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HALIFAX

Updated Framework to Address Homelessness in HRM, 2026-28

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Homelessness Projections

- Homelessness in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has grown by 92% since 2022 and over 400% since 2018.
- At its peak, over 200 people were sleeping rough in parks and event spaces, with no shelter or temporary housing available.
- Homelessness is expected to continue to increase in the coming years.

A Changing Landscape

- The number of people sleeping rough has dropped by 50% to about 100, mainly due to the Province of Nova Scotia opening more shelter and temporary housing beds.
- Individuals living rough no longer outnumber the available indoor shelter and temporary housing options.
- There are a wider variety of shelter and temporary housing options available than ever before.

Framework Updates Needed

- The changing landscape of homelessness, with more shelter and temporary housing vacancies and fewer people living rough than several years ago, requires HRM to make updates to the 2023 Framework to Address Homelessness in HRM.

Current Approach to Homelessness

- Since 2023, the municipality's focus has been on helping people survive and remain safe while living outside.
- Designated encampments served a purpose as an emergency response when individuals living rough outnumbered available indoor options.
- The new approach set out in the 2023 framework also included a defined process to close encampments (which will continue even with the updates to the current framework).

The Role of the Homelessness Team

- Connects individuals experiencing homelessness/living rough in HRM with needed supports and services.
- Addresses ongoing public or community safety concerns related to encampments and/or individuals living rough.
- As designated encampments decrease, team will need to be even more responsive to individual and community needs: intervening quickly to prevent the need for encampments.

Functional Zero Homelessness

- A milestone where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.
- Systems are able to respond quickly and effectively to prevent long-term or repeated homelessness.
- Use of community data to monitor & inform homelessness work.
- With the updates to our existing framework outlined in this report—and in collaboration with our partners—HRM will work toward Functional Zero Homelessness.

The Need for Seasonal Planning

- Encampment numbers drop in winter but rise in spring.
- Seasonal variations require active monitoring and adaptive planning to meet people's varying needs in collaboration with partners.
- Our new approach will incorporate seasonal planning.

Proposed Strategic Actions (2026–28)

1. Phased Closure of Encampments

- All designated encampment locations in HRM will be closed within 18–24 months.
- Measured, carefully-phased and person-centered approach to ensure that encampment closures do not lead to significant increases in undesignated encampments.
- HRM’s designated encampment closures will continue to use our existing, civilian-led process, which has worked well in recent years.

2. New Encampment Policies & Procedures

- Implement new policies and procedures to increase safety and security for residents within, and those neighbouring, designated encampments.
- Use a designated encampment registration process to ensure ongoing 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. Provincial-Municipal Collaboration

- Actions to address homelessness must incorporate both provincial and municipal approaches.
- Our new shared Statement of Commitment with the Nova Scotia Department of Opportunities and Social Development is now in the final stages of approval.
- Will further our productive collaboration by clarifying our specific roles and responsibilities.
- Will more clearly define how we will work together to respond to homelessness in the HRM.

4. Homelessness Team Change in Focus

- Shift HRM outreach and compliance focus from emergency and survival support to assertive housing outreach.
- Prioritize connections to available shelter, temporary housing.
- Full integration with the Homeless Individual and Families Information System (HIFIS) and use of the By-Name List.
- Continue to support communities with related community safety concerns related to homelessness.

5. Prevention Strategies

- Using data-informed approach, 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. Collaboration with Planning & Development

- The most important intervention to reduce the need for encampments is to ensure sufficient availability of deeply affordable housing.
- Continue to collaborate with Planning & Development to facilitate increased availability of affordable and deeply affordable housing.

7. Escalation of Complex Cases

- For individuals not able to be matched to existing shelter and temporary housing options, escalate cases to case management or HRM-OSD partnership tables for solutions.

8. Project Management Approach

- Adopt a data-informed, project-management approach to HRM homelessness work with tracking, monitoring, and regular reporting on progress, deliverables, timelines, risks, and achievements.
- Integrate best practices from the Functional Zero Homelessness approach.

Questions