



# Committee Report

<b>To:</b>	Chair Nielsen and Members of Community Services Committee
<b>Committee Date:</b>	April 25, 2023
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	CSR-CS-07-23
<b>Title:</b>	Overnight Warming Centre Pilot
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Anne Marie Shaw, Director of Community Services
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Kim Wingrove, CAO
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	
<b>Status:</b>	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW81-23; Endorsed by County Council June 8, 2023, per Resolution CC38-23.

## Recommendation

1. That staff report CSR-CS-07-23, regarding an overnight warming centre in Owen Sound be received; and
2. That Grey County enter into a one-year agreement with Safe n Sound to establish a warming centre in Owen Sound as a pilot project; and
3. That the operating funding required in the amount of \$150,000 be provided from the Safe Restart Funding Reserve.

## Executive Summary

The significant increase in housing costs, due in part to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, has led to a 300% increase in people experiencing homelessness from 2020 to 2023 in Grey County. An overnight warming centre is required in Owen Sound for the cold winter months. Safe n Sound, a local agency that provides supports and services to people experiencing homelessness, is interested in providing a warming centre at their location on 8<sup>th</sup> St. E. Staff are recommending a pilot project for the 2023-24 winter funded from Safe Restart Funding Reserve. If successful, staff will work with various community partners for continued warming centre services in 2024.

## Background and Discussion

Grey County receives funding for homelessness services and supports through the Provincial Housing Prevention Program (HPP). The objective of the funding is to provide programs and supports that prevent, address, and reduce homelessness, including chronic homelessness. Grey County uses the funds to assist with arrears and utility disconnections to prevent homelessness, to provide funding for

70 residents through the Homes with Related Supports Program, to fund the Short-Term Shelter Program and to provide supports to community agencies working with people experiencing homelessness such as Safe n Sound.

While the County works diligently to assist people to get and maintain housing, demand can exceed resources or the resources available may not be suitable for supporting clients with complex needs. In order to ensure that there is a safe, warm place for those who need it, an alternative is required.

The current provincial funding guidelines do not include provision to fund warming centres within the system of homelessness prevention and supports administered by the County. As defined by funding guidelines, the entry point into the system of services and supports is through temporary shelter programs such as the County's Short Term Shelter Program.

Traditionally, warming and cooling centres are designated by the lower tier municipality and located within its geographical boundaries in response to during extreme cold or winter storm events. The following types of warming centres are listed in our current emergency management plan.

**Warming Centre (or Warming Station):** A Warming Centre is designated as such by the lower tier municipality and located within its geographical boundaries during extreme cold weather or winter storm events. Under this Plan, Warming Centres, if required, are not the responsibility of the County. A couple different types of Warming Centres are relatively common within Grey County, as follows:

- a) As needed, Warming Centres may be established which can provide short-term (i.e.. not overnight) warmth and protection. Such Warming Centres are typically designated within facilities open to the general public during regular business hours, such as libraries, community centres, and shopping malls which have sufficient space and facilities to accommodate the needs of hosting such additional visitors. A municipality's determination of the need for a Warming Centre is usually based on weather forecasts predicting extreme cold events and the needs of its vulnerable populations.
- b) As needed, Warming Centres may focus on serving stranded travellers, and displaced renters and homeowners, and may need to be open overnight, depending on road closures, bad weather, etc. Such Centres generally close upon the reopening of roads, and/or at the conclusion of the bad weather, and/or the conclusion of other factors from which the need arose in the first place. These Warming Centres throughout Grey County operate most commonly along or near the busiest roadways, especially in areas where there is no hotel/motel accommodation available, and often at the recommendation/request of the Police service for that municipality.

These two scenarios do not take into consideration the longer term needs of our homeless population during the winter months. In other communities who are responding to seasonal needs, a winter warmth program or warming centre is run by a third party, usually a community agency with funding from multiple partners.

The significant increase in housing costs, due in part to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic has led to Grey County seeing a 300% increase in people experiencing homelessness from 2020 to 2023 and led the County to bring the emergency shelter program in house. The County's Short Term Shelter Program for individuals experiencing homelessness provides short term accommodation at a motel while

outreach housing workers assist the individual or family with a housing plan. The program does not work for all individuals as some individuals are banned by the motel owner, do not wish to access the motel program or require a higher level of care beyond the scope of the program. In the case of those unable to access the motel program or not wanting to access the program, a warming centre is beneficial as it provides a person shelter and services during the cold winter months.

### **What is a Warming Centre**

A warming centre is normally activated when the weather turns cold in November to end of March or it can be operated only on days of extreme cold. Extreme cold is determined by the Medical Officer of Health based on a forecast from Environment Canada of -15 degrees Celsius or colder or a wind chill of -20 degrees Celsius or colder.

Warming Centres focus on providing a warm indoor space for vulnerable residents. The facility provides a resting place, snacks, access to washroom facilities, referrals to short term shelter and other community services.

Opening a warming centre through the months of November to April allows for certainty for people accessing services and provides stability to staffing. It is difficult to staff sporadic days and hours determined last minute by cold temperatures. The warming centre will allow staff to develop relationships and trust with those using the services and hopefully lead to better housing outcomes for people. The consistent hours will also take the pressure off the Short-Term Shelter Program, local police, Grey Bruce Health Services and other community agencies as there will be a warm place for someone to be directed to.

### **Survey of Local Service Managers**

A survey of local Service Managers showed that warming centres are usually being provided by community-based collaborations and initiatives. They are locally driven responses to the unique needs of a community. Many are partnerships between community-based organizations, municipalities, and the faith community.

Due to the rise in people experiencing homelessness some Service Managers are assisting local agencies to provide services. In a survey of six similar two-tiered Service Managers.

- None of the six Counties directly operate a warming centre
- 4 of the 6 have warming centres run by third parties
- The 4 warming centres are funded by a mix of County, Municipal and community organization funds.

### **Local Need**

Safe N Sound is a local organization that provides services and supports to those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in Owen Sound. Safe n Sound provides advocacy, basic life skills, referrals to supports, access to emergency food, court support, clothing, harm reduction and crisis/peer intervention and support. Safe n Sound support over 800 visits to their program monthly.

The community agency provided extended evening hours this winter and overnight one especially cold weekend. Safe n Sound are interested in providing a warming centre for the 2023-24 winter.

Staff are recommending a pilot project from November 1, 2023 to April 1, 2024 for Safe N Sound to provide a warming centre from 3pm to 8am each day. The warming centre will provide the following services: a resting place for residents, snacks, access to washrooms, laundry, showers, computer and referrals Short Term Shelter Program, community agencies and primary care.

Data will be collected on the demographics of people using the centre, how they accessed the centre, services provided, services required, service gaps and other data to inform recommendations coming from the pilot.

Funding will be provided from the Safe Restart Funding Reserve. \$150,000 will provide staffing, security, and operating funds. Grey Bruce Health Services are supportive of the pilot and willing to assist where possible.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

None.

## Financial and Resource Implications

The \$150,000 project will be funded from the Safe Restart Funding Reserve that is anticipated to have a \$1,287,200 balance at the end of 2023. The portion that relates to 2024 will be included in the 2024 budget.

### Relevant Consultation

- Internal (list) Finance
- External (list) Safe n Sound. Grey Bruce Health Services

## Appendices and Attachments