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ALLOCATION OF THE PROVINCIAL RENT BANK FUNDING

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 30, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Approval be granted to allocate the additional Provincial Rent Bank Program funding of $237,434 from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) as part of the current delivery model of homelessness prevention through the Northridge Community Church of the Salvation Army and the Employment and Financial Support Branch of the Community Service and Housing Department and that the funding be allocated between these two delivery agents as indicated in this report.

2. The Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services be authorized to execute agreements on behalf of the Region to give effect there to, subject to the prior review of Legal Services.

3. The Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services be authorized to allocate any new or related Provincial Rent Bank funds that may in future become available, within the framework of provincial guidelines.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks Council's approval for the allocation of recently received additional Provincial Rent Bank Program funding as a part of the Region's current delivery model of homelessness prevention supports.

3. BACKGROUND

In March 2004, the MMAH announced the Provincial Rent Bank Program. The intention of this program is to:

- Promote housing stability by helping low-income people, who have short-term rental arrears, to avoid eviction.
- Divert people from emergency shelter systems, thus creating cost savings for the Province and Municipalities who share responsibilities for shelter costs.

The funding allocation for The Regional Municipality of York was $639,133. The Province did not specify a period of time in which this funding allocation should be used.

Since 2001, York Region has provided funding to the Salvation Army in Newmarket to operate the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP). The Program provides one-time financial assistance to at-risk households to maintain or obtain housing. The program also provides services by linking households to other programs and services such as budget counselling, and/or the Trusteeship Program. The provider monitors the stability and success of households who have received assistance through ongoing program follow-up.

Ontario Works (OW) offices can assist OW and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients with financial supports for extraordinary expenses over and above their basic needs through the provision of OW discretionary benefits (80:20 cost shared provincial/municipal funds) or, in a few cases, through 100% municipal funds. This assistance can include some funds for rental arrears to prevent OW/ODSP recipients from facing eviction.

Council previously approved a funding arrangement with the Northridge Community Church of the Salvation Army on September 23, 2004, through the adoption of Clause 5 of Report No. 7 of the Community Services and Housing Committee, to flow 75% of the Provincial Rent Bank Funding through the already established Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP). It was also agreed that the balance of the funding would be allocated through the Employment and Financial Support Branch to provide additional support dollars beyond the 80:20 cost-shared benefits and available municipal benefits. The report noted that the Program would be delivered over two years ending December 31, 2006.

This 75/25 split to support HPP clients and OW/ODSP recipients is working well for all parties.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

On April 6, 2006 the MMAH announced an additional allocation of $237,434 to York Region to continue the delivery of the Rent Bank Program.

4.1 Recommendations for New Funding

It is recommended that the new provincial funding be divided in the same manner (75/25% split) as the initial allocation between the Northridge Community Church of the Salvation Army, who operate the HPP, and the Employment and Financial Support Branch. The following are some benefits of continuing this arrangement with both of these programs:

- The delivery mechanism is in place and provides a streamlined access to service for both OW/ODSP clients and low income households.
- Policies and procedures, under HPP have been aligned to be consistent with provincial (OW/ODSP) requirements.

- Tracking and reporting systems are in place to meet the provincial tracking requirements.
- In 2005, Rent Bank funding delivered through the HPP assisted 123 households and a further 93 households were assisted by the Rent Bank Funding delivered through the OW Program.

It is anticipated that this new funding combined with the previous allotment will carry homelessness prevention services to the end of 2007.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Provincial Rent Bank Program is 100% provincially funded and does not impact the municipal tax levy. The provincial funding initiative will complement the Employment and Financial Services Branch administered OW discretionary benefits.

Current levels of municipal funding allocated to the HPP will continue to be required so that the Program can provide the range of supports to York Region residents facing a housing crisis.

This spending plan has been included in the draft 2007 Community Services and Housing Department Business Plan and Budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Rent Bank assistance is available to all residents through the co-operation of Salvation Army Churches in York Region and through the four Employment and Financial Services OW offices across the Region.

7. CONCLUSION

This funding will supplement programs currently in place and allows the Region to continue to serve its most vulnerable residents by providing financial assistance to prevent evictions due to rental arrears and unforeseen medical emergencies or temporary loss of employment.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.