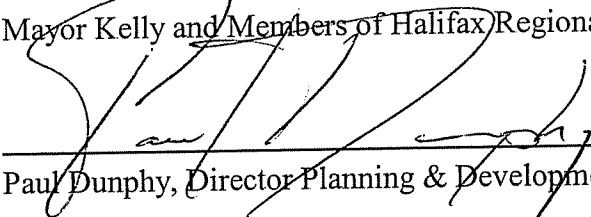


**Halifax Regional Council**  
**April 5, 2005**

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

**SUBMITTED BY:**   
Paul Dunphy, Director Planning & Development Services

**DATE:** March 24, 2005

**SUBJECT:** Homelessness in HRM: Portrait of Streets and Shelters Volume II -  
Update on Homelessness Research and Housing Policy Development

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## **INFORMATION REPORT**

### **ORIGIN**

Staff.

### **BACKGROUND**

- HRM received a grant from the Government of Canada Supporting Communities Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) in 2003/04 and 2004/05 to investigate housing and homelessness issues in the municipality, increase community capacity, and explore opportunities for municipal involvement.
- This report provides an overview of a recently completed report - Homelessness in HRM, Portrait of Streets and Shelters Volume II (2005).

This report will highlight key findings of the homelessness report as well as other activities undertaken by staff as part of the housing and homelessness file.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Homelessness in HRM - Portrait of Streets and Shelters**

*Homelessness in HRM – A Portrait of Streets and Shelters* is a broad based homelessness study facilitated by research staff at the Halifax Regional Municipality. The study utilizes a mix of methods, including literature review, 2001 Census analysis, qualitative interviews with homeless individuals and a one-day snapshot survey of absolutely homeless individuals in the Metro area.

The first survey was conducted on June 19, 2003 and served as the basis of the first *Portrait* report. It called for a greater collaboration between community organizations and the three levels of government, a swift implementation of the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing program, and the establishment of a harm reduction facility for individuals with addictions and mental illness disorders currently not served by the shelter system.

While over the past year community organizations and government collaborated on several important initiatives, this report suggests that homelessness continues to be unabated and important gaps remain in the continuum of supports. Specifically:

- **A temporary Out of the Cold Program was established in December 2004 in the Metro area, but no financial commitment has been made to continue the program in future years.**
- **Supportive housing for individuals with dual mental illness and addictions (“shelter of last resort”) has not been established in HRM. Research indicates that supportive housing is a cost-effective option of serving those hard to house as compared to emergency care.**
- **Current affordable housing programs do not meet the needs of individuals with lowest incomes in HRM (the bottom 20%).**
- **Income growth in HRM has been stagnant for most households, and the lowest income households have been consistently losing ground. Therefore, income gap is growing (FCM, 2004).**

This report presents data on the second point-in-time survey of homelessness conducted on **June 17, 2004**. It draws comparisons between the 2003 and 2004 results, and provides additional analysis of some of the themes that emerged from the surveys – Vulnerable Families, Youth Homelessness, Diversity and Housing, Income and Housing Affordability in HRM. **The findings largely confirm the results of the 2003 survey and validate the Portrait survey as a community-based benchmarking tool for monitoring broad local trends in the state of homelessness.**

**Highlights of findings:**

- **266** individuals were surveyed through the 2004 survey as compared to 234 in 2004 and the gender split was exactly the same as in 2003 (**67% male and 33% female**).
- Homeless respondents to the survey ranged from **14 to 74 years old**, and the average age was 35 years old. Women and those surveyed outside the shelter system tended to be younger and **only a third of the youth was surveyed through the shelter system**.
- **34% of respondents were under 24 years of age**, 39% were between 25 and 44, and 28% were over 45 years of age. There was a marked increase in the proportion of **youth and older adults** between 45 and 64 years of age.
- Half of the respondents reported receiving some form of government assistance and **less than 10%** engaged in panhandling and related activities.
- **Family violence**, conflict and breakdown was cited by 32% of respondents as the immediate cause of homelessness, followed by **substance abuse** (26%), being unable to find **accommodation** (23%), **lack of income** (19%) and **mental illness** (14%).
- **58% of respondents indicated having a health condition**, with 33% reporting addiction, 20% mental illness, 15% medical condition and 4% disability (many individuals were affected by more than one health problem).

2. Federal Initiatives

With the establishment of the new Cabinet, the housing and homelessness portfolio is now the responsibility of Federal Minister Joe Fontana. In January 2005, Halifax was part of national federal consultations on housing and homelessness. Currently, approximately \$800M of previously committed federal funding for affordable housing has not been spent therefore no new financial commitments were announced for housing in the 2005 Budget. Partnerships and deeper subsidies are critical to achieve housing affordability for low income households (below 20<sup>th</sup> income percentile).

3. Provincial Initiatives

The Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Program signed in 2001 is intended to provide or renovate between 850 and 1,500 new affordable units in Nova Scotia by providing limited up-front capital and operating funding over 10 years. While only one announcement was made in 2002 and one in 2003, as of December 2004 199 new units were approved and 114 low-income homeowners received grants for urgent housing repairs. Overall 313 units were funded in the province since the program was initiated.

Out of the 199 new units, 6 ownership and 66 senior rental units were funded in HRM. Federal capital grants are being provided up front. The proponents in many cases are required to provide land and some equity, while the Province will provide rent supplements. According to the Provincial

Government information, to date \$11.55 M was committed under the program out of a total of \$37.3 that must be spent by 2007. On March 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase II of the Program was announced in Nova Scotia. New announcements are anticipated.

#### 4. HRM's Initiatives

HRM has a broad interest and influence on the housing market, both non-profit and for-profit. HRM's sphere of influence spans over several areas, from taxation, land use regulation and safety inspection, research, policy development, partnerships and supporting community capacity to address emerging needs.

HRM was able to support community-based initiatives through research (See Literature Review, Appendix 2), tax and fee exemptions, land donations and small project grants (approximately \$130,000 was allocated in 2004 to community based housing and social support initiatives). Property donations made to non-profit organizations involved in supportive and affordable housing development were able to leverage provincial and federal project contributions. Affordable housing policy is expected to be a strong component of the Regional Plan.

HRM was also able to advocate nationally through its engagement with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, regionally through the Atlantic Mayors' Congress, and locally by supporting the implementation of the Nova Scotia-Canada Affordable Housing Agreement. Staff reported on some of these initiatives in the Feb. 10, 2004, November 16, 2004 and January 15, 2005 reports.

#### 5. Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) Research Grant Extended

HRM obtained approval for \$75,000 of Government of Canada Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) for the third stage of research, community development, policy and tool development for the 2005/06 fiscal year (HRM received \$125,000 in 2003/04 and \$98,000 in 2004/05). This may include a potential affordable housing demonstration project, and a tool kit of incentives to non-profit and for-profit housing providers.

### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

No budget implications.

### **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.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Homelessness in HRM - Portrait of Streets and Shelters Report and Poster
2. Literature Review
3. Housing Resource Group Brochure

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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.

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