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FEDERAL HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES UPDATE

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, March 28, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides preliminary details of what is known, to date, of the federal government's plan for funding of homelessness initiatives over the next two years.

3. BACKGROUND

In late 1999, the federal government responded to requests for support in dealing with the growing problem of homelessness in Canada by establishing the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiatives (SCPI), a program funded through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The Region was allocated \$1.6 million under the Program over a three-year period.

In 2001, York Region worked with HRSDC and service providers in the community to complete *York Region's Community Plan to Address Homelessness*. In 2002, York Region was confirmed by HRSDC as the "*Community Entity*" to act as the delivery agent on behalf of the federal government.

In 2003, the Government of Canada announced the extension of the Program (SCPI 2) and that the new allocation of funding to the Region for the ensuing three years would be \$1,626,865.

In November 2005, a federal news release announced a one-year extension of the program, to March 31, 2006, to provide approved SCPI 2 projects additional time to be completed. An announcement, in February 2006, of a further one-year funding pot of \$530,374 brought York Region's total SCPI funding allocation, since the inception of the Program, to \$3,784,104.

The first budget brought down by the new federal government contained no mention of continuing funding of homelessness programs which led to intense national lobbying

throughout 2006 for a renewed federal commitment. On December 19, 2006, a new federal initiative entitled the Homelessness Partnering Strategy was announced, though no details accompanied the release.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

On January 29, 2007, Regional staff met with representatives of Service Canada, representing HRSDC, who provided details of the government's new initiative, including:

- The initiative, to be called the Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI), will begin April 1, 2007 and end March 31, 2009.
- HPI has Cabinet approval and will go to the Treasury Board in March for inclusion in the upcoming federal budget.
- York Region can expect to be a priority area with funding at approximately the same annual rate as SCPI (i.e. \$530,000/year).
- Some principles of HPI are:
 - a) Increased emphasis on partnerships, especially with provincial governments (preliminary discussions are underway).
 - b) Emphasis on "horizontal federal partnerships" there is an interest in seeing other federal departments involved e.g. Corrections or those with surplus lands.
 - c) Funding priorities will be on capital investment in shelter, transitional and supportive housing, and supports to those facilities that help get the homeless off the street – not supporting capacity building or research projects as with SCPI.

At the same meeting, Service Canada officials advised that the SCPI program was to be wrapped up by March 31, 2007 and no expenses were to be incurred under that program after that date.

4.1 Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI)

On February 13, 2007, regional staff were invited to participate in a province-wide conference call with Service Canada officials where more specific information on HPI was provided.

4.1.1 Bridging from SCPI to HPI

In recognition that the delivery of the 2006/2007 extension to the SCPI program was considerably delayed – York Region received its funding agreement in December 2006 – Service Canada has indicated it will provide a further "administrative" extension to the existing agreement to December 31, 2007 to allow for the completion of capital projects which have unexpended funding allocation. Projects which provide service only, even if not fully expended, will not be extended.

Regional staff have requested the extension for approved capital projects.

4.1.2 Accessing HPI Funding

In order to access the approximately \$1.06 million expected in York Region for the period April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2009, it will be necessary to complete an update to the *Community Plan to Address Homelessness* and submit it for federal approval. This document will be prepared in consultation with a wide range of community stakeholders and set out the priorities for services to the Region's homeless and near homeless residents over the next several years.

At this date, this process is well underway and a draft of the update will be presented to Council, along with recommendations for going forward based on more complete information about the federal government's intentions for the Program.

Once the update is approved by Council and Service Canada, an application for funding can be submitted to Service Canada.

4.1.3 Next Steps

The following actions will be taken over the next several months:

- Work with community representatives to complete the Community Plan Assessment and Community Plan Update required by Service Canada.
- Report to Council when the draft update is completed for approval of the document and recommendations for going forward.
- With Council's approval, submit the update and application for HPI funding to Service Canada.
- Conduct a Request for Proposals process to identify projects to recommend to Council for funding.
- Implement the Program.

4.1.4 Service Impact for York Region

A realistic estimate of the timing of receipt of the new federal funding and commencement of new activities is that projects could begin activities early in 2008.

Unlike many other communities across Canada, York Region has taken care not to use SCPI funding for homelessness services deemed to be essential. The majority of the federal funding has been used for shorter term capital projects. Because of this strategy, the gap in the flow of federal funding between the end of SCPI and the start of the new program will be manageable.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs associated with the SCPI program, including regional administrative costs, have been funded by HRSDC. It is anticipated that the new program will also be fully funded.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The availability of federal homelessness funding has enabled a wide range of services and facilities for vulnerable residents to be delivered in all areas of York Region.

7. CONCLUSION

It is very encouraging to see a renewed federal commitment to funding of homelessness services. The national programs provide one of the few sources of capital assistance for creating new shelter beds and supportive housing units, meeting a particular need for growing communities such as York Region.

The Minister's announcement, in December 2006, also alluded to plans for a long-term federal homelessness strategy, a long sought- after goal of communities across Canada.

For more information on this report contact Sylvia Patterson, Director, Housing Services Branch in the Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.