement of Commitment to guide our collaboration.
4. Change the focus of HRM homelessness outreach and compliance work from emergency and survival support to an assertive housing outreach and compliance focus that prioritizes connecting individuals living rough to available indoor shelter and temporary housing options.
5. Collaborate with our partners on policies and strategies that continue to reduce the number of people becoming homeless without temporary shelter in place and those returning to living rough after they have moved into a shelter or housing option.
6. Continue to collaborate and support the Planning and Development Business Unit's efforts to facilitate the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing.
7. For any individuals not able to be matched to existing shelter and temporary housing options, HRM's role will be to escalate these complex cases to existing case management tables and/or the HRM-OSD partnership table for appropriate solutions.
8. Adopt a data-informed, project management approach to our homelessness work that includes a detailed project plan that allows for tracking, monitoring and reporting on our project's actions, timelines, deliverables, interdependences, risks and achievements. Integrate best practices associated with Functional Zero Homelessness approach.

CONCLUSION

The landscape of homelessness in the HRM has changed and so, too, must our approach to working with individuals experiencing homelessness. The changes to our current framework as outlined in this report and the strategic actions noted above will guide our HRM Homelessness team to respond to the changing landscape of homelessness in the HRM, more effectively connecting individuals with indoor shelter and other needed services, while also addressing ongoing community safety concerns.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for the 2025/26 fiscal year. If the current updates to the framework are approved, existing financial and/or staffing resources will be redirected to support its implementation. At this time, no financial implications have been identified for future fiscal years. Should new funding requirements arise, a report will be brought back to Council for consideration and approval.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are a number of factors that could increase pressure on the municipality within the homelessness crisis. The loss of existing shelters or temporary housing spaces could once again result in ratios of people living rough exceeding indoor options. Additionally, the mass loss of existing affordable housing stock could impact the demand and need for housing for lower income individuals and families, causing an influx to rough living. HRM will closely monitor risks, identify them quickly, and collaborate with our partners to respond to and mitigate any such risks.

Without designated encampments, undesignated camping could increase. However, phasing out encampments slowly over a period of time will mitigate this risk. Also, the changes outlined above in outreach and compliance approaches focusing on connecting individuals quickly to indoor shelter will apply to all individuals living in tents, including those in undesignated locations, thereby helping to further mitigate these risks.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Since 2022, staff have engaged in multiple community consultations with various interested parties, including people with lived and living expertise in homelessness, the Business Improvement Districts, local community groups, the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, the Province of Nova Scotia, and various service providers. HRM will continue these many collaborations during the coming years.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council could choose to:

1. Not approve the proposed strategic actions and continue the current approaches in addressing homelessness, including maintaining designated locations.

This alternative is not supported by staff, given that indoor shelter and temporary housing are better for the health and well-being of individuals and communities, and there is no longer the need for designated encampments.

2. Direct the Acting CAO to develop an alternative approach to addressing homelessness.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

...

(b) provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and

(c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities

Halifax Regional Municipality By-law P-600 Respecting Municipal Parks

Camping

8. (1) Camping is prohibited in a park unless otherwise posted or by permission.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: The Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality (2023)

Report Prepared by: Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homelessness, Community Safety: 902 456 7420
Rachel Boehm, Executive Director, Community Safety: 902-943-9904

A Framework to Address Homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality

Prepared by:

Name: Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homelessness

Department Name: Parks and Recreation

Date: February 2023

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Section 1: Executive Summary

The Halifax Regional Municipality is in an affordable housing and homelessness crisis. Since 2018 the number of people who are recorded as homeless has more than doubled. As of January 19, 2023, there are 790 experiencing homelessness in locations across the municipality. The number of people forced to shelter outside, many in municipal parks, some in other locations or sleeping in their vehicle, has increased 500 per cent, from 18 in 2019 to 108 today.

The rise in homelessness is driven by a number of factors, the largest being the lack of affordable, stable and supportive housing. The vacancy rate in the municipality is less than 1 per cent and as low as 0.2 per cent in some communities driving rental costs higher. The rising cost of living also impacts the housing crisis as people can not afford a place to live. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) reported in January 2023 that over the past year rent has increased 8.9 per cent. This is four times the average historical growth rate. More than 12 per cent of the residents in the municipality are in core housing need. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defines core housing need as households that spend more than 30% of their income on shelter. Those that spend 50% or more on shelter are in severe housing need.

While the provision of housing, social supports, and health care are responsibilities of the Province of Nova Scotia, with up to 110 people currently sheltering outside, most in municipal parks, the municipality has a stake in the state of homelessness and lack of affordable housing. Some of the municipality's most vulnerable citizens have no choice but to sleep outside in tents. They do not have enough food, supplies, or access to critical care. They are stigmatized, faced with increased risk of violence, and little hope. The challenge facing the municipality is what can it do to help and how does it support other orders of government and the many community service providers supporting those experiencing homelessness. This framework identifies those things the municipality is uniquely positioned to do and gaps that it can fill in order not to duplicate the efforts of others. There are four key roles the municipality can undertake to help address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis. These roles are:

1. Supporting residents sheltering outside
2. Supporting precariously housed persons and families to stay housed
3. Supporting public education efforts
4. Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

In partnership with other orders of government and the community the municipality can help those citizens experiencing homelessness and change their circumstances. This framework provides a road map of activities the municipality should consider pursuing.

Section 2: Background

Affordable Housing and Homelessness

There is an affordable housing and homelessness crisis in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The municipality has recently recorded the largest number of people needing housing and the most people sheltering outside in its history, other than after the Halifax Explosion in 1917.

Based on a count of people sheltering outside completed by a team of service providers in November 2022¹, at least 85 people are sleeping outside, the majority in tents pitched in the municipality's parks. Local service providers' estimates suggest that this number could be as high as 110 as they could not connect with all the residents they know are sleeping outside. This is a 44 per cent increase in the number of people sheltering outside from the Spring 2022 Point in Time Count².

The following table shows the numbers from the 2018³ and 2022 Point in Time Counts.

	2018 ⁴	2022 ^{4 5}	% Growth
Number of people experiencing homelessness	220	586	166%
Number of youths experiencing homelessness	44	64	45%
Number of adults experiencing homelessness	158	439	178%
Number of seniors experiencing homelessness	18	76	322%
Number of people sleeping outside ⁶	18	108	500%

It is important to note that everyone experiencing homelessness is not sleeping outside. Some are in shelters, some in precarious housing situations, and some in vehicles. Additionally, people experiencing homeless are not a homogenous group. Each person has their own strengths and story, opportunities for support and practical needs. One size will not fit all when it comes to meeting service needs. It is recognized that each person sheltering outside benefits from an individualized, person-centred plan of supports dedicated to assisting them to move from sheltering outside to safe and appropriate alternatives. However, the exploration of these options happens with people, not to people or for people. Culture, gender and history of each individual must be considered in the process of providing such alternatives. People should be empowered to make decisions on appropriate alternatives but cannot be forced to take alternatives to sheltering outside in a designated or other suitable location.⁷

¹ [Nov 22 Navigator Survey.pdf \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](#)

² [2022 Point-in-time count \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](#)

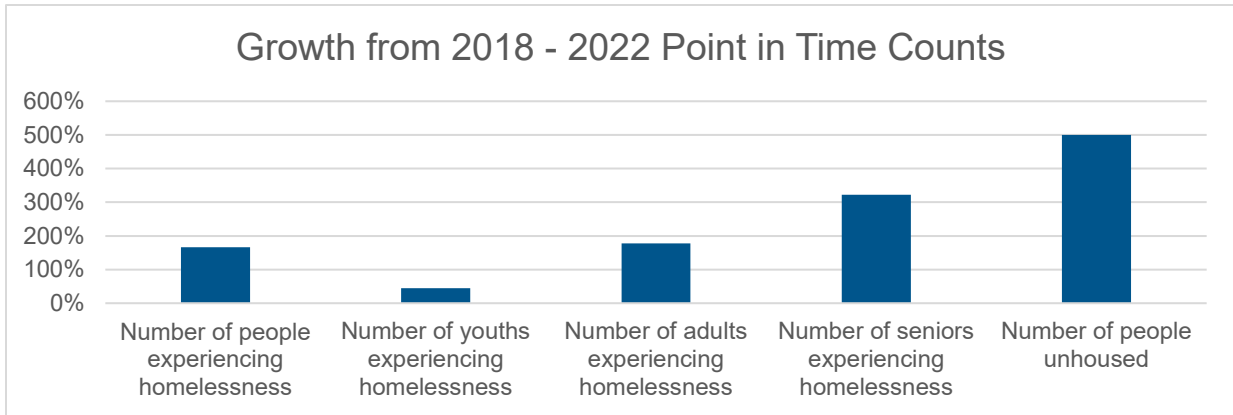
³ [2018+Halifax+Point+in+Time+Count+Report.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](#)

⁴ Numbers based on the percentages reported in the Point In Time Count

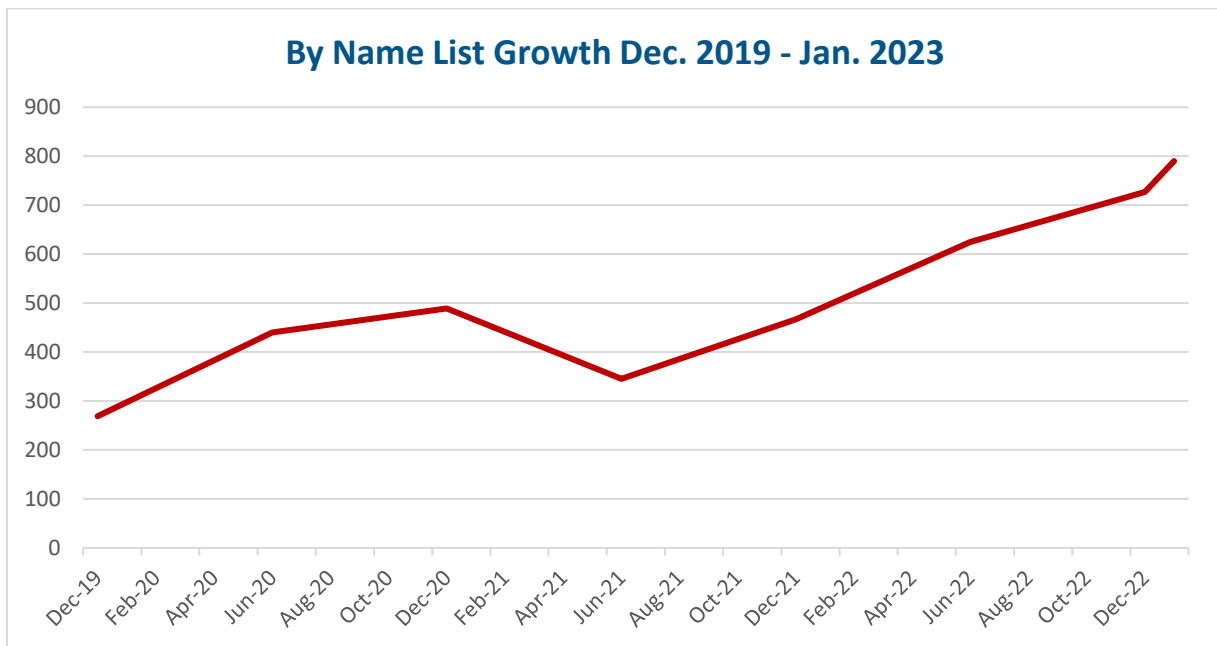
⁵ Some persons surveyed declined to answer this question

⁶ Number of people sleeping outside is included in the number of people experiencing homelessness

⁷ There may be instances where the municipality will require someone to relocate based on their personal circumstances or other concerns that may make a location unsuitable.



As of January 3, 2023, there are 769 people on the By Name list⁸, a list of people experiencing homelessness maintained by the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia. In two weeks, that number grew to 790 on January 17, 2023. This is an increase of 63 people since December 2022. The By Name list grew by 55 per cent between December 2022 and 2021 and 170 per cent since December 2019. Even with significant investments in support from all three orders of government, the number of people in need of housing is growing faster than options are being created.



The Cost of Housing

According to CMHC data⁹, the vacancy rate for apartments in the Halifax Regional Municipality dropped as low as 1 per cent in 2022, the lowest it has been in 30 years. In some areas of the municipality, such as North Dartmouth where more relatively affordable housing is often found, the vacancy rate is as low at

⁸ [AHANS | HRM Homelessness Statistics](#)

⁹ [Rental Market Report | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](#)

0.2 per cent.

Average rents in 2022¹⁰ were:

Type of apartment	Average rent
Bachelor	\$990
One-bedroom	\$1,157
Two-bedroom	\$1,449
Three-bedroom	\$1,690

Average rents show an 8.9 per cent increase between January 2022 and 2023. The increase from 2020 to 2021 was 5.1 per cent. Based on the 2022 CMHC data the average rent in some areas of the municipality was as high as \$1,396 for a one-bedroom and \$1,897 for a two-bedroom apartment. Rental.ca reported in October 2022 the average rental cost for available apartments in some parts of the municipality was \$2,453¹¹.

Statistics Canada defines someone in core housing need¹² if a household spends 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter, living in a home needing major repairs, or living in unsuitable housing. If one or more of these criteria are met, and the household would not be able to find affordable, suitable, or adequate housing in their area, they are in core housing need. Based on the 2021 Census¹³, the average core housing need in HRM was 12.2 per cent. Within the municipality, the highest level of core housing need is in North Dartmouth at 30.4 per cent, and the lowest rate of core housing need is in Cole Harbour at 1.7 per cent.

Not only did the costs of apartments rise but the price of other goods and services has increased as well. Based on the Consumer Price Index¹⁴, inflation in Nova Scotia peaked in 2022 at 9.3 per cent. Current economic predictions suggest that financial pressures will continue into 2023. There continues to be high demand for rental housing, which is expected to keep prices high. In a statement released in October 2022¹⁵, the Royal Bank of Canada also stated: "In previous work, we projected a moderate recession for Canada's economy in 2023. We now believe this downturn will arrive as early as the first quarter of next year. Higher prices and interest rates will shave \$3,000 off the average household's purchasing power, weighing on goods purchases". These trends, and the number of people already in core housing need, suggest that more people will be forced into homelessness in the foreseeable future.

The End of the Provincial Rent Cap¹⁶

In Nova Scotia, amid housing affordability concerns exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a greater emphasis was placed on the role of rent control in addressing housing affordability issues. Several factors are influencing the rental market, such as rental construction, employment, migration, owning vs. renting, and secondary rental markets like Airbnb. While housing affordability was a growing issue prior to COVID-19, the rental market was further complicated by uncertainty caused by the pandemic. To help mitigate the impacts caused by COVID-19, the Province of Nova Scotia announced immediate protections ordered

¹⁰ [Rental Market Survey Data Tables | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](#)

¹¹ [Rentals.ca October 2022 Rent Report](#)

¹² [Core housing need of private household \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

¹³ Statistics Canada, 2021 Census – Indigenous people & Housing, released 2022-09-21

¹⁴ [Nova Scotia Department of Finance - Statistics](#)

¹⁵ [Canada's recession to arrive earlier than expected \(rbc.com\)](#)

¹⁶ [Residential Tenancies Program: legislative changes - Government of Nova Scotia](#)

under the Emergency Management Act:

- Rents cannot increase by more than two per cent per year for existing tenants
- Landlords will not be able to get an eviction order for renovations

In October 2021, the government extended these protections until December 31, 2023.

According to 2021 Canadian census data, 43 per cent of households were renting. Of those living in Halifax, those living downtown had the highest rates of unaffordable housing at 54.3 per cent. However, high rates were also found in all of the Regional Centre, as well as in neighboring communities. If rent control is removed at the end of 2023, and supply remains low, Halifax is likely to face an increase in housing insecurity, especially for those already living in unaffordable housing in the regional centre.

Significantly rising costs have also affected the viability of the landlord, especially the small landlord, charging relatively modest rents. With costs driven by inflation and other factors and a cap on rent, some of these owners have been left with no option but to sell their units, in many cases, resulting in the loss of affordable housing. For most property owners, once the rent cap is lifted, it stands to reason they will raise rents to begin addressing the dramatic rise in operating costs that they have not fully recovered for three years.

Housing is a Provincial Responsibility

Social housing and shelter are provincial responsibilities. Between 1995 and 1996, a service exchange process transferred various roles and responsibilities between municipalities and the Province of Nova Scotia. The province assumed responsibility for social services, including affordable housing and child welfare, nursing homes, and homes for the elderly. Municipalities, in turn, were required to contribute financially to the province towards education, social housing, and corrections. With this transition, municipalities no longer had resources assigned to or a direct role in the services related to social housing and homelessness.

At the core of our community's homelessness crisis are issues such as the lack of affordable and supportive housing stock and wrap-around services: provincial responsibilities to address.

Sector Capacity

The housing and homelessness sector is made up of over 30 different service providers or advocacy groups and all orders of government. Many of these service providers are contracted by the province to offer shelter services, housing, and community outreach. Considering the support of ancillary services to people experiencing homelessness, the number of service providers is over 100. The vast majority of these service providers are working at or beyond their capacity and have been doing so for a long time. In discussions with the service provider community, the majority of them have shared that their staff are tired and, in some cases, burned out, they are under resourced and unable to meet the needs of the community they serve, do not have the capacity to take on more work, and are, at times, forced to compete with each other for resources. As with most sectors they face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers. As the municipality hopes to see improvements in the response and support to the growing homeless population, the capacity of the sector is critical to any effort. The municipality, other orders of government, and service providers must look for opportunities to increase sector capacity.

More Market Value Housing Stock Will Not Address The Housing Crisis

Commercial builders and developers have a role in addressing the municipality's affordable housing and homelessness crisis. The solution to this crisis lies in creating housing stock including affordable options that are available to persons with low-income levels. Many in the community are looking for the commercial building and development sector, through the construction of more housing, to address all the

needs in the community. While this will increase the overall stock of housing, it will not provide all housing options, such as social and supportive housing.

At a recent Halifax Chamber of Commerce luncheon, a local developer underscored government's role in this, indicating that the commercial builder, developer, and property owner cannot financially build housing and make it available at deeply affordable rates. Considering the rapidly rising cost of real estate and construction, it is not feasible for the commercial market, without substantial support, to build, offer, and maintain deeply affordable housing.

Commercial builders and developers can build housing, but it must be provided to government or the not-for-profit community, supported by government, to manage and run without the burden of capital costs. Alternatively, if there is to be more affordable housing offered by the commercial building and development sector, substantially more capital and operating cost support must be provided to the commercial builder, developer, and property owners.

Municipal actions to address the affordable housing and homelessness

The municipality continues to take a number of steps to help encourage the development of affordable housing. Highlights of some recent steps taken to date include:

- Adoption of Administrative Order 2020-008 – ADM, Respecting Grants for Affordable Housing, to facilitate grants for affordable housing
- Adoption of amendments to bylaw M-201, Respecting Standards for Residential Occupancies, to require registration of residential rental accommodations
- Policy and bylaw amendments to waive municipal-related construction fees for non-profit housing developments
- Amendments to Administrative Order 50, Respecting the Disposal of Surplus Real Property, to create a surplus land category for properties for affordable housing purposes
- Amendments to AO 2014-001-ADM, Respecting Tax Relief To Non-Profit Organizations, were made in 2020 (effective April 1, 2021) to provide streamlined and predictable property tax relief for registered charitable or non-profit groups
- Less-than-market value sale of surplus municipal properties to facilitate the development of affordable housing projects
- Removal of land use planning barriers to housing that is considered more affordable such as secondary and backyard suites, shared housing, tiny homes and mobile homes

In 2021 and 2022, the municipality has committed significant resources to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. These efforts include:

- Constructing two modular housing sites, one in Halifax and one in Dartmouth, providing shelter for 64 individuals
- Providing additional support for street navigators and outreach workers
- Designation of locations where camping is permitted in parks within the municipality, along with supports such as water delivery, portable toilets, and garbage collection
- Provision of survival supplies such as tents, sleeping bags, insulated tarps, food, health, and personal care products to persons who have become homeless
- Support for a 24-hour emergency all gender shelter in peninsular Halifax
- Support for the operation of emergency shelter space during extreme weather events

Conclusion

The affordable housing and homelessness crisis in the municipality continues to grow. Without significant changes in the current approach to housing, the number of people experiencing homelessness in the

near future could grow significantly. While the province and service providers continue to work to create more affordable and deeply affordable housing, the municipality will continue to face a significant number of residents forced to sleep outside. As such, the municipality needs to continue efforts to support suitable housing development and support those residents who have no other option than to pitch a tent in a park or other piece of land. The municipality also must consider how it will respond to a situation where hundreds could be homeless on its streets in the next 18 months if the rental cap is removed.

This framework outlines a recommended approach for the municipality to take to help address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in the community with a focus on those areas where the municipality is uniquely positioned to do and gaps that it can fill in order not to duplicate the efforts of others.

Section 3: Framework

3.1: Vision

That every resident of the Halifax Regional Municipality has a safe, supportive, and sustainable home and that all homes are purposely constructed for long-term human habitation, built to safety codes and standards, and in a suitable location based on access to transportation and amenities and municipal planning strategies.

3.2: Municipality's Role

The Province of Nova Scotia holds the formal responsibilities for social services, health care, and housing. People experiencing homelessness who are unable or unwilling to go to a shelter or other available emergency or transitional housing option are left with no choice but to shelter outside. Many of these residents end up sheltering in a municipal park, on a right of way or other empty space, or private property. For this reason, and a humanitarian commitment to try and help those marginalized in our community, the municipality has a role to play in supporting residents who are experiencing homelessness.:

The municipality supports people sheltering outside while they wait for suitable housing to be available. The municipality focuses on four key roles.

1. Supporting residents sheltering outside
2. Supporting precariously housed persons and families to stay housed
3. Supporting public education efforts
4. Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

3.3. Principles

The following principles are used to guide this work. These principles continue to evolve as the municipality's understanding of the needs of the community changes, as more is learned from persons with lived experience in the community and incorporate emerging best and promising practices into this work.

1. HUMAN RIGHT
The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes adequate housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living.¹⁷
2. PARTICIPATION:
The persons whose decisions and actions will impact must be involved in developing policies and work plans. We support the mantra of "Nothing About Us Without Us."¹⁸
3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW
The municipality administers and enforces the laws, regulations, and bylaws enacted by Regional Council, the Province of Nova Scotia, and the Government of Canada. This includes building, general safety, and fire codes. The municipality expects all its partners and citizens to comply with the law.
4. PERSON-CENTERED

¹⁷ [FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

¹⁸ [Nothing about us without us - Wikipedia](#)

Ensure that people's preferences, needs, and values guide clinical decisions, providing care and support that is respectful of and responsive to them. It is important to remember people who shelter outside have strengths, and those must be recognized, respected, and leveraged.

5. HOUSING FIRST

A *Housing First* approach¹⁹ focuses on moving people experiencing homelessness quickly from a shelter or sleeping rough to safe, sustainable, and supportive housing. Stable housing is essential to deliver services successfully and supports to persons experiencing homelessness.

6. RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship building, learning, education, and voluntary compliance are always preferred over involuntary compliance action.

7. TRANSPARENCY

Transparency and ongoing communication are essential for the development of trust. Strong, productive relationships between all levels of government, service providers, and the community cannot exist without trust and transparency.

8. COOPERATION

Housing and homelessness are complex problems²⁰, with no order of government nor single community agency able to solve them independently. The municipality is committed to working in close partnership with others to reduce homelessness and increase the availability of affordable and deeply affordable housing.

Whenever possible, the municipality should avoid duplicating the work of service providers and other levels of government and instead support them in their efforts to serve all residents better.

9. CIVILIAN LED RESPONSE

Responses to homelessness issues should, whenever possible, be led by a coalition of Street Navigators, service providers, and health professionals. Halifax Regional Police (HRP) or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) primarily focus on the prevention and resolution of crime and will be involved when / as required.

10. TRAUMA-INFORMED

Trauma is often closely tied to substance use, mental illness, stigma, healthcare access barriers, and other challenges. Trauma-informed practice means recognizing this link and ensuring that people feel safe and are not re-traumatized by their current experiences.

¹⁹ [Housing First | The Homeless Hub](#)

²⁰ [The Critical Difference Between Complex and Complicated \(mit.edu\)](#)

Section 4: Strategic Priorities

Section 4.1: Supporting residents sheltering outside

A count of the number of people sleeping outside was completed in November 2022 by street navigators and outreach workers. During this count, researchers were able to connect with 85 people sleeping outside. They know of others they could not speak with during this count and estimate the total number of people sleeping outside to be at least 110 individuals. This is a dramatic increase from 18 people identified in the 2018 Point In Time Count. Even over the past few months, between the Point In Time Count completed in April 2022 and the count in November 2022, there has been more than a 44 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping outside.

All of these counts show that there is also a much higher rate of homelessness within some of the marginalized populations in the municipality than in the general population. For example, in the 2022 Point In Time Count, 22 per cent of people self-identified as First Nations, Metis, Inuit or of Indigenous ancestry. This compares to 4 per cent of the overall population of the Halifax region. Similarly, 15 per cent self identified as African Nova Scotia, Black, Caribbean, or of African descent compared to 3.8 per cent of the municipality's total population. The municipality, the province, and service providers must work together to develop strategies to address these and other inequities.

The Province of Nova Scotia is responsible for providing housing for persons experiencing homelessness. While the province works to build and acquire suitable housing stock, in the interim, these residents are left to access a temporary housing option, if available. Without a place to go, many residents are left with no other option but to shelter outside, with many locating in municipal parks. Residents sometimes shelter in other locations, such as adjacent to schools or daycares, in cemeteries, other vacant lands, on active sport fields, or in their vehicle.

Residents need supplies and support to survive outside while they wait for housing. Typical supports include everything from tents and sleeping bags to food and water to personal supplies and clothing.

Residents sheltering outside often do not disturb their neighbours and are active community members. There are times, however, when homeless encampments negatively impact the surrounding community. In addition to reporting homeless encampments themselves, garbage and waste are the most common complaints the municipality receives. Garbage and waste can lead to severe rodent and other pest issues. Instances of illegal activity and violence can also create difficult situations for the community.

The municipality will help to support individuals experiencing homelessness that have no option but to shelter outside.

Outcomes

- Improved quality of life and general health for those forced to shelter outside.
- A reduction in harmful behaviours committed against persons experiencing homelessness.
- A decrease in the negative impacts of people being forced to shelter outside.

Tactics

- 4.1.1 The municipality will update protocol for homeless encampments, including rapid response to high-priority areas such as near schools, playgrounds and cemeteries.
- 4.1.2 The municipality will continue to designate locations where people can camp in parks intended for people experiencing homelessness. The municipality will provide potable water, garbage collection, storage boxes, and toilet options at these sites. The municipality will also strive to find

options to offer power and running water at these sites. The municipality will continue to seek support from other orders of government to provide suitable additional spaces for residents needing to shelter outside and applicable services.

- 4.1.3 In addition to regular garbage collection at designated locations, the municipality will continue cleaning up abandoned items at encampment sites on municipal land
- 4.1.4 The municipality will continue create opportunities to increase the number of public bathrooms and sources of potable water available throughout the municipality.
- 4.1.5 The municipality will work with stakeholders to develop a civilian-led primary response team to respond to situations that occur in encampments or with persons experiencing homelessness in various community situations.
- 4.1.6 In support of the Province of Nova Scotia, the municipality will support the operation of emergency extreme weather shelters. Typical supports include planning, transportation, communication, and supplies.
- 4.1.7 In partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia and service providers, the municipality will champion the establishment of a daily drop-in centre for persons experiencing homelessness.
- 4.1.8 The municipality will continue to support the existing Street Navigator programs and work to expand navigator or outreach support on evenings and weekends, as well as in the more rural areas of the municipality.
- 4.1.9 The municipality will review the roles of municipal supported Street Navigators within the Business Improvement Districts and look for opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of outreach activities.
- 4.1.10 In partnership with others, the municipality will supply emergency supplies and support to persons experiencing homelessness and sheltering outside.
- 4.1.11 The municipality will explore opportunities to use multi-district recreation facilities, smaller facilities, and other municipally owned properties to provide increased services, such as showers, to support residents who are experiencing homelessness.
- 4.1.12 The municipality will support the province, private property owners and other stakeholders to identify sites where people sheltering in a vehicle can park, and in extreme weather, idle their car for prolonged periods of time to stay warm.
- 4.1.13 The municipality will consider supporting expanded use of safe, built-to-code shelters, and their placement in an appropriate location(s) conforming to municipality zoning.
- 4.1.14 As opportunities arise, or as replaced by “to-code” shelters, the municipality will remove the unsafe Tyvek small temporary shelters placed in the community by volunteers.
- 4.1.14 The municipality will support and learn from the expertise of those with lived experience. The information provided will inform and guide the development of policies and practices within the municipality. The municipality will share this research with other stakeholders where possible and appropriate.

- 4.1.15 The municipality will work with service providers and other stakeholders to support activities and policies that address the over-representation of various populations²¹ within those experiencing homelessness. These populations would include persons who are Indigenous (22 per cent vs 4 per cent in the overall population of the municipality), black (15 per cent versus 3.8 per cent), LGBTQ2S+ (15 per cent versus 4 per cent of the Canadian population²²), persons with a disability, and former children in care of the province. Additionally, policies and practices also need to be considered through a gender lens as there are specific challenges for women, transgender, and non-binary individuals who are precariously housed and unhoused.
- 4.1.16 The municipality will support the yearly Point in Time count and other quantitative research efforts to better understand the true number of individuals and households experiencing homelessness.
- 4.1.17 The municipality will work with stakeholders to develop an annual housing and homelessness report card.
- 4.1.18 Working with the Province of Nova Scotia and service providers, the municipality will help develop a response plan to a rapid increase (500 – 1000 people) in the number of people experiencing homelessness if the provincial rent cap is removed without other measures in place to ensure affordability.

²¹ [2022 Point-in-Time Count for Halifax Regional Municipality | DHBC \(downtownhalifax.ca\)](https://www.downtownhalifax.ca/2022-Point-in-Time-Count-for-Halifax-Regional-Municipality-DHBC)

²² [LGBTQ2+ community in Canada: A demographic snapshot \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-627-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm)

Section 4.2: Supporting precariously housed²³ persons and families to stay housed

The impact of being forced to shelter outside is dramatic. Deterioration in physical and mental health is well documented. Residents living outside suffer more violence than those living in suitable housing. The importance of ensuring that no one is forced to shelter outside is clear. While the obvious answer to address this problem is the creation of more housing, another priority needs to be, where possible, preventing someone from becoming homeless.

Efforts to prevent someone from becoming homeless are generally called diversion. Typical diversion activities include paying a damage deposit, paying rental or storage arrears, or completing minor repairs in someone's apartment. Several diversion efforts are underway by service providers and the Province of Nova Scotia.

Based on the principle of cooperation, the municipality does not have a unique role in this area and, therefore, will not launch its own diversion activities but rather support the existing efforts of other orders of government and service providers.

Outcomes

- A reduction in the number of new people experiencing homelessness and the number of chronically homeless.

Tactics

- 4.2.1 The municipality will participate in consultations and conversations around rent control, income, housing, homelessness, health care, and associated topics relating to residents at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.
- 4.2.2 The municipality will consider partnering with agencies and organizations providing diversion activities and support them where appropriate and possible. That support could include financial contributions or assistance from HRM staff. The municipality will specifically look to support unmet needs of the current diversion efforts that align with municipal interests.
- 4.2.3 The municipality will explore opportunities such as no net loss policies requiring the preservation of existing affordable housing stock.

²³ [COHhomelessdefinition.pdf \(homelesshub.ca\)](#)

Section 4.3: Supporting public education efforts

The impact of stigma on persons experiencing homelessness, and those that support them, is profound. Stigma leads to increased discrimination, isolation, vulnerability, and pressures on mental health. This places even more barriers in front of someone trying to find suitable and stable housing. A holistic approach to addressing homelessness must include addressing stigma and its impacts.

Many people in the community want to help persons experiencing homelessness. However, many don't know what to do and, in an attempt to do something, cause harm. For example, people leaving food at an encampment can lead to severe rodent infestation. The waste wood left for fires in some places is heavily treated with chemicals and is dangerous for individuals in and around encampments.

Public education efforts could take many forms, including social media, radio advertising, public service announcements, and bus or billboard signage. The municipality does not propose to take a leadership role in these efforts but acts as a partner and supports experts' work to address the community's public education needs.

As part of its approach to assisting people experiencing homelessness, the municipality, based on the principle of cooperation, will partner and support experts' work to educate the public about the issues and how they can help.

Outcomes

- A reduction in harmful behaviours committed against persons experiencing homelessness.
- An increase in appropriate community support for persons experiencing homelessness.
- A reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Tactics

- 4.3.1 The municipality will partner with service providers and the Province of Nova Scotia to support a public education campaign that addresses misconceptions about persons experiencing homelessness and provides practical steps someone can take who wishes to support those individuals.
- 4.3.2 The municipality will support and participate in community discussions that aim to understand and address the issues and impact of the homelessness crisis. The municipality believes that acting together, government and community, can have a much more significant impact than working in isolation.
- 4.3.3 The municipality will ensure people reaching out to the municipality with questions, suggestions, and complaints about homelessness are provided answers and information promptly.

Section 4.4: Facilitating the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing

The root of the current housing crisis is the lack of suitable housing stock. The long-term solution must include the construction of new housing stock, with suitable support to help people successfully stay housed, that can be made available to persons at a rent they can afford. The municipality has development and regulatory tools that it can use to support the goal of building new housing stock and maintaining existing affordable and deeply affordable stock.

The municipality is already active in this work through initiatives such as zoning changes that allow backyard and secondary suites. Efforts will continue to support the development of homes people can afford based on their income.

Outcomes

- An increase in the number of affordable and deeply affordable housing units available for rent in the municipality.
- A reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Tactics

- 4.4.1 The municipality will explore opportunities to provide surplus land to the not-for-profit sector.
- 4.4.2 The municipality will continue to participate in funding affordable housing projects through the Affordable Housing Grant Program and Community Grant Program and support programs offered by other levels of government, including accepting and distributing funds such as the Rapid Housing Initiative²⁴.
- 4.4.3 The municipality will continue to streamline zoning, bylaws, and permitting processes to support various forms of affordable housing.
- 4.4.4 The municipality continues to explore how to financially support the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing.
- 4.4.5 The municipality will explore and use tools to support the creation and retention of affordable housing through development approvals, such as but not limited to inclusionary zoning, density bonusing, and policies requiring no net loss of existing affordable housing.
- 4.4.6 The municipality will explore opportunities to incentivise the development of housing projects on vacant property.
- 4.4.7 The municipality will support the Province of Nova Scotia, other orders of government, and other service providers to support the launch of a tiny homes project.
- 4.4.8 The municipality will explore the role that a municipal housing corporation could play in addressing affordable housing needs.
- 4.4.9 The municipality will explore opportunities to allow the conversion of non-residential buildings to create new residential units.

²⁴ [Rapid Housing Initiative | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca)

Section 5: Performance Indicators

Indicators around the municipality's efforts to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing

1. The number of tents and other supplies provided to residents.
2. Support provided to emergency event shelters.
3. Ongoing feedback from persons with lived experience.
4. The number and diversity of individuals with lived experience expertise consulted.
5. Feedback generated through calls to 311. Tracking calls and service requests initiated, addressed, and closed out.
6. The number of visitors to the drop-in centre.
7. Participation in consultations and conversations around rent control, income, housing, homelessness, health care, and associated topics relating to residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
8. In-kind land provided or reduced or waived fees to support the construction and maintenance of affordable and deeply affordable housing.
9. Funds distributed by the municipality from federal or provincial initiatives to support people experiencing homelessness or build or maintain affordable and deeply affordable housing.
10. Permits issued for new units owned by the non-profit sector.
11. Number of housing units built with municipal support through funding or collaboration with other orders of government.

Indicators around collective efforts to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing within the municipality but not managed by the municipality

1. The volume of available and occupied units of affordable and deeply affordable housing in the municipality.
2. The number of people who experience homelessness and sheltering outside, measured through the Point in Time and other counts, including demographic data such as background and gender.
3. Growth of new persons experiencing homelessness and looking for housing as reported through registration on the By Name list or similar tool.
4. The number of individuals housed or sheltered by various initiatives within the municipality.
5. The number of people who engage with public education messages as tracked through website clicks or similar tools.

This data would be captured in a yearly homelessness and housing report card delivered to Regional Council. Annual report cards are an increasingly common tool through which municipalities are evaluating the impacts that interventions have on the experiences of unhoused individuals as well the demographic data that provides an intersectional understanding of who is experiencing homelessness. Historically there have been annual report cards on housing and homelessness in Halifax and by reinitiating this process staff will be able to provide regular updates to council and the public. While not all data points tracked within the report card are within the municipality's scope of influence, having a complete picture prepared on, at minimum, an annual basis will support evidence-based decision making for municipal interventions. We are currently conducting lived experience surveys and the proposed budget includes funding for this process to continue.