



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**To:** **Members of the General Committee**

**From:** **Sheldon Laidman, Commissioner of Community Services**

**Meeting Date:** **October 4, 2021**

**Subject:** **Report CSSS21-009  
Overflow Shelter Status and COVID Homelessness Response  
Update**

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## **Purpose**

To provide Council with a status update on Homelessness response and recommendations for the Overflow Emergency Shelter services at 210 Wolfe Street.

## **Recommendations**

That Council approve the recommendations outlined in Report CSSS21-009, dated October 4, 2021, of the Commissioner of Community Services, as follows:

- a) That the Overflow Emergency Shelter service at 210 Wolfe Street revert to an overnight service (12 hours per day) beginning December 1, 2021;
- b) That the agreement with Brock Mission to operate the Overflow Emergency Shelter service be amended to reflect the revised hours of service for the Overflow Emergency shelter and to explore opportunities to open the Overflow Emergency shelter for extreme heat or cold advisories;
- c) That staff be directed to use up to \$150,000 to be funded from the provincial Social Services Relief Fund to enhance the security measures in the neighborhood (e.g., provision of fencing around adjacent properties) as deemed appropriate by the Commissioner of Community Services;
- d) That staff evaluate the effectiveness of the change in hours of operation at 210 Wolfe Street on the neighborhood, city enforcement services, and the Police and provide a report to Council following the first six months of implementation;

- e) That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute such documents as are necessary to give effect to the outcome of the recommendations on terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Community Services and in a form acceptable to the City Solicitor.

## **Budget and Financial Implications**

The base cost to operate the Overflow Emergency shelter originally at the Murray Street location was \$248,400 per year. This budget essentially covered rent and a contract with Brock Mission who operated with a one person staffing model for 12 hours per day. This cost to operate at Murray Street was funded through the Social Services homelessness budget.

The cost to operate the 24/7 shelter at 210 Wolfe Street in 2021 including the capital upgrades to the facility have been entirely paid for through the provincial Social Services Relief Funding. The final round of funding through this provincial program will expire in 2022. Staff have submitted a budget to the Province for use of this funding that includes the operation of the 210 Wolfe Street for the full 2022 year. It is important to note that the funding responsibility for this shelter will revert to the City in 2023 therefore ongoing financial sustainability in the City's Social Services homelessness budget needs to be a consideration.

Based on the need for Brock Mission to have a 2 person staffing model and security, the base cost for a 12 hour shelter is estimated to be \$410,000 per year. This cost is based upon the lease costs at 210 Wolfe Street and may increase if a new site is pursued with increased lease costs.

The cost for a full 24/7 year round shelter service at 210 Wolfe Street would be \$735,000 per year.

## **Background**

### **Council Approval**

Report CSSS19-012 dated October 15, 2019, approved an overnight overflow shelter program operating out of Murray Street Baptist Church and operated by Brock Mission staff. The approved budget was \$248,400. The program included up to 30 shelter beds, Brock staffing from 8:30 pm to 8:30 am and was approved by the Murray Street Baptist Church congregation with extensions up to and including April 2021. The program was intended to be an "overflow" program where shelter beds would be in use only when the other shelter program beds were full. The program operated only 12 hours overnight and was not open during the day. Brock Mission provided the staffing, and a rental fee was paid directly to Murray Street Baptist Church with a total program cost of \$248,400 per year.

In March 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, shelter services in the homelessness system had to adjust capacity to meet social distancing requirements, add COVID-19 screening and monitoring, and ensure the health and safety of residents and staff. Initially the Overflow shelter program was moved to the Peterborough Sport and Wellness Centre with the Brock Mission men's shelter program. This ensured adequate social distancing, screening/monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms, and 24/7 shelter services for both programs.

In July 2020, with the re-opening of the Peterborough Sport and Wellness Centre, shelter services returned to their original locations, including the Overflow shelter program returning to Murray Street Baptist Church with overnight operations only and with a reduced capacity of a maximum of 17 beds. At the same time, staff were exploring several options related to finding an alternative 24/7 location for the Overflow shelter program while the pandemic continued. A 24/7 service was felt to be necessary as no other programs or services were available during the day in the initial part of the pandemic.

Report CSSS20-013 dated October 19, 2020, approved a new location for the temporary Overflow shelter at 210 Wolfe Street for a period of up to two years using provincial Social Services Relief Funding and to use Social Services General Assistance reserve to fund any shortfall that the provincial funding could not cover. Services currently available at this location include:

- 32 shelter beds when shelter beds at other Peterborough emergency shelter services are full;
- 2 Brock Mission staff plus security are on-site 24/7; and
- Meals, shower, and laundry services are available on-site to shelter users.

The full cost of changes to the building to convert it to a shelter use (\$223,000) plus the operational costs have been covered through 100% provincial Social Services Relief Funding.

The Province announced a new allocation of Social Services Relief Funding on August 16, 2021, with an allocation to Peterborough of \$2,141,000. Staff have submitted a proposed budget to the Province to comply with their deadline which currently includes the full cost to operate the Overflow Emergency shelter in 2022 as it is currently operated. Communications from the Province have been clear that this round of funding will be the final round of funding. This funding will be adequate to fund the Overflow shelter through to the end of 2022 at which point the costs would be once again borne by the City. However, after submitting the proposal, further consideration has been given as to whether a 24/7 overflow is still necessary as there are various programs and services available during the day now. The Emergency Overflow shelter can revert to its original core intended purpose of providing emergency overnight shelter.

## Current Status of the Overflow Emergency Shelter

### Shelter Usage

The shelter usage during the pandemic has fluctuated as services available differed during the pandemic. The following tables illustrate emergency shelter usage patterns, including the demand and occupancy at each shelter, the number of unique emergency shelter users, the average use of the Overflow shelter program, the occupancy rate of individuals accessing the Overflow shelter each month, and the acuity level of those staying in the shelter system.

On average, overall shelter demand is being met within the existing 91 bed shelter system. Alternative options are sought by Social Services staff in conjunction with the individual shelter provider in the rare instance where capacity is met. Since the Wellness Centre temporary shelter closed the occupancy at the Brock Mission shelter has been above 90%. Occupancy at the Overflow shelter has fluctuated between 43% and 94% with a significant trend indicating higher occupancy levels since the Overflow shelter was moved to the Wolfe Street location. Cameron House occupancy has been between 67% and 96% occupancy however it has been reduced to only 7 beds due to Covid distancing restrictions. YES Shelter has the widest discrepancy in occupancy per month between 51% and 100% capacity each month.

Two trends are apparent since the opening of the 210 Wolfe Street Overflow shelter location. The average usage of the overflow shelter increased substantially starting in March of 2021 to the present. Average nightly occupancy from July 2020 to February 2021 was between 7 and 10 persons per night at the original Murray Street location. This has increased to between 22 and 30 per night at the new location. The move to Wolfe Street has also coincided with a substantial increase in the average number of nights each person stays at the Overflow shelter per month. The average length of stay at the Overflow shelter has almost doubled since March.

The other pattern that has emerged is the increasing level of acuity of shelter users in the overall system. Level of acuity is scored using a system that assesses history of housing and homelessness, various risk factors, socialization, daily functioning, and wellness. The percentage of those with high to very high acuity scores has grown with 49% of all shelter stays in this category in 2021, compared to 44% in 2020 and only 29% in 2019.

**Table 1: Shelter Demand and Occupancy April 2020 to August 2021**

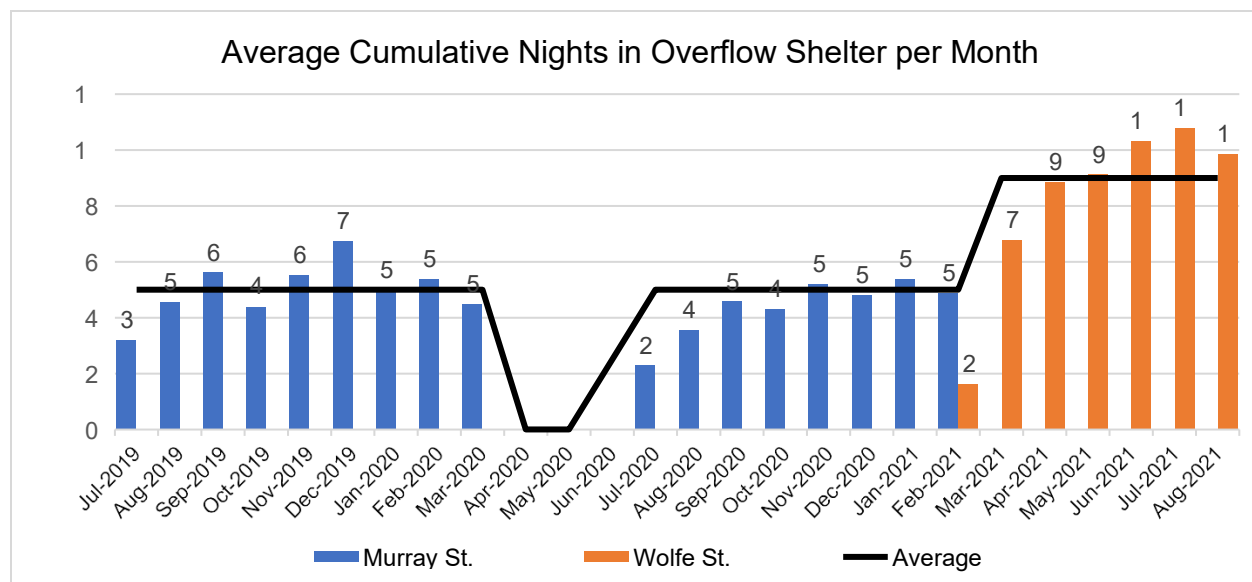
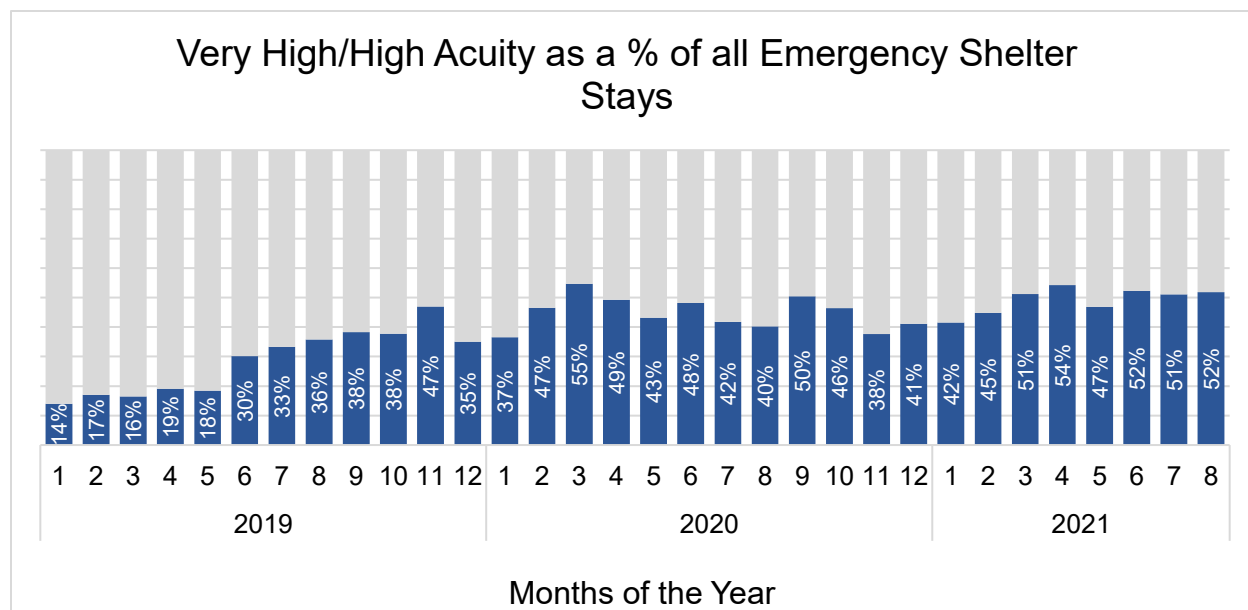
Month	Brock Mission	Overflow	Cameron House	PSWC	YES Shelter – Youth	YES Shelter – Family*
April, 2020	n/a	n/a	21%	104%	91%	0%
May, 2020	n/a	n/a	69%	90%	97%	0%
June, 2020	n/a	n/a	86%	91%	94%	0%

Month	Brock Mission	Overflow	Cameron House	PSWC	YES Shelter – Youth	YES Shelter – Family*
July, 2020	106%	59%	94%	93%	107%	0%
August, 2020	96%	46%	81%	n/a	89%	0%
September, 2020	96%	63%	90%	n/a	65%	0%
October, 2020	94%	59%	83%	n/a	64%	0%
November, 2020	99%	66%	96%	n/a	68%	0%
December, 2020	93%	43%	90%	n/a	83%	0%
January, 2021	101%	51%	88%	n/a	81%	0%
February, 2021	95%	51%	92%	n/a	78%	0%
March, 2021	90%	75%	82%	n/a	70%	0%
April, 2021	96%	82%	76%	n/a	90%	0%
May, 2021	98%	81%	67%	n/a	77%	0%
June, 2021	96%	91%	95%	n/a	56%	0%
July, 2021	91%	94%	88%	n/a	51%	0%
August, 2021	95%	91%	91%	n/a	65%	0%

\*note—Families have been served using hotel facilities during the pandemic. An occupancy exceeding 100% can occur as some shelters have the ability to add extra cots and there can be situations where the same bed is occupied twice in the same day as someone vacates the shelter and another takes their place later that evening.

**Table 2: Unique Shelter Users and Use of Overflow Beds April 2020 to August 2021**

Month	Unique Shelter Users at all Shelters	Avg Shelter Users Accessing Overflow per Night
April, 2020	181	0
May, 2020	162	0
June, 2020	152	0
July, 2020	172	10
August, 2020	172	8
September, 2020	160	11
October, 2020	175	10
November, 2020	145	11
December, 2020	152	7
January, 2021	153	9
February, 2021	147	9
March, 2021	157	13
April, 2021	167	26
May, 2021	181	26
June, 2021	185	29
July, 2021	172	30
August, 2021	169	29

**Table 3: Average Cumulative Nights in Overflow Shelter for Individuals per Month****Table 4: Very High/High as a Percentage of all Emergency Shelter Stays**

### COVID-19 Response Update

Since March of 2020 and as part of the necessary COVID-19 response, Social Services and emergency shelters have had to isolate people experiencing homelessness that are COVID probable or positive or identified by Peterborough Public Health as a high-risk contact. Since March 2020, the isolation location has been used 372 times. At this location, a room is provided as well as meals and on-site support. Security is on-site

24/7 to safeguard Public Health requirements to isolate in-place. The City continues to use 100% provincial Social Services Relief Funding to cover this isolation response. The current funding expires December 31, 2021. Discussions are underway with Peterborough Public Health and Emergency Shelter Operators about an appropriate exit strategy. Social Services is exploring what other communities around Ontario are doing as it relates to exiting motel isolation options and costs.

All shelters have Covid screening protocols in place to protect clients and staff from an outbreak. In addition, PPH has conducted vaccination clinics in the shelters and in locations frequented by homeless individuals in an attempt to provide vaccination coverage to those staying at the shelters or living elsewhere. This overall approach, while costly and resource intensive, has been successful in mitigating any significant outbreaks in the shelter system.

### **Current Overflow Shelter at 210 Wolfe Street**

The current Overflow shelter program operating out of 210 Wolfe St includes 24/7 staffing and operation, 24/7 on-site security, a 32-bed program, meals, laundry, and showers. The Overflow Shelter program is a low barrier shelter in terms of not requiring a sobriety test or identification to enter. It is however not a “no barrier shelter” and it is not a “safe consumption site”. Active substance use is not permitted in the shelter building. Amnesty totes are provided to clients of the shelter program to store those belongings that cannot be taken into the shelter program and sleeping area. Guests can access their totes at any time and leave the premises with their items. If someone returns under the influence and their behaviour is calm, they can enter the shelter program. If someone returns to shelter and their behaviour is dangerous to other residents and staff, they may be asked to come back in a few hours.

The Mobile Support Overdose Response Team operating out of Simcoe St provides regular outreach to the Overflow location. Social Services staff also do outreach to the Overflow shelter program with the aim of housing search and collaborative case managing with shelter staff and other organizations involved with clients in the shelter. When the report to use 210 Wolfe St as an Overflow Shelter program was approved, changes were needed to the building. The total cost to convert the space from office use to shelter use was \$223,000. The monthly costs to operate the current program for 24/7/365 that includes staffing, security, food, supplies, etc. is being funded using 100% provincial Social Services Relief Funding.

### **Challenges at 210 Wolfe Street and Overall System Responses and Impacts**

The placement of a shelter program often poses neighborhood challenges. The Overflow Emergency Shelter program at 210 Wolfe Street is no exception. Since the placement of the Overflow Emergency Shelter at 210 Wolfe St, there have been significant challenges in the neighbourhood including issues with trespassing on neighbouring properties, damage to the shelter building, garbage and recycling issues, confrontational behaviour, near constant placement of tents on the adjacent Rehill lot open space and rail corridor, drug equipment on both neighbouring and public property

and personal property taken from adjacent properties. The security on-site at the shelter is a position that assists with the shelter operation itself and necessary COVID screening and does not have any ability or jurisdiction to respond to issues off of the property.

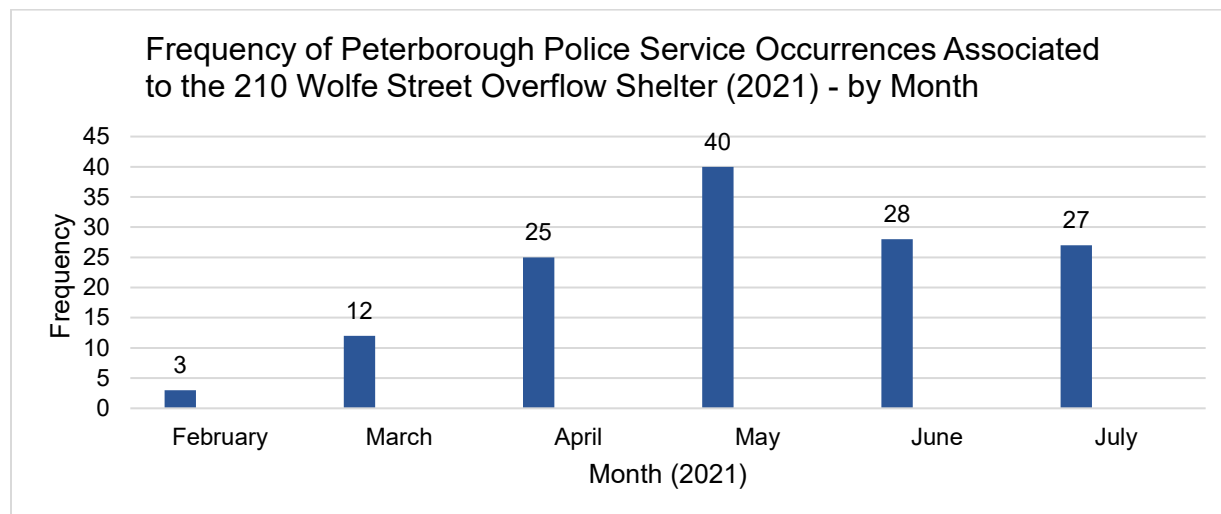
### **Coordinated City Responses and Impacts to Resources**

The pressures in the homelessness system, in neighbourhoods and in the community have resulted in increased outreach in response to the City's Parks and Facilities By-law as well as pro-active outreach to connect to people experiencing homelessness that either cannot or choose not to access shelter services with the goal to connect people to supports and services.

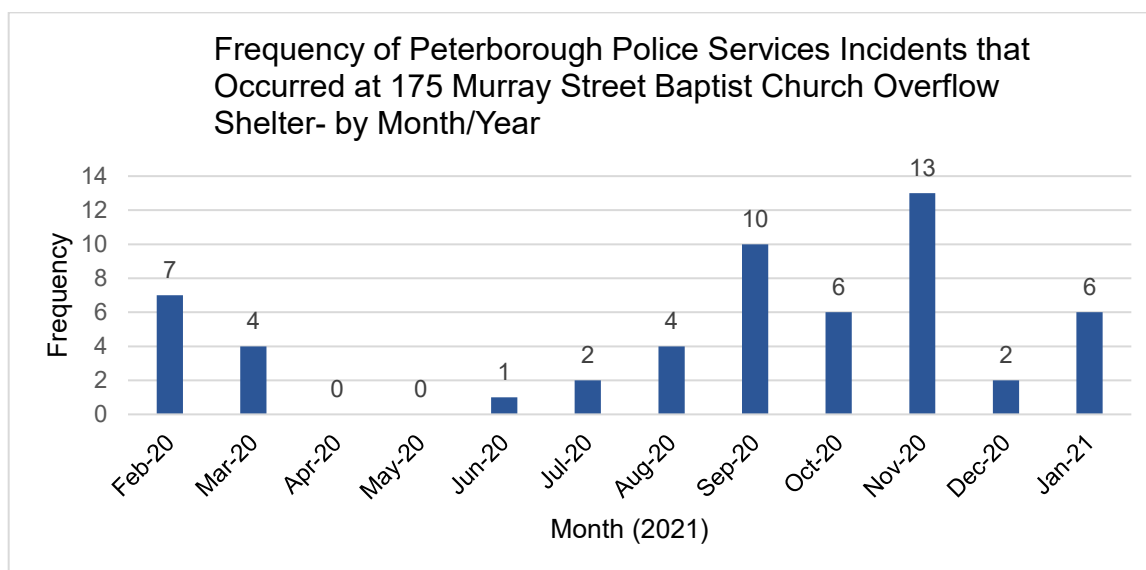
The City has worked diligently to ensure a coordinated response between Bylaw Enforcement, Social Services, Public Works, Police, and contracted security services to respond to incidents of people putting up structures and sleeping in City owned properties. Through September 10<sup>th</sup>, City enforcement had responded to 220 incidents of tenting throughout the entire City. The 220 incidents is only reflective of total incidents and there could be multiple tents involved at each incident. This figure does not include incidents resolved by other city staff at locations such as the Art Gallery, Museum, and Arenas. Each incident is responded to by Bylaw Enforcement personnel along with a Social Services outreach worker to provide a notice to vacate and to connect the person to services if they are willing. If items and garbage are left behind then Public Works staff respond to clean up the site. Police are called in to provide support if there is a risk of violence towards City staff or the public or to enforce trespass orders that are not complied with.

While specific data is not maintained on all tenting incidents responded to at 210 Wolfe Street by City staff, the area has become a central focus of tenting incident complaints. Multiple incidents of tenting are being responded to on an almost daily basis at Wolfe Street. The impact to City staff resources has been significant. The City has two By-Law enforcement staff, who traditionally focus on property standard matters. Contracted Security services have been enlisted to provide support. In addition, Public Works resources have been required to respond to a high number of calls to this area, drawing them away from other scheduled services.

The impacts to Police resources have been significant at the Wolfe Street location compared to the former location at Murray Street Baptist Church. The following two tables show police calls responded to at Murray Street versus the Wolfe Street location. The Wolfe Street location has seen a three times increase in incidents being responded to by the Police. In general, the impacts of response requirements at the Wolfe St location and other tenting situations across the City has stretched Police resources. With the large number of higher priority response calls requiring immediate police action, Police are often not able to address the tenting and public disorder calls for service in a timely manner.



\*Note – The above graph includes occurrences that took place at 210 Wolfe Street, 175 Dalhousie Street (Rehill Parking Lot) and a variety of other surrounding addresses where occurrences can be related back to the WolfeStreet overflow shelter.



It is apparent from the incidents being experienced at Wolfe Street compared to Murray Street that the activity experienced at the shelter itself and the neighbourhood is significantly different. Once the site moved to Wolfe Street and hours increased to 24/7 the number of persons staying at the shelter increased considerably, the length of stay at the shelter increased considerably, the number of police complaints increased considerably, the number of tenting incidents increased considerably, and the impacts to neighbouring properties increased.

The recommendation in the report to reduce the service to an overnight shelter only is meant to bring the service back to its original intent as an overflow shelter only. The extreme risk created by COVID-19 has dissipated as more and more services are

available during the day. City staff and Brock Mission staff believe that returning the shelter to an overnight only shelter may reduce the hub of activity that the Wolfe Street/Rehill lot has become to reduce the impact on the neighbours as well as city services while maintaining the core overnight shelter service.

The recommendation to allocate up to \$150,000 in provincial SSRF funds is meant to assist to address safety concerns in the neighbourhood. Items that could be contemplated include the fencing of yards of properties along Dalhousie and Wolfe Streets to reduce unwanted access to their yards.

### **Outreach and Supports**

Social Services staff conduct regular proactive outreach in the downtown area as well as attend calls related to the Parks and Facilities by-law. Other services and supports continue in a limited capacity based on funding and health and safety related to the pandemic. The One Roof Community Centre, partially funded by the City, continues to provide a take out meal once a day and a drop in service, but with limited capacity. A locker system was implemented as well in partnership with the Salvation Army to allow homeless persons to store belongings.

Homelessness support services continue to do what is possible to increase housing solutions and reduce shelter usage. From January to July 2021, there have been 161 shifts from homelessness to housing. Despite this success the number of people experiencing homelessness and chronic homelessness remains an issue. An Overflow program is still needed in the homelessness response system until more can be done to increase housing solutions, including 24/7 supportive housing for the highest acuity.

The major challenges with finding and retaining housing include:

- A market rental vacancy rate of 2.6% in 2020 which is well below what is considered to be a healthy vacancy rate;
- The loss of low income housing in the community as landlords repurpose housing from multi-dwelling to family units or sell properties during this unprecedented housing market; and
- Average rents in Peterborough have increased by 5% each year over the past several years.

### **Social Assistance System**

The final issue to draw attention to that is affecting the shelter system is the social assistance system itself. Social assistance rates whether it be through the Ontario Works system administered by the City or the Ontario Disability Support Program administered by the Province have not increased with the cost of living and do not allow for individuals or households reliant on this system to afford housing in the private market. An individual on Ontario Works is provided with only \$733 per month which

includes both their housing allowance and basic needs allowance. As all apartment options and even single rooms would use all of this amount each month, many persons on social assistance are choosing the shelter system as their permanent housing option as meals and basic needs are met and it allows for persons to maximize the remaining portion of their social assistance.

Staff are continuing to pursue options through its authority found within the Ontario Works directives to continue to incentivize persons to make emergency shelter usage a short term option and work towards permanent housing options.

## **Update on Brock Mission and Other Options Considered**

### **The New Brock Mission**

The men's shelter program moved from the temporary St. Paul's Presbyterian Church location to their new building at 217 Murray Street on June 10, 2021 with a current occupancy of 30 persons. It is anticipated that this occupancy may be able to be increased to 40 persons in the near future as Brock Mission continues to work with Public Health to ensure proper standards are in place. These additional 10 beds would function similar to the overflow shelter to provide additional system flexibility. The new Brock Mission includes 15 transition units meant to be used by persons from the homelessness system. Tenants are moving into the units throughout the month of September.

### **Other Options Considered**

#### **1. Movement of the Overflow Shelter to an Alternative Location:**

Understanding the challenges faced in the Wolfe Street neighbourhood, staff have continued to seek out alternative locations for the overflow shelter. During the search in 2020 for an alternative shelter location, staff did an exhaustive search of other city properties and a call for proposals to the private sector and did not arrive at any other viable properties. While staff would continue this search if directed by Council, finding a location that would provide an improved location that would be suitable for a shelter is a difficult task. The value of the 210 Wolfe Street location is it is City owned and most other options considered, including the former Murray Street Baptist Church location, are time limited with owners only wanting to provide temporary leases.

#### **2. Closure of the Overflow Emergency Shelter:**

Based upon the current demand for shelter space, staff are not recommending this option. While it remains a goal of the system to be able to eventually close shelters, at present, the demand does not justify this recommendation.

#### **3. Split hours based on time of year:**

It was also considered to operate the Overflow Emergency Shelter at 24/7 during the winter months with reduced overnight hours in non winter months. The cost to operate the 210 Wolfe Street shelter for 24/7 service through the end of March and then revert to a 12 hour service for the remainder of the year would be \$520,000 in 2022. This is not being recommended as it is difficult for the operator to make such drastic changes to their staffing model throughout the year and expect to have a continuous effective service. It would also not address the immediate neighbourhood impacts of a 24/7 shelter operation.

### **Evaluation of 210 Wolfe Street Hours of Operation**

The reduction of the operating hours at 210 Wolfe Street to an overnight shelter only is being recommended to bring the shelter system back to its original level of operation, reduce negative impacts on city enforcement response and the neighbourhood, and to ensure the shelter system is financially sustainable moving forward for the City.

The recommendation is to evaluate this change for a six-month period to determine the impacts of this change. It is also understood that this will provide an opportunity to assess if changes elsewhere in the shelter system have an affect on the Overflow shelter usage including the 15 transition units opening at the Brock Mission, Brock Mission potentially increasing its shelter occupancy to allow some overflow capacity, and Cameron House returning to its pre COVID-19 capacity.

### **Summary**

The Overflow Emergency Shelter at 210 Wolfe Street remains a challenge in terms of its impacts on the neighbourhood and city and police resources. This report provides an overview of those challenges at the site itself and more broadly across the City. A recommendation is provided to transition away from a 24/7 service to an overnight service at 210 Wolfe Street and provide some enhanced security measures.

Submitted by,

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Commissioner of Community Services

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