

Municipal Update: Helping address homelessness in the Halifax region

Date of issue: Dec. 22, 2023

The Halifax Regional Municipality's priority has been, and continues to be, treating those experiencing homelessness with dignity – and continuing to work with community partners to find ways to provide support to them within our organization's capacity and scope. The following is an update on ongoing efforts to help address homelessness in our region.

Designated Outdoor Sheltering Locations

As of Dec. 18, 2023, the designated outdoor sheltering locations were occupied as follows:

- **Barrington Street Green Space, Halifax** – four tents on site; this site is not fully occupied.
- **Correctional Centre Ballfield, Lower Sackville** – 25 tents on site; this site is fully occupied.
- **Geary Street Green Space, Dartmouth** – two tents and one structure on site; this site is not fully occupied.
- **Grand Parade, Halifax** – 28 tents; this site is fully occupied.
- **Green Road Park, Dartmouth** – eight tents and three structures on site; this site is fully occupied.
- **Lower Flinn Park, Halifax** – four tents on site, this site is fully occupied.
- **Martins Park, Dartmouth** – no tents on the site.
- **Saunders Park, Halifax** – no tents on the site.
- **Victoria Park/University Avenue, Halifax** – 24 tents and one structure on site; this site is fully occupied.

Fire safety

- Municipal staff have developed educational material regarding fire safety for those sheltering outside. Over the coming days, municipal staff will be distributing a [handout](#) to those experiencing homelessness and [signage](#) is being posted today in the active designated outdoor sheltering locations.

Access to heat and power

- As temperatures have gotten colder, there has been an increase of fires in tents and other shelters where people are sheltering outside. The fire safety handouts and signage mentioned above are important educational tools.
- As fuel-based appliances should never be used in or near tents due to the significant fire and carbon monoxide risk, the municipality is looking at other opportunities for heat and power. More information on these options will be provided in the coming days and weeks.
- In the interim, extra funds have been provided to street navigators with the Business Improvement Districts to provide winter supplies such as winter grade sleeping bags.

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Additional indoor sheltering spaces

- The municipality is in ongoing discussions daily with the Province of Nova Scotia to identify potential options for additional indoor sheltering spaces this winter season and to open these spaces as soon as possible.
- More details will be shared once a location has been confirmed and timing for operation of the facility by the province has been determined.

Temporary emergency shelters

- The Province of Nova Scotia activates temporary emergency shelters for overnight accommodation when temperatures are -10 degrees Celsius or below (accounting for wind chill) and/or snowfall amounts are 15 cm or greater.
- The municipality supports the province by providing access to municipal facilities, for their use as temporary emergency shelters, as well as operational support.
- Temporary emergency shelters often operate in tandem with warming centres, which are coordinated by community organizations, so those experiencing homelessness have accommodations both overnight and during the day.
- For more information visit the municipality's Emergency Accommodations [webpage](#).

Meals during the holiday season

- Funding of \$8,500 (originally budgeted for the annual New Year's Day Levee) has been provided by Regional Council to the North End Community Health Centre to purchase and distribute warm meals to those experiencing homelessness.
- One warm meal per day will be distributed at various large encampment sites throughout the municipality on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

Support for Volunteers

- Several groups of volunteers have formed in different locations over the past several months to assist those experiencing homelessness. In addition, the provincial 211 and municipal 311 call centres have received daily calls from residents looking to help their unhoused neighbours.
- To assist with coordinating the support of these groups of volunteers, the municipality has assigned a Community Developer to provide support to the volunteer groups. This staff person will be a liaison between the municipality and the groups of volunteers, helping them to coordinate their efforts in ways that are beneficial, meaningful and aligned with shared objectives. There is excellent goodwill in the community and the staff support will play a crucial role in channeling that generosity into activities that are better organized, have a greater impact, and are safer for everyone involved.
- The support for volunteers position has recently been appointed and has already started working with the volunteer groups.

Wellness checks

- Municipal staff and Street Navigators will continue to visit the designated outdoor sheltering locations as well as various encampment locations throughout the region over the holidays to ensure support is provided to those who need it.

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Informational video series via social media

- The municipality continues to deliver an informational video series to address commonly asked questions about the current homelessness situation in the region.
- Launched on Nov. 27, these videos have featured Max Chauvin, Director of Housing & Homelessness. Our most recent video showcased Lucas Goltz, the Program Coordinator for the Navigator Outreach Program (delivered through a partnership between the Downtown Halifax Business Commission and the Spring Garden Area Business Association).
- This initiative supports one of the four roles within the mandate of the municipality identified in the *Framework for Addressing Homelessness*: supporting public education efforts.
- The following videos have been shared via municipal social media channels ([Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter \(X\)](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#)) and posted on the *Helping address homelessness* [webpage](#):
 - Nov. 27 – What is the difference between being homeless and sleeping rough?
 - Dec. 6 – Service providers. Who are they and what do they do?
 - Dec. 13 – What can residents do to help?
 - Dec. 20 – What is the role of Street Navigators?
- The next video is scheduled for the first week of January.

Donations to those experiencing homelessness

- The municipality appreciates that residents want to support those who are experiencing homelessness in their communities.
- There are already a number of community organizations and service providers that are doing this work right now and residents are encouraged to connect with them to coordinate support they would like to provide. A [list](#) is available on the 211 [webpage](#).
- There are a variety of ways for residents to help and as outlined in the Dec. 13 video residents should ensure that what they wish to donate directly to someone in an encampment is wanted, needed and can be used by those receiving the donation.
- Food dropped off and left out simply attracts rats and other items left that people do not want becomes waste and landfill.

For more information about ongoing efforts by the municipality to help address homelessness in our region visit halifax.ca/addressinghomelessness.