

A photograph of a sunset over rolling hills, with the sun low on the horizon and rays of light illuminating the scene. The hills are covered in dry grass and shrubs.

# Shelter Development Strategy

## Update Report

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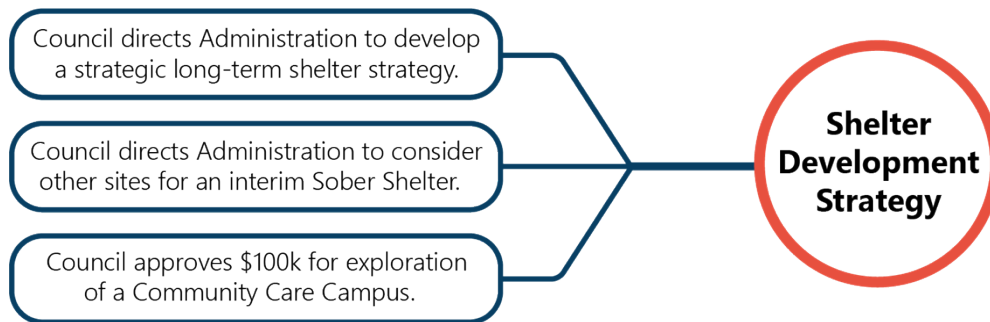
May 2023

**PUBLIC**

## Strategy Rationale:

The City of Lethbridge (CoL) owns the existing Shelter land and building and manages a lease with a third-party operator who is chosen and funded by the Government of Alberta (GOA). Outside of this site, the CoL has historically taken a hands-off approach when it comes to any new shelter development in the community, leaving this responsibility to the Province of Alberta and interested not-for-profit organizations. However, problems linked to homelessness in our community have been exacerbated by issues like the opioid crisis, COVID pandemic, inflation and cost-of-living increases, and the City can take an increasingly involved approach to shelter development. By expanding the City’s involvement in this area, the City will be able to better influence and facilitate appropriate capacity levels, as well as site design and location.

City Council has provided a number of directives to Administration over the past year (Appendix A), and this Shelter Development Strategy aims to pull these different directives together into a holistic and strategic approach. This will clarify the City’s roles, responsibilities, goals, and outcomes relating to short-term and long-term shelter development in the City.



### Summary of Council Direction\*

Council directs administration to develop a strategic long-term shelter strategy.	<b>Jan 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023</b>
Council approves \$225,670 for operations of an overnight comfort centre.	<b>Dec 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Council rescinds direction authorizing Administration to apply for development approval for an interim shelter at the Civic Curling Rink. Council further directs Administration to consider alternate sites for an interim Sober Shelter and report back.	<b>Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Council directs Administration to proposed Land Use Bylaw updates regarding “Shelter”, “Supportive Housing”, and other related social uses as well as begin the rezoning process for a new Direct Control Bylaw at the current shelter.	<b>Nov 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Council authorizes Administration to apply for development approval for an interim shelter at the Civic Curling Rink.	<b>Aug 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Council approves a budget up to \$100,000 to procure a consultant to conduct engagement and develop conceptual designs and a business case for a community care campus.	<b>April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>

\*More context and links to Council minutes can be found in Appendix A.

## Goal of the Shelter Development Strategy

1. To clarify the City’s involvement in shelter development and identify opportunities to ensure that there is land available and adequately zoned for ‘Shelter’ use as defined in Land Use Bylaw 6300.
2. To ensure that the City of Lethbridge has adequate shelter capacity to house all those experiencing homelessness in the Community on any given night.

## Shelter Capacity Context

To understand what problem the City is aiming to solve, it is important to understand the current demand on the City’s shelter capacity, keeping in mind that this demand will ebb and flow daily and based on seasonal conditions.

As per the 2022 Point-in-Time Homelessness Count, 454 people were experiencing homelessness of some form on the night of September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Of the 454 individuals, **235 were unsheltered**, 92 were accessing emergency housing, and 127 were provisionally accommodated. These numbers are a substantial increase over what was recorded during the 2018 Point-in-Time Homelessness Count where 223 individuals were experiencing homelessness, with just **7 unsheltered**. Not only has the number of individuals experiencing homelessness nearly doubled since 2018, the number of those unsheltered has increased by nearly **35X**.

There is no single-reason why the number of people experiencing homelessness in Lethbridge has nearly doubled in just four years; factors including, but not limited to, the opioid crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and cost-of-living have impacted all aspects of a person’s life that might cause someone to experience homelessness. Some of these aspects include employment & financial stability, mental & physical health, addictions, family relations, marginalization, and more.

While the number of people experiencing homelessness has nearly doubled since 2018, the shelter capacity in the City of Lethbridge has remained unchanged since the early 2000’s. The community has an average shelter capacity of approximately 157 beds, meaning that on the night of the 2022 Point-in-Time Homelessness Count the community had a gap of approximately 170 shelter beds.

### Current Shelter Capacity in the Community:

Organization	Capacity	Target Population
<b>Blood Tribe Department of Health</b>	~125 beds	General population; low-barrier
<b>Wood’s Emergency Youth Shelter</b>	8	Youth
<b>YWCA</b>	24	Women & Children

# Current Issues in Increasing Shelter Capacity

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Despite a great deal of discussion around the need to increase shelter capacity in the community and several recent unsuccessful efforts to do so, the demand on shelter beds has outpaced supply in our community. Through analysis, the City has identified three major restrictions that have impacted the ability to increase supply. While any one of these restrictions may be difficult enough for an applicant to overcome, the reality is that often all three are typically stacked, compounding the challenge at hand.

## **1. Lack of available and appropriately zoned land to purchase, develop, or redevelop.**

The lack of available and appropriately zoned land is one of the earliest hurdles that organizations face when developing social services within the City of Lethbridge. In Land Use Bylaw 6300, there are no land use districts that allow 'Shelter' use as a permitted use, and only two land use districts (Downtown Commercial (C-D) and Public Building (P-B)) where 'Shelter' is a discretionary use, which is subject to appeal to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board. This typically means that an organization wishing to develop a shelter in Lethbridge will have to either go through a contentious rezoning process, or likely have their discretionary development appealed – all of which creates uncertainty both operationally and financially. Lastly, even if a property is properly zoned, it must be available at the right moment for lease or purchase.

The City experienced these difficulties firsthand in fall 2022 when Administration, at the direction of City Council, took steps to receive development approval for an interim Sober Shelter at the Civic Curling Rink. Administration had analyzed multiple municipal properties that could quickly be converted to accommodate a shelter at a reasonable cost - this was done alongside recommendations from the Social Services Integration Group (an ad-hoc committee made up of various community stakeholders). This analysis identified the Civic Curling Rink as the only appropriate and available City owned facility. A robust public engagement strategy was then developed with over 200 people attending public open houses, nearly 2000 people viewing the related GetInvolved webpage, and 461 people responding to the online survey. Despite this rigorous site selection and robust public engagement, Council ultimately decided to rescind their direction giving Administration approval to apply for development approval for an interim Sober Shelter at the Civic Curling Rink.

## **2. Access to Funding**

This restriction is two-fold, firstly organizations must find capital funding to develop their project as most potential shelter operators are not-for-profit organizations and lack access to substantial capital to purchase a building or redevelop a site to be used a shelter. Secondly, organizations must then find operational funding to sustain their organization's activities, which is necessary to accommodate an increased demand on their organization's resources. Without upfront government funding commitments, organizations will see the development of additional shelter capacity as risky.

The City does provide capital funding to housing projects along the entire housing continuum through the Affordable Housing Capital Grant; however, the City has historically not provided operational funding to housing providers in the Community.



### 3. Availability and Willingness of Operators

The development and operations of shelters is often a contentious topic with community members holding varying, and often opposing views on how to manage the situation. Furthermore, because of the rapid rise in visible homelessness throughout the Country, the topics of homelessness, encampments, substance use and more have seen an increased focus by the public.

Developing and operating a shelter is often a politically complicated endeavor that includes a large amount of reputational risk for organizations. Because of this reputational risk, organization's may be hesitant to develop or operate a shelter as they might experience slander and defamation as a result of going through the rezoning and/or appeal process.

## The Municipality's Role in Reducing Barriers

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When discussing a municipality's role in shelter development, we can think of it on a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum the municipality takes a hands-off approach to facilitating shelter development and generally restricts shelters from being developed in most (or all) of the community. On the other end, the municipality takes a much more active role in making it easier to develop a shelter in the community, even going so far as to develop and operate their own shelter(s).

Below is a breakdown of Administration's recommendation on where the City could most strategically position itself to ensure adequate shelter space is created throughout our community.

### 1. Land Use Regulation (recommended)

- The City could increase the number of parcels throughout the City that allow 'Shelter' as a permitted use via Land Use Bylaw amendments. This would decrease uncertainty for shelter developers and provide clear direction on where shelters are appropriate in the City and under what requirements.

### 2. Land Banking & Asset Rationalization (recommended)

- Even if there is appropriately zoned land, that land must be available for development at the right time. The City could look to actively bank land for infill and redevelopment purposes for a variety of short, medium, and long-term opportunities including shelter and social service opportunities. This provides the opportunity for the City to lease properties and/or negotiate the sale of strategic properties to facilitate shelter development.

### 3. Capital Funding (recommended)

- The City currently provides capital grants to social housing providers through the Affordable and Social Housing Capital Grant. While this grant is currently fully committed, future funds through the grant could be used to incentivize shelter development.

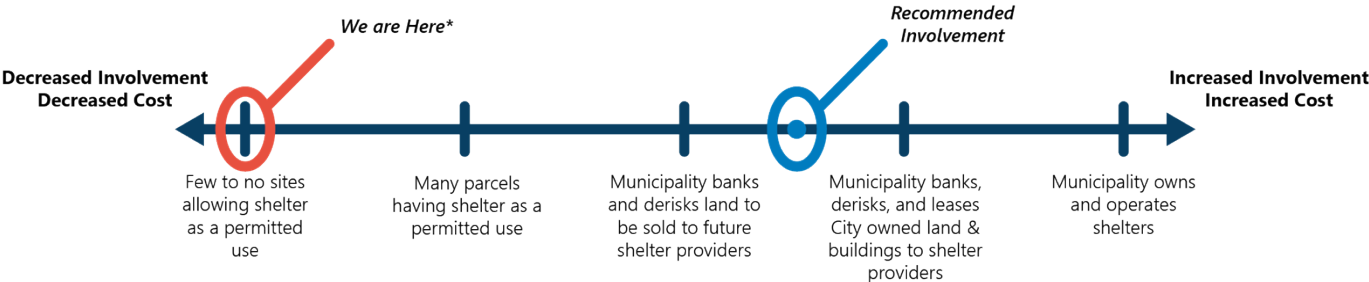
**4. Operational Funding (not recommended)**

- This is typically left up to the Province or not-for-profits. Providing ongoing operational funding can be costly and risky for a municipality and could set a precedent for funding other social operations throughout the City.

**5. Service Operations (not recommended)**

- While uncommon, municipalities have the ability to own and operate housing of all forms, including shelters. This would result in considerable ongoing capital and operational costs including considerable additions of full-time employees to manage increased workload.

**Administration’s Recommendation**



Administration believes that taking the following actions would improve the short and long-term shelter development opportunities in the City:

- Making 'Shelter' a permitted use in more areas of the City.
- Actively land banking for social uses.
- Provide capital funding to potential shelter developers, potentially using the currently approved Affordable and Social Housing Fund.
- Continue lobbying efforts to other levels of government for increased capital and operational funding to increase shelter capacity in Lethbridge.

## Council Recommendations

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**1. BE IT RESOLVED that City Council direct Administration to:**

- a. Return to Council through the Cultural & Social Standing Policy Committee with quarterly updates on the implementation of the Shelter Development Strategy.
- b. Work with the Government of Alberta and current/potential shelter operators to identify capital and operational funding sources for temporary and permanent shelter development on City owned land that will adequately address the needs of those who are difficult to house.

**2. FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that City Council:**

- a. Rescind the following April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022 resolution:

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT City Council approve a budget up to \$100,000 with a recommended funding sourcing from Council Contingencies, to procure a consultant to do the following:*

1. *Conduct community engagement on the creation of a made for Lethbridge Community care campus;*
2. *Create conceptual designs for a community care campus; and*
3. *Develop a business case for a community care campus; and*

*FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that Administration provide regular updates to the Cultural and Social Standing Policy Committee at each step.*

- b. Reallocate the previously allocated \$100,000 from Council Contingencies to the execution of the Shelter Development Strategy at the discretion of the City Manager or designate.

**3. FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that City Council direct Administration to:**

- a. Proceed with the confidential recommendations provided in confidential Attachment 1b.

## Appendix A: Prior Related Council Direction

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### January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

From an Official Business Motion from Councillor John Middleton-Hope and Councillor Nick Paladino, Council voted unanimously to direct Administration to develop a strategic, long-term response for sheltering residents in need and those who are difficult to house (high acuity), including the establishment of a permanent shelter that may also be used to temporarily house citizens during severe inclement weather or in the event of a disaster (including any required funding amounts and the proposed sources of funds), and report back to Council through the Cultural and Social Standing Policy Committee by the end of Q2 2023.

### December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

Council approves \$225,670 to be allocated as a one-time cost to Streets Alive Mission to enable operation of an Overnight Comfort Centre.

### November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

Council rescinds its August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022 direction which authorized Administration to apply for development approval for an interim shelter at the Civic Curling Centre.

Council provided further direction to consider alternate sites for an interim Sober Shelter and report back through the Cultural and Social Standing Policy Committee. Council also authorized the Mayor to write a letter to the Provincial Government requesting support on funding opportunities and site selections for Sober Shelters in Lethbridge.

### November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

Council directs Administration to return to Council before the end of Q3 2023 with proposed Land Use Bylaw amendments regarding "shelter", "supportive housing", and other related social uses.

Council also directs Administration to begin the process of a new Direct Control Bylaw for the current Lethbridge Shelter and Stabilization Centre with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, reading to occur before the end of Q1 2023.

*Note: due to a number of factors, including allowing the new shelter operator time to begin operations, the need for proper neighbour consultation, and the need for proper staffing resources to complete this project, Administration postponed the rezoning application. 1st reading is now planned for May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023.*

### August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

Council authorizes Administration to proceed with the necessary steps to apply for development approvals for an interim shelter at the Civic Curling Centre.

### April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022:

Council approves a budget up to \$100,000 to procure a consultant to conduct engagement and develop conceptual designs and a business case for a community care campus.