



PO Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

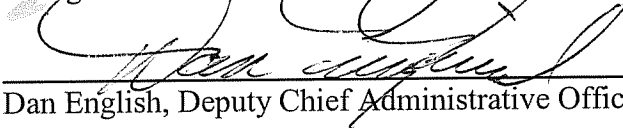
5.

**Halifax Regional Council  
Committee of the Whole  
February 10, 2004**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**

  
George McLellan, Chief Administrative Officer

  
Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** January 28, 2004

**SUBJECT:** Report on Homelessness in HRM - A Portrait of Streets and Shelters

---

**ORIGIN**

May 28, 2002 Motion of the Committee of the Whole that staff provide a report on a policy or strategy on affordable housing in Halifax Regional Municipality.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Table the *Homelessness in HRM - Portrait of Streets and Shelters*;
2. Table the Provincial and Federal government to support the development of a shelter of "last resort" for individuals currently not served by the shelter system by virtue of their mental illness, addiction and related problems;
3. Encourage and support the Provincial Government in its implementation of the Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Program and direct staff to explore appropriate partnerships;
4. Encourage the federal government to develop a National Housing Strategy.

## BACKGROUND

- In 1998 the Big City Mayors declared homelessness in Canada a national disaster.
- Homelessness has many dimensions, including physical, social and personal factors.
- The Municipality does not have responsibility for providing social housing but it has a strong interest in the quality of life in the community. This includes ensuring that housing is affordable to households of all income levels.
- The municipality bears costs related to homelessness and substandard housing in the form of police and fire services, safety, social equity, and public perception.
- HRM Vision 20/20 states that poverty and homelessness are unacceptable.
- In 1999 the federal government introduced the Supporting Community Participation Initiative Program (SCPI) for homelessness programs in the most affected communities. The Community Action on Homelessness (CAH) is responsible for locally implementing the national strategy.
- HRM received a research grant under the SCPI program for several initiatives, including investigation of the scope and profile of homelessness in HRM.
- This report provides a synthesis of findings and key recommendations included in the *Homelessness in HRM - A Portrait of Streets and Shelters* report dated January 2004.

## DISCUSSION

It should be noted that by accepting the Report on Homelessness in HRM, Council will not be approving any of the specific recommendations contained in the report. Staff will proceed with the process to consider implementation of the various recommendations. Council will choose to adopt each recommendation, or not, based upon an understanding of the costs and the benefits associated with each recommendation provided in reports at a future date.

The Report on Homelessness in HRM does not commit HRM to the role of service provider in the housing field. The focus of the recommendations is rather on building new partnerships, advocacy, supporting community groups in their work and conducting ongoing research. The scope of the work is consistent with:

- HRM Vision 20/20 relative to the goal of social justice, which states that poverty and homelessness are unacceptable;
- The Corporate Scorecard theme of Healthy, Vibrant and Sustainable Communities; and
- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities National advocacy work on housing issues and social equity.

Four recommendations are being submitted to Council for adoption at this time. The first recommendation is simply adoption of the Report on Homelessness. The issues and rationale for recommendations 2-4 are each discussed later in this staff report.

1. Accept the *Homelessness in HRM - Portrait of Streets and Shelters* report.

This report describes the first effort in HRM to document both **relative** and **absolute** homelessness in the regional municipality.

In this study a **household at risk** of homelessness was one that spent 50% or more of its gross household income<sup>1</sup> on all self-reported shelter costs regardless of tenure and as reported by the 2001 Census. In HRM more than 16,000 households meet this description, which represents 12% of all households and 31,000 individuals or 8% of the population. Further:

- 44% of Nova Scotia households at risk reside in HRM;
- 73% of households at risk are renter households and 27% are owner households;
- nationally HRM has one of the highest proportions of renter households paying 50% of their income on shelter - 22%. Only Vancouver is higher at 22.3%;
- 58% are single individuals (non-family households);
- 16% are in visible minority households;
- 10% are immigrant households;
- 2% are Aboriginal households.

An **absolutely homeless** person was defined as an individual that on the night of June 19th did not have their own place to stay as determined by a survey of streets, shelters, transitional housing, addiction recovery, police and emergency care services. This does not represent a total count of the absolutely homeless but it does provide a multi-faceted portrait of the homeless population. The full report is attached. Significant findings include:

- 269 homeless individuals surveyed in the Metro area, including 35 children;
- 8 women and 3 youth turned away by agencies due to lack of beds on the night of June 19<sup>th</sup>;
- 23 women and 11 children on a waiting list for transitional housing;
- 67% of those surveyed were male and 33% were female;
- 41% of all those surveyed (including children) were under 24 years of age;
- 5% of those surveyed were over 65 years of age;
- 62% were originally from Halifax;
- 14% of respondents were Aboriginal, 9% Black, 7% Asian, 1% Latin American (only 1% of HRM population is Aboriginal and 7% is visible minority);
- Leading causes of homelessness cited included lack of housing and eviction, family breakdown and violence, lack of income and substance abuse;
- 75% cited health problems;
- 21% were homeless for more than 6 months; 53% of street respondents were homeless for more than 6 months;
- 42% were homeless for the first time;
- 58% of all those surveyed were homeless two or more times; 79% of the street population was repeatedly homeless.

These findings indicate that youth, women with children, Aboriginal Canadians, members of visible

---

<sup>1</sup> Springer and Mars, 1998.

minorities, persons with multiple health needs and renters are among the most vulnerable to housing instability and homelessness. Chronic homelessness is a problem in HRM and the level of service available – the number of emergency beds, the availability of addictions and other health services and the number of affordable housing units in our region – appears to be inadequate.

Immediate gaps that need to be addressed include:

- emergency shelter provision for women and youth
- shelter of last resort
- street outreach, detox, long-term addiction recovery programs
- more transitional and affordable housing.

**2. Encourage the Provincial and Federal government to support the development of a shelter of “last resort” for individuals currently not served by the shelter system by virtue of their mental illness, addiction and related problems.**

Severe mental health and addictions issues are a factor contributing to chronic homelessness among some individuals. It is the general policy of local shelters that those who are disruptive or intoxicated cannot be admitted. This is based on concerns over safety, but a shelter of “last resort” is needed in Halifax.

A significant proportion of homeless individuals in HRM find themselves without shelter repeatedly and for extended periods of time. The longer an individual is homeless, the more difficult it may be for him or her to return to a stable housing environment. Addictions and mental health problems are a major barrier to obtaining stable housing.

Programs based on abstinence may not be effective for individuals who “have exhausted all permanent housing options”. Strategies that focus on “reducing harm” rather than requiring abstinence as a condition for accessing shelter and related services are gaining currency in public health and housing fields. This research suggests that there is an urgent need for a shelter of last resort, for more long-term addiction programs. This continuum of housing and health care will support those in HRM that are not being served by existing services and shelters. Given that matters related to housing and health are the responsibility of the provincial and federal governments, HRM should encourage both levels of government to address this issue.

There are several indicators of this need:

- A “wet shelter” at the Metro Turning Point operated last year served 32 men who otherwise would not have been admitted.
- In 2002 HRM Police made 453 arrests for public intoxication among persons who claimed to have no fixed address and in 2003 the number increased to 518. This represents about 150 different individuals because many are being repeatedly arrested – on average 4 times per person with some being arrested 10 or more times in any given month.
- In the *Portrait* study 26% of individuals indicated that they were struggling with addictions, and 21% self-reported to have a mental illness.
- 19 individuals said that they were not admitted to a shelter on June 19<sup>th</sup> because the shelter was full (9) or because of other reasons (10), which may include admissions policies.

**3. Encourage and support the Provincial Government in its implementation of the Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Program and direct staff to explore appropriate partnerships.**

In January 2001 the federal government allocated \$680 million nationally for new affordable housing production and rehabilitation. In September 2002 the Province of Nova Scotia signed the five-year \$37.3 M Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Agreement. The program, if implemented, has the potential to produce up to 1,500 units in the province and should include at least 600 units in HRM (based on the share of population and level of need). Only six units have been funded in HRM so far with a \$240,000 subsidy from the program. While this program is not likely to address the needs of the homeless and those on very low incomes<sup>2</sup>, it is pertinent that HRM enters into dialogue with the Province to facilitate and expedite the implementation process.

**4. Encourage the federal government to develop a National Housing Strategy.**

The federal government does not have direct responsibility for housing matters in Canada, but various departments and agencies of the federal government are nonetheless important participants in influencing the affordability of housing. Overall management of the economy, financing (including social and assisted housing), taxation policy, creation of model building and energy codes, assistance for municipal infrastructure, research and information dissemination all influence the availability, demand for and cost of housing in Canada. Most of the social housing stock in HRM (5% of the total stock) is the result of federal government activity in the housing sector between 1946 and 1993.

From 1984 to 1993, almost \$2 billion was cut from federal housing programs. In 1993, all federal funding for new social housing was cancelled. Nationally the production of social housing fell from 25,000 new units per year in 1983 to zero in 1993<sup>1</sup>. In Halifax only 36 new units have been built since 1986, and many older units are in urgent need of repair and some are boarded up.

---

<sup>2</sup> With maximum cost-shared subsidy of \$50,000 per unit and a definition of "affordable rental housing" set at average market levels, the program will not be able to produce housing units affordable to the working poor. For example, a single individual working full time in Halifax at a minimum wage would earn approximately \$11,000 per year. At 30% of income to shelter expense ratio that individual would be able to afford a \$281 per month bachelor apartment. Average market rent for a bachelor apartment is \$472 per month, creating a gap of \$191 dollars per month. According to FCM calculations \$56,000 subsidy would be required, not \$50,000 to achieve 30% affordability level (FCM, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> Hulchanski, 2003.

Spending on housing by Canada, provinces and territories

	1993-1994 (\$ millions)	1999-2000 (\$ millions)	Dollar change	Percent change
Newfoundland	18.1	8.0	-10.1	-55.8
Prince Edward Island	2.3	3.2	+0.9	+39.1
Nova Scotia	24.2	14.3	-9.9	-40.9
New Brunswick	32.7	31.8	-0.9	-2.8
Quebec	286.3	288.3	+2	+0.7
Ontario	1,140.9	837.1	-303.8	-26.6
Manitoba	46.6	43.2	-3.4	-7.3
Saskatchewan	43.1	40.5	-2.6	-6.0
Alberta	287.3	93.2	-194.1	-67.6
British Columbia	83.4	90.9	+7.5	+9.0
NWT / Nunavut	69.7	114.4	+44.7	+64.1
Yukon	4.9	11.1	+6.2	+126.5
Total – provinces, territories	2,039.5	1,576.0	-463.5	-22.7
Canada (CMHC)	1,944.9	1,927.9	-17	-0.9
Total – all Canada	3,984.4	3,503.9	-480.5	-12.1

Source: CMHC, 2001

In 1996 1.7 million Canadian households were living in core housing need. In 1999 the federal government announced \$753 million over three years for homelessness initiatives and in 2001 \$680 million (\$18 M in Nova Scotia) for a five-year Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing programs. The 2003 federal budget included:

- \$320 million over five years for new affordable housing;
- \$405 million over three years for SCPI;

- \$384 million over three years for RRAP;
- Federal Real Property for Homelessness program extended.

While this new injection of funding is much needed, projects funded by SCPI have to demonstrate long-term sustainability (which entails commitment of provincial funds). Federal contributions to the affordable housing program also have to be matched by the province or other partners.

These short term programs and several others administered by CMHC do not represent an adequate national housing strategy.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, among other parties, have been calling for a federal national housing strategy. FCM proposed that the crisis in affordable housing can be reduced by achieving the following goals<sup>2</sup>:

20,000 new or acquired affordable units per year for 10 years;

10,000 rehabilitated affordable units per year for 10 years;

40,000 households per year for 10 years receiving income or rental assistance to make their units affordable.

HRM can stress the importance of programs aimed at addressing the crisis in affordable housing and homelessness and encourage the federal government to develop a comprehensive housing strategy that takes into consideration the needs of the urban Aboriginal population, those of immigrants, refugees, visible minorities and other at-risk populations.

### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct budget implications resulting from the recommendations contained in this report. Any future budget requirements with respect to the implementation of any of the recommendations will be identified in business plans and/or reports to Halifax Regional Council as appropriate.

### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN**

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

None recommended

### **ATTACHMENTS**

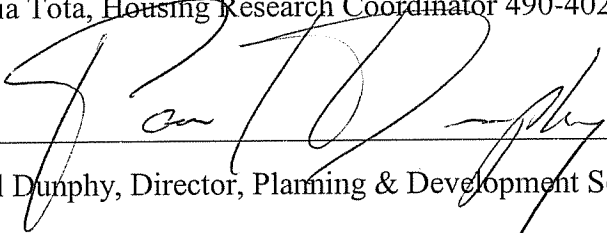
1. Homelessness in HRM - A Portrait of Streets and Shelters

---

<sup>2</sup> FCM. A National Affordable Housing Strategy. Oct, 2000.

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Kasia Tota, Housing Research Coordinator 490-4023

Report Approved by:   
Paul Dunphy, Director, Planning & Development Services