

Hanover-Owen Sound Task Force December 1, 2020 – 9:30 am

The Hanover-Owen Sound Task Force met on the above date through electronic participation with the following members in attendance:

Present: Chair Selwyn Hicks, Councillors O’Leary, Desai, Milne; and Warden McQueen

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, CAO, Randy Scherzer, Director of Planning, Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture, Anne Marie Shaw, Director of Housing, Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services; Heather Morrison, Clerk; Stephanie Lacey-Avon, Intermediate Planner; and Brian Tocheri, Hanover CAO

Guests: Francesca Dobbyn, Executive Director, United Way Grey Bruce

Call to Order

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 9:30.

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

Business Arising

Randy Scherzer reviewed the Recommendations and Opportunities document which highlights points, questions, opportunities and further information requested from previous Task Force meetings. He provided an overview of the most recent meeting discussions related to addiction and mental health services and also noted that staff are reaching out to other stakeholders in order to provide further data which will be gathered for the final report of the Task Force. He highlighted the common themes from the November 16, 2020 meeting which are contained within the Recommendations and Opportunities document.

Mr. Scherzer spoke to questions arising from the last meeting .

Delegations

Grey Bruce Public Health Update-Andrea Riley

Chair Hicks noted that Ms. Riley was unable to attend today's meeting and will follow up with information related to the update from Grey Bruce Public Health. This information will be forwarded to the Task Force members and posted on the County website once received.

Warden McQueen joined the meeting.

Social Services Overview-Barb Fedy, Director of Social Services

Ms. Fedy provided an overview of Grey County Social Services which includes Ontario Works, Children's Services and EarlyON programs. A caseload comparison from 2018 to 2020 was provided to the Task Force for Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) along with other provincial comparators.

Ms. Fedy then outlined the reasons for application to OW as well as caseload numbers per municipality in Grey County. She highlighted the trends, pre COVID-19, which include an increase in length of time on assistance and clients with multiple barriers, making a harder to serve clientele. Ms. Fedy also noted that the ODSP caseload is currently on the rise across the province. She also spoke to the trend of more females than males currently accessing social assistance. The combined OW and ODSP caseloads by municipality were reviewed as well as the access to local services based on those caseloads.

Ms. Fedy noted that historically, Ontario Works has been the life stabilization and employment component of social assistance. However, the employment portion is being removed from that OW portion and being moved to the provincial level, through the Employment Services Transformation initiative. There was also discussion on continuing to build on the established local hub of services to support our vulnerable population.

An outline of the Children's Services program was then provided including the EarlyON programs and fee subsidy program. Ms. Fedy spoke to licensed childcare locations, both centres and private home spaces, and program capacity within Grey County. She highlighted the costs of childcare in the area and surrounding regions. She also noted the lack of Registered Early Childhood Educators in the area.

Ms. Fedy then highlighted some accomplishments within the Social Services department including social assistance modernization, managing staff retirements and staff onboarding, significant collaboration with community stakeholders and emergency management changes related to COVID-19 and evacuation centres.

Challenges were also reviewed which include transportation barriers for clients, availability of local addiction and mental health services, modernization changes and program impacts, lack of affordable and attainable housing, COVID-19 and the end of federal emergency assistance programs.

Program enhancements related to COVID-19 restrictions were then outlined. These include phone call check-ins with clients, MyBenefits mobile app, virtual monitoring of home child care providers, safe restart of childcare including an increase in required protocols supporting public health requirements, Ontario Student Nutrition Program and reallocation of Social Services Van Driver to assist with delivery of food hampers, backpacks for the United Way Backpack program and PPE delivery and drop off.

Questions from the Task Force members then followed. Ms. Fedy provided the current monthly entitlements for Ontario Works based on family size. Discussion occurred on the potential for a guaranteed income program and the current Community Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program and the uncertainty of social assistance caseloads once the CERB ends. Discussion related to the opportunity to have a one-stop shop for social assistance services occurred.

Overview of United Way-Francesca Dobbyn, Executive Director

Ms. Dobbyn provided the Task Force with an overview of the United Way Bruce Grey. She spoke to the Breakfast Club program and provided numbers and associated costs to the members. She outlined the priorities of the organization which include: From Poverty to Possibility; Healthy People, Strong Communities and All that kids can be. She noted that 100% of the funds donated to United Way Bruce Grey stay in the community. Ms. Dobbyn also outlined the Mission of the organization to meet the unmet needs in Grey and Bruce Counties.

The various funding streams for the United Way were then outlined. These include donations, grants for United Way projects and grants for partnered community projects. She noted that the charitable and not for profit sector are being relied on more and more to provide for people's basic needs. She provided an overview of the various food programs supported by United Way.

Ms. Dobbyn then spoke to the utility program which has assisted with more than \$2.7 million dollars of utility costs in the past 15 years. She noted that there have been policy changes over the past several years that have assisted with this program including no winter disconnections, no rural load limiters and no Friday disconnections.

The Backpack Program was then outlined noting that for the past 16 years, 28,626 backpacks have been provided to families in need. From 2015-2019, 350+ backpacks were provided to Hanover families and 2030+ to Owen Sound families. Ms. Dobbyn

also highlighted the provision of meals to homeless sheltering in local motels, the ability to be connected through the purchase of tablets and pandemic financial support.

She noted that the United Way brings people together to solve problems and create opportunities. She spoke to an example of stakeholder collaboration relative to COVID-19 situations.

Questions from the members then followed. Ms. Dobbyn noted that the United Way of Grey Bruce is an autonomous organization who looks after the local community needs, therefore local needs can be customized. She also provided comments related to the earlier discussion surrounding a universal basic income including positive choices, housing and food securities and overall community improvement.

Anne Marie Shaw spoke to rent supplement program provisions and the benefits of such a program. Ms. Dobbyn noted the challenges related to servicing smaller communities such as Hanover with the same programs and supports provided in a larger urban area like Owen Sound. General discussion occurred on what the end of the pandemic will look like and how vulnerable residents will manage once the federal assistance ends.

Other Business

There was none.

Next Meeting Dates

December 11, 2020 9:30 am.

On motion by Councillor Milne and Councillor Desai the meeting adjourned at 11:16 am.

Selwyn Hicks, Chair