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HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVES—2005 RESULTS

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, February 28, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Chair write to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing requesting that funding for the Provincial Rent Bank Program be annualized prior to the program's expiry in December 2006.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on homelessness prevention initiatives, namely the Homelessness Prevention Program, the Provincial Rent Bank Program, and the Emergency Energy Program.

3. BACKGROUND

In 2001, the Province introduced a new program called "Hostel Redirection" and provided York Region with \$64,018 to fund activities aimed at preventing homelessness. At that time Council approved additional municipal funding to provide a total of \$100,000 to the Salvation Army in the Town of Newmarket for the operation of the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), a service designed to provide one-time financial assistance for individuals and families to either retain or obtain appropriate housing.

Following an independent evaluation showing the success of the program and growing demand for its services, in December 2002, Council approved total base funding of \$200,000 and later in 2003, Council increased the base funding for this program to \$250,000. The provincial contribution to these budgets remained static at \$64,018 until 2005 when an increase of 3% was annualized.

In 2004, the Province announced funding for two new homelessness prevention initiatives, the Provincial Rent Bank Program and the Emergency Energy Program, which provided York Region with one time funding of \$639,133 to address issues of rental

arrears, (as reported to Council in September 2004) and funding of \$125,070 to assist residents with energy related expenses.

The new provincial dollars were not intended to replace the municipal funding that supported prevention programs, but were intended to be used as a part of a broader delivery model of homelessness prevention supports. In York Region, this funding was used to complement the existing HPP program. The Rent Bank funding was allocated over two fiscal years ending in December 2006. The Emergency Energy funding began as one-time funding in 2004 but in November 2005 the Province announced that this funding will be annualized.

All three programs have been included in the Region's recently approved 2006 Budget at the same funding levels as in 2005.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Project Results 2005

Following are the details of the success of the Programs in 2005:

4.1.1 Homelessness Prevention Program—Northridge Community Church of the Salvation Army

The HPP, operated by the Salvation Army, has been providing one-time financial assistance to individuals and families across the Region to prevent eviction, or establish households in appropriate housing. An external evaluation of the pilot program showed that it was more cost effective to keep people housed than to risk having to accommodate them in an emergency shelter. The analysis indicated that the average cost to house a family of four in emergency shelter was \$6,080 (\$40/person/day x 38 days), while the average cost to assist households through the HPP program was \$1,367.

Non-monetary support is also provided in the form of referrals to other services to stabilize at risk households such as budget counselling, food bank assistance, family counselling, etc.

This service has been designed to provide assistance to low-income individuals and families who are not in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) assistance, and who are at risk of losing their homes. The HPP stabilized housing for 147 households in 2005.

4.1.2 Provincial Rent Bank Funding

The Provincial Rent Bank funding allocated to York Region in 2004 was one-time funding to assist low income households or those on OW or ODSP. In September 2004, Council approved a plan to deliver the Program over two years, from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2006.

The purpose of this funding was to assist households with a maximum of up to two months of rental arrears in order to prevent eviction. Those needing more than the two months of assistance, to remain housed, could receive additional funding through the HPP program, or through OW Assistance.

In 2005, this program was delivered through both HPP (75% of allocated funding) and through Ontario Works (25%). It will continue to be administered by both programs until the provincial funding is exhausted at the end of 2006.

In 2005, expenditures totalling \$282,408 stabilized 162 households through HPP and 90 households through OW, funded 100% by the Province.

4.1.3 Emergency Energy Funding

The Emergency Energy funding allocated to York Region in 2004 was one-time funding to support low income households with all energy related emergencies, up to a maximum of two months assistance. Because of the fit with HPP and Rent Bank, this funding is also administered by the Salvation Army since households often need more than two months of assistance and/or have rental arrears as well and could receive top up funding through the HPP program.

This funding was allocated 100% to the Salvation Army since social assistance recipients can access help with energy arrears from OW.

In 2005, expenditures totalling \$80,070 assisted 80 households with energy related emergencies, subsequently stabilizing their housing, funded 100% by the Province.

4.2 Project Goals and Budgets 2006

The HPP program continues to provide a valuable service to a significant number of vulnerable residents in York Region and is budgeted to continue in 2006.

The Salvation Army has set the following goals for 2006.

4.2.1 Homelessness Prevention Program

- Continue to provide financial assistance to households to prevent homelessness.
- Continue to provide counselling, anger management, and referrals to other types of services such as budget counselling, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Gamblers Anonymous, in order to stabilize and prevent recurrences.
- Continue to work with other community agencies to promote public awareness.
- Maximize the client services funding while still providing an adequate administration budget in order to maintain staffing and program stability, as agreed with the Region.
- The HPP program aims to assist 230 households in 2006.
- The approved 2006 Budget is \$250,000, which includes a provincial contribution of \$65,939.

4.2.2 Provincial Rent Bank Program/Emergency Energy Program

- Continue to deliver these programs in conjunction with the services of the HPP.
- The number of households to be assisted in 2006 is again expected to be more than 300 households.

4.3 Issue

The Rent Bank and Emergency Energy funding allocated by the Province has enabled the Region to serve more households at risk of homelessness than previously. In 2005, the Salvation Army fully expended the HPP funding of \$250,000, the Energy Emergency funding of \$80,070 and their 2005 Rent Bank allocation of approximately \$239,500. The Social Assistance Division of the Community Services and Housing Department allocated the balance of the 2005 Rent Bank funding to social assistance recipients.

Since only 10% of the total of these budgets was earmarked for administration costs, approximately \$570,000 was spent on direct assistance to clients to prevent homelessness.

With the heightened awareness of the availability of these supports, it is anticipated that the demand for assistance will continue to grow in 2006. While it is encouraging that the Emergency Energy fund has been annualized, unless the Province extends the Rent Bank funding past December 31, 2006, York Region will be faced with a significant program funding and service gap in 2007.

This report recommends that correspondence be directed to the Province to urge renewal of the Rent Bank funding on an ongoing basis past the end of 2006.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

These programs are included in the 2006 Budget. The details of these budgets are shown in the table below.

Table 1
Approved 2006 Budget Allocations

Program	Provincial Funding	Regional Funding	Total Budget
Homelessness Prevention Program	\$ 65,939	\$184,061	\$250,000
Provincial Rent Bank	\$319,567	0	\$319,567
Emergency Energy Fund	\$125,070	0	\$125,070
Totals	\$510,576	\$184,061	\$694,637

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There is no direct financial impact on local municipalities. However, residents of local municipalities who find themselves at risk of homelessness will receive support under these initiatives. The prevention of homelessness supports quality of life in local communities

7. CONCLUSION

These services address several of the priorities identified in York Region's *Community Plan to Address Homelessness (Update 2003)* by providing supports to the homeless and at-risk population of York Region.

While these programs cannot resolve the complex issues that lead to homelessness, they do provide short term, concrete actions to improve the condition of some of the Region's most vulnerable residents. Without continued provincial funding of the Rent Bank however, significantly more York Region households could lose their homes and be forced into the already overstrained emergency shelter system.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.