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ORGCODE CONSULTING INC.

**A SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY
CONSULTATIONS ON A PLAN TO
REACH FUNCTIONAL ZERO
HOMELESSNESS BY 2030 IN
GREATER SUDBURY**



 rgCode Consulting Inc., at the request of the City of Greater Sudbury, completed community consultations with various entities on January 15 and 16, 2024 with regards to the City Council direction for staff to prepare a plan on what it would take to realize functional zero homelessness by 2030. This report outlines which entities were consulted and summarizes the contributions from those discussions.

WHO WAS CONSULTED

The following entities participated in consultations:

- ~ Canadian Mental Health Association
- ~ Centre de Sante Communautaire du Grand Sudbury
- ~ Community Builders
- ~ City of Greater Sudbury Planning
- ~ Elgin Street Mission
- ~ Greater Sudbury Housing Corporation
- ~ Greater Sudbury Police Service
- ~ Health Sciences North
- ~ Infrastructure Canada
- ~ Kina Gbezhgomi Child and Family Services
- ~ Monarch Recovery Services
- ~ N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre
- ~ Northern Initiative for Social Action
- ~ Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services
- ~ People with lived experience of homelessness in Greater Sudbury
- ~ Salvation Army - Cedar Place
- ~ Samaritan Centre
- ~ Sudbury Action Centre for Youth
- ~ United Way
- ~ YMCA Employment and Immigration Services
- ~ YWCA - Genevra House

City staff from Housing Stability and Homelessness in the Community Development Department were not present at the consultations to help create an open environment where participants felt they could be candid in their remarks.

SUMMARY OF MAIN IDEAS FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

A VARIETY OF HOUSING SOLUTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR THE PLAN

Supportive Housing: there is a need to have housing that is permanent, has 24/7 supports available onsite, and is deeply affordable for those individuals experiencing homelessness with the most complex and often co-occurring needs. Appreciating there are different populations that can be served in supportive housing and different models of support, the consultations revealed a desire to have culturally appropriate and safe Indigenous-specific supportive housing, supportive housing for people living with co-occurring mental illness and substance use that have experienced chronic homelessness, supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness that also frequently experience incarceration, and supportive housing specifically for women that have experienced trauma and chronic homelessness.

Transitional Housing: while the question of *Transition to where?* permeated several discussions regarding transitional housing, there was still strong support for more transitional housing. Some of the population groups named as potentially benefiting from transitional housing in Greater Sudbury were youth, survivors of domestic/intimate partner violence, people completing residential substance use recovery programs, and people exiting incarceration.

Deeply Affordable Housing: acknowledging the woefully inadequate shelter portion of income assistance relative to the cost of rental accommodation in Greater Sudbury, many entities consulted spoke to the need for more deeply affordable housing that people relying on income supports can afford. It was mentioned that this is necessary not only to respond to current homelessness, especially amongst those individuals where poverty was the primary factor driving their homelessness, but also necessary to prevent future homelessness of others in the community. Several people consulted expressed a desire to see easier access to Rent Geared to Income housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness.

CORE VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND FOUNDATIONS

The most cited values, principles and foundations mentioned in the consultations that were recommended to help guide the framing and implementation of the plan are as follows (listed alphabetically):

- ~ Accountable to the people served
- ~ Choice and self-determination
- ~ Coordinated and collaborative
- ~ Empathetic
- ~ Empowered
- ~ Equity
- ~ Follows the 7 Grandfather Teachings
- ~ Harm reducing
- ~ Holistic
- ~ Housing is a Human Right
- ~ Inclusive
- ~ Non-judgmental
- ~ Respectful and dignified
- ~ Services are easy to access and navigate
- ~ Tailored to the unique needs of each household served
- ~ Trauma-informed
- ~ Transparent

THE ROLE OF THE CITY AS THE SERVICE MANAGER IS NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD & SHOULD BE CLARIFIED IN THE PLAN

“The city should...” was a phrase heard multiple times during the consultations. Clear from the words that followed those three words is that many entities in the community (both inside and outside the homelessness and housing support sector) do not understand the City’s role as a Service Manager. Some groups were under the impression that it was solely city funding that was allocated to organizations. Others thought City staff have the authority and resources to immediately open hundreds of more shelter beds or housing units if desired. Finally, the City’s responsibilities for things like Coordinated Access were not well understood. The plan should consider making clear the roles and responsibilities of the City as Service Manager as it relates to plan implementation.

A 24/7/365 SHELTER IS STRONGLY SUPPORTED

Overwhelmingly people consulted see the need for Greater Sudbury to have adequate shelter space, and that the shelter needs to operate 24 hours per day. It was felt that with the current hours of service delivery it is difficult to sustain engagement with people who use shelters on housing matters. In addition, there was concern expressed about the health and general welfare of people that use shelter having to return to the elements each day, especially those with medical frailties and/or older adults. Furthermore, it was felt that there would be less conflict and enhanced supports for immediate needs if the shelter operated 24/7. It was also shared that lack of shelter availability during the day makes referrals to shelter services very difficult and often highly ineffective, while also making it difficult for various services to stay in contact with people that use the shelter and also use their services. While acknowledging there must be a balance between emergency responses and housing solutions, the deficits perceived in shelter delivery were seen as impacting the latter and part of what is driving the rise in encampments in the community.

WITHOUT ADDRESSING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES IN THE NOT FOR PROFIT HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES SECTOR, FUNCTIONAL ZERO WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE

Recruiting and retaining staff is a significant challenge in the non-profit homelessness and housing support services sector. The pandemic was hard on the workforce, with high degree of turnover, and the sector is yet to fully bounce back. It was shared that job postings stay open for some positions in the sector, and that the pool of applicants is not as plentiful as pre-pandemic applicants, and that finding people that meet the requirements for the job can be challenging. This is all occurring against a backdrop of increased service demands with existing staff stretched very thin on some days. It was expressed that unless there is a new strategy to attract qualified candidates to the sector, and if funding for agencies does not improve in order to provide competitive wages, not only will Functional Zero be impossible — the existing service infrastructure may collapse. Well supported ideas like expanding shelter hours to operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week will also be impossible.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HEALTH SECTOR AND THE HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING SUPPORT SECTOR WOULD BENEFIT FROM IMPROVEMENT

From the Health Sector, there is frustration at the lack of availability of shelter space, the difficulties figuring out who to call where and when to get assistance for a patient experiencing homelessness, and the lack of appropriate housing. Meanwhile, many in the homelessness and housing support sector are frustrated with reported difficulties accessing mental health and addiction services along with other primary health care services, and, discharges to the street or shelter without advance warning and sometimes with conditions that the non-profit service provider cannot support.

It was suggested that the community may be better served by having a health, homelessness and housing integrated service planning and operations table. This may help facilitate improved communication between all parties and help all parties better understand roles and responsibilities. One of the features recommended for plan implementation is to find complimentary ways for the health sector and homelessness and housing support sector to communicate and implement activities in a mutually reinforcing fashion when engaging with the same population group.

INCOME SUPPORTS ARE WOEFULLY INADEQUATE FOR PEOPLE TO ACCESS AND SUSTAIN HOUSING INDEPENDENTLY

There is strong support for the City of Greater Sudbury to help advocate for improvements to income supports: OW; ODSP; OAS; GIS; CPP. It was felt that without improvements to income supports — at least keeping pace with inflation — that helping people exit homelessness will only be more difficult, and more people will likely descend into homelessness. Reaching Functional Zero was seen as daunting without there being an increase in income support levels.

RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IMPACT HOUSING AND SERVICE ACCESS AND SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN THE PLAN

Several organizations that work with members of the BIPOC community (Black, Indigenous, Other People of Colour), expressed concern about the level of racism and discrimination faced when trying to rent housing or access other services. In particular, non-white newcomers to Canada and First Nations people were seen as disadvantaged currently in Greater Sudbury. Through the consultations, promoting equity in the plan was recommended. Furthermore, it was suggested through the consultations that consideration be given to increasing **for Indigenous, by Indigenous** approaches to respond to homelessness and housing supports as one strategy to address the racism and discrimination experienced by Indigenous Peoples and to have a greater impact on reducing the proportion of the homeless population that identifies as Indigenous.

A HOUSING LOSS PREVENTION STRATEGY IS RECOMMENDED FOR THE PLAN TO REALIZE FUNCTIONAL ZERO

Without addressing inflow into homelessness more effectively, there is concern that outflow will never keep up and that net reductions in the overall number of people experiencing homelessness will be impossible. There are concerns about the rise in older adults seeking assistance, the rise in families seeking assistance, and individual adults with more complex needs losing housing primarily for issues associated with affordability and/or increasingly compromised health. There was frustration shared that people losing Rent Geared to Income housing is particularly frustrating given it is the most affordable housing in the City. Throughout the housing continuum, a comprehensive approach to lessening housing loss was recommended to be included in the plan. Such a strategy should focus not only on eviction, but also housing situations where the household is not the leaseholder or owner of the dwelling but is being dislodged from a living situation that is otherwise safe (e.g., free from abuse) and appropriate (e.g., not overcrowded). Furthermore, it was suggested that such a strategy include an early-detection of potential housing loss mechanism specifically for Rent Geared to Income housing.

“NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US”: ENSURING ONGOING INVOLVEMENT OF VOICES OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED/LIVING EXPERIENCE

An intentional consultation session was held with people with lived/living experience of homelessness. Those with lived/living experience consulted on the plan offered keen insights into what they would do if they were in charge (e.g., create a lot more housing; need for a 24/7 shelter or some other suitable place to go during the day), what gaps need to be addressed (e.g., ensuring there is shelter available 24/7/365; more workers with lived experience), what types of housing and support are needed in Greater Sudbury (e.g., more government assisted housing rather than relying so much on the private market; more types of housing for people that need intensive supports), and which population groups they felt are underserved in the current system design (e.g., youth; men).

While this process included the voices of people with lived/living experience, as part of the broader consultations other entities also reinforced the importance of including people with lived/living experience on several occasions. The City is encouraged by people consulted to create more formal structures to include the voices of people with lived/living experience going forward and to lay out this intention and process in the plan.

IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the various interested and affected parties consulted on the City of Greater Sudbury's development of a plan to realize functional zero homelessness generally agreed:

- ~ Housing stock that is affordable and has the right supports is necessary to realize functional zero homelessness;
- ~ The plan to realize functional zero homelessness should reflect the core values, principles and foundations suggested;
- ~ The City's roles and responsibilities as it pertains to homelessness and housing supports should be made clear in the plan;

- ~ A 24/7 shelter is strongly supported to address the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness and improve connections to programs that help people exit homelessness;
- ~ Recruiting and retaining staff to the sector will be necessary to have the workforce to realize functional zero homelessness;
- ~ Improvements can be made in communication, planning and service delivery between the health sector and homelessness and housing support sector and should be a key feature of the plan;
- ~ The community would like the City of Greater Sudbury to take a more active role in advocating for increased income supports, and it is felt that without increasing income supports functional zero homelessness will be difficult, if not impossible;
- ~ Racism and discrimination is said to be impacting current access to rental housing and services, and ensuring there is an equity lens applied to the plan and implementation, and in particular examining more *for Indigenous, by Indigenous* approaches to responding to the needs of the unhoused in the community should be a consideration in the plan and implementation;
- ~ Addressing inflow into homelessness through more efforts to prevent housing loss is necessary to realize functional zero homelessness; and,
- ~ The voices of people with lived/living experience should be included in system planning, program design and evaluation in a routine manner going forward.