

Peel moving toward ?sustainable solution? for influx of asylum claimants

Update on Peel's asylum claimant response presented at February 22 Regional Council meeting

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Peel's shelter system is now operating at 383 per cent capacity.

This is due to an influx of asylum claimants in the region. Asylum claimants currently occupy 72 per cent of available shelter and overflow hotel beds in Peel.

This data was presented in a staff report submitted to Region of Peel council at its February 22 meeting by Sean Baird, Peel's Commissioner of Human Services.

?Continuing to support asylum claimants through the shelter system and overflow hotels is not sustainable,? reads the report. ?A different approach, with appropriate sustainable allocation-based funding is required to improve service to asylum claimants, while reclaiming space in the shelter system for local individuals and families experiencing homelessness.?

The report said that Regional staff are continuing to move towards a more sustainable model for helping asylum claimants; one that's outside of the shelter system. Staff said the Region will do this by opening dorm-style shelter facilities for asylum claimants and designing a Regional reception centre with federal, provincial and municipal partners.

On November 24, 2023, the Government of Canada announced it would be providing \$7 million for the creation of a reception centre and temporary shelter for asylum claimants in Peel.

Baird explained in his report that Regional staff were seeking approval to enter into ?direct negotiation contracts with service providers to operate facilities and with required specialized vendors, contractors and suppliers for the capital improvements required for facility start-up.?

Council supported the request unanimously.

Baird's report noted that Regional staff are preparing a proposal for the federal and provincial governments to request additional funding for the reception centre, as well as temporary shelter facilities and ongoing supports.

As of February 4, Peel housed 1,529 asylum claimants. It says it expects to see the influx of asylum claimants continue at current, or increased levels in the future. Historically, asylum claimants accounted for about five per cent of Peel's shelter capacity, compared to the current 72 per cent. Global conflict and crisis has caused an increase in asylum claimants not only in Peel, but in other municipalities across Ontario.

Peel has had to open six more overflow hotels to meet demand and now operates 11 overflow hotels. Regional staff say running the hotels will cost \$68 million in 2024 and they have submitted a claim to the federal government's Interim Housing Assistance Program to manage these costs. Staff said this funding model is not cost-effective or viable in the long run.

Peel opened a dorm-style temporary shelter site for asylum claimants in December 2023 that has 228 spaces and is operating at 100 per cent capacity. Part of the approved request to Council would see more of these facilities opened.

Regional staff said the Regional reception centre will serve as a point of intake for asylum claimants in the (Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area) and will provide streamlined services and supports, immediate respite, and additional shelter spaces for asylum claimants staying in Peel.

The centre will also refer asylum claimants to other participating municipalities for ongoing provision of housing and settlement supports.

Baird's staff report said full details on the reception centre service model, referral pathways to other municipalities, costs, and a proposed funding model will be brought to Regional Council in March.