



City of Peterborough

To: Members of the General Committee

From: Sheldon Laidman, Commissioner of Community Services

Meeting Date: March 9, 2020

Subject: Report CSSS20-006
Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit Program

Purpose

A report seeking approval for the receipt and use of funding under Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program that begins on April 1, 2020.

Recommendations

That Council approve the recommendations outlined in Report CSSS20-006, dated March 9, 2020, of the Commissioner of Community Services, as follows:

- a) That the City of Peterborough participate in the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program, offered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; and
- b) That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute Transfer Payment Agreement(s) with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program.

Budget and Financial Implications

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) program is 100% funded by the provincial and federal governments. Appendix A outlines Peterborough's notional funding allocation of up to the following amount to assist households approved in the City and County of Peterborough ("service area") for the first two fiscal years:

- 2020-2021: \$305,617
- 2021-2022: \$400,449

Incremental funding for new households in the service area is factored into each year's funding. For example, the 2020-2021 funding of \$305,617 is increased by \$94,832 in 2021-2022 to allow for new applicants and the existing households who were approved from the service area in previous years. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing staff will provide program dollars to the Ministry of Finance for payments to households. The City can claim administration costs and amounts paid for first and last month's rent assistance on a quarterly basis.

Funding for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit is available to the City only after the Transfer Payment Agreement is signed. The deadline to enter into such an agreement is March 31, 2020.

Background

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) was announced as part of the National Housing Strategy. This program is 100% funded by the provincial and federal governments, and conducted by the provincial government, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Finance. The City as Service Manager will be required to enter into an agreement with the Province to deliver the program and funding.

This program includes first and last month's rent assistance where appropriate. The COHB is to be calculated for each household to make up the difference between 80% of Average Market Rent and 30% of their monthly income.

Initial estimates indicate that the annual funding will provide assistance to between approximately 40-50 households in the City and County of Peterborough. The program will operate as a portable benefit with the benefit being provided directly to the recipient rather than the landlord which is the format used in other rent supplement style programs.

The COHB program end date aligns with the National Housing Strategy funding end date of March 31, 2029. A new bilateral agreement between the federal and provincial governments would be required to extend the program beyond March 31, 2029.

Service Manager Role and Responsibilities

The City is the Service Manager for housing and homelessness in the City and County of Peterborough. As Service Manager, the City's role in the COHB program, beginning April 1, 2020, is to identify and select eligible households. The 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan's strategic direction to end chronic homelessness will guide this work. Staff will assist individuals with applications to the Ministry of Finance.

Priority Groups

There are two main priority group areas eligible for this funding – vulnerable populations and households in existing or new community housing. At this time, there is limited direction from the Ministry on whether any priority is higher than another. Priority groups include:

- Vulnerable populations
 - Survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking;
 - Persons experiencing or at-risk of homelessness;
 - Indigenous persons;
 - Seniors; and
 - People with disabilities.
- Households in existing or new community housing:
 - Households living in community housing that are not receiving affordability support; and
 - Households no longer receiving financial assistance as a result of expiring federal-provincial programs or social housing operating agreements/mortgages.

Eligibility Requirements - Highlights

Households must be on, or eligible to be on, the waiting list for Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) housing to qualify. In addition, if the household is on the waiting list, they must consent to be removed upon receipt of the COHB. Households must be permanent residents of Ontario, cannot own a home, cannot be in receipt of RGI or any other housing benefit other than Ontario Works/Ontario Disability Support Program shelter allowance.

Summary

Staff presented information about the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program to the Peterborough Regional Liaison Committee on February 13, 2020 through report C555PRLC20-001. As Service Manager the City must “identify and select eligible households” and “assist with applications to the Ministry of Finance.” The number of households receiving COHB does not count towards the City’s Service Level obligations but the COHB will help many households afford their housing expenses.

Submitted by,

Sheldon Laidman
Commissioner of Community Services

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Attachment
Appendix A: Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program funding allocation letter