



INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa: Update, November 2019

ISSUE:

A critical problem in reducing homelessness is a very small, and shrinking stock of lower rent housing affordable to those on very low income.

NEED TO RETHINK AND REFOCUS THE APPROACH

The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEHO) urges the City of Ottawa to be more deliberate in using all available tools to increase the availability of low rent housing that is affordable to those who are homeless and at risk of homelessness and with very limited incomes. For example:

- 1 Develop and meet ambitious new targets for reducing the City's social housing waiting list and increasing the availability of suitably-sized, affordable housing. The ATEHO recommends a target of a 50% reduction in the waiting list over the next five years of the plan, through new production of rental housing, the use of housing allowances, purchase of existing housing, redevelopment of social housing and other innovative approaches.
- 2 Vigorously pursue current opportunities for federal and provincial funding and continue to increase municipal capital funding for new development of both affordable and supportive housing, and for housing allowances.
- 3 Set a target to eliminate chronic homelessness by 2024 through a combination of Housing First initiatives and an increased supply of supportive housing.
- 4 Redesign the City's Action Ottawa program to remove administrative barriers through strategies such as reducing Request For Proposal application requirements and using cooperative planning processes to better serve priority needs.
- 5 Put in place a dedicated Housing Resource team in the Housing Branch in order to work with the community to fast-track planning and development processes and proactively prepare proposals for available housing capital funding.



ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS OTTAWA UPDATES

In 2018, the City of Ottawa began an annual reporting process to monitor progress in delivering the 2014-2024 Plan on Housing and Homelessness. The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEHO) provides review and commentary on the progress as documented by the City to highlight opportunities to reform and improve outcomes of the homeless serving system.

Reflecting on the worsening homelessness situation as reported by the City in April 2018, the ATEHO has outlined a new path forward. This path is designed to stimulate thinking about different ways to respond to persisting homelessness through recommendations in four specific areas:

- Rental Housing Affordability;
- Community Planning;
- Systems Level Approach; and
- Homelessness Prevention

The ATEHO will issue four updates that will provide commentary on the implementation of the 10-Year Plan. These updates will also contain recommendations to the City on potential solutions to ending and preventing homelessness.

BACKGROUND

Housing First is a key strategy of the City to address homelessness. This approach is designed to assist chronically homeless families and individuals to find housing they can afford, and to achieve housing stability through appropriate support services. Since 2015, 882 single individuals have been housed through this initiative, with a 92% retention rate after 12 months. Yet without sufficient housing at lower rents, placement of individuals and families into housing becomes a serious challenge. This is reflected in the City's 2018 report that found:



12,163 applicants on the social housing waiting list in 2018, a **14.8% increase** and an alltime high.



7,937 unique individuals using an overnight emergency shelter in, a **6.5% increase** and a **record high**.



4,835 new applications for assistance, but only 1/3 was placed into housing or allocated rental assistance.



Housing First has facilitated housing **882 individuals since April 2015** and **225 graduating from the program**. Yet, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness remains almost unchanged.

INVESTMENTS ARE INSUFFICIENT

The City has made an investment to increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing. Although there were only 484 total units of affordable (271) and supportive (213) housing created over the five-year period from 2014-2018, there are 410 additional units under development in 2018. The ATEHO acknowledges this increase and particularly notes the \$15 million capital fund allocated by the City in its 2019 budget. But, given the worsening increase in homelessness in our community, more needs to be done.

The City has also expanded the number of housing allowances and rent supplements (mainly as part of the Housing First programs). Of the total 753 households assisted, almost half (367) were allocated in 2018 alone.

Increasing the stock of affordable housing through new construction is desirable and, in some circumstances, the best solution, but it is also a costly way to resolve the need for truly low rent housing for those on the social housing waiting list and in shelters. In addition to new supply, the use of housing allowances or rent supplements, the purchase of existing housing, redevelopment of social housing and innovative housing solutions (micro-suites, for example) should all be considered and pursued.



I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.”

Leonardo da Vinci



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