

Peel seeing ?dramatic rise? in asylum claimants requiring emergency shelter

Shelter system currently operating at 247 per cent occupancy

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Rising levels of global unrest have led to an unprecedented increase in the number of asylum claimants in need of support in Peel.

At Region of Peel Council's September 14 meeting, Peel's Commissioner of Human Services, Sean Baird, brought forward a report outlining the scope of the issue. The report was authored by Peel's Manager of Housing Services, Leslie Moreau.

The report said Peel's shelter system is currently operating at 247 per cent capacity. It added that 57 per cent of shelter occupants were asylum claimants.

The Region said its shelter system has always been used to temporarily house asylum claimants; however, historically asylum claimants have accounted for about five per cent of shelter occupants.

As of August 27, 730 asylum claimants were residing in Peel's shelter overflow hotels. Another 16 were camped outdoors waiting for assistance.

Moreau's report said Peel started to see a sharp increase in asylum claimants in need of shelter this Spring.

According to the report, Peel is preparing a claim for funding from the Federal Government's Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) to assist with the cost of running its shelters.

Region of Peel staff estimate its shelter system costs are currently \$2.5 million per month and estimate a 2023 shelter system cost of \$15 million.

?Staff will also work with community partners to design a sustainable model for sheltering asylum claimants in 2024, continuing to advocate to the federal and provincial governments for required funding,? said Moreau in the report.

Peel submitted its IHAP claim on July 28 and is expecting to see money to help with its shelter system early next year.

Moreau's report said Peel's shelter system was not set up to house people from other countries fleeing war, violence, and persecution.

?A more appropriate, sustainable, and trauma-informed program is required, separate and apart from the shelter system to better meet the needs of this growing population,? the report found.

Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown said he's worried about asylum claimants being turned away from shelters due to overcrowding, especially as winter approaches.

Region of Peel CAO Gary Kent said he has a people first approach and that people need to be taken care of. He said he's been advocating for more funding, especially after seeing Toronto get some additional funding to support asylum claimants.

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie said she'll be pressuring the Provincial and Federal governments for funding to assist Peel.

?It is a very serious problem and I hope we can come to a resolution soon,? said Crombie.

Caledon Mayor Annette Groves sent a letter about the asylum claimant response that was received by Region of Peel Council on September 14.

In it, she said Peel is not getting its fair share of federal funding to help with its shelter system.

?I commend regional staff and our community support agencies who are on the front lines doing all they can to process the refugees as efficiently and compassionately as possible,? said Groves.

Groves said she supports Peel's request for funding from the Federal Government.

Region of Peel staff plan to bring another update on asylum claimants to Council in October.