

Peel submits plans, funding requests to Provincial and Federal governments for asylum claimant response

Peel to open Regional Reception Centre for asylum claimants pending funding

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Region of Peel has developed what it calls a sustainable plan to help asylum claimants ? but it needs the support of the Provincial and Federal governments to implement it.

On March 21 the Region announced it was submitting its ?Asylum Claimant Response ? Moving Towards a Sustainable Model? proposal to the Provincial and Federal governments to let them know what funding would be required to adopt and implement it.

There's an unprecedented number of asylum seekers coming to Canada right now, and it can be seen in Peel Region where emergency shelters are operating well above capacity (over 350 per cent). The Region said the rise in asylum claimants first started in June 2023 and has continued to grow since, with no end in sight.

The Region of Peel, which is in charge of housing services, secured additional shelter facilities and overflow hotels. However, this is expensive and unsustainable from a funding standpoint. Due to this, Peel is looking to differentiate its asylum claimant response system from its emergency shelter and homelessness response system.

The Region has been working on a new model which will contain two distinct components. The Region wants to implement a ?Regional Reception Centre? with coordinated transfers to other municipalities, and dedicated Peel shelter facilities for asylum claimants.

According to the Region, the Regional Reception Centre will serve the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and provide the following services: needs assessments, service navigation, orientation sessions, legal aid, IRCC information, Ontario Works information, language and settlement services, and health services where applicable.

The Region said this approach, which it calls person-centred, will give asylum claimants the tools and resources they need to successfully integrate into Canadian society.

Peel said it needs an annual commitment of \$62,000 per asylum claimant from the Provincial and Federal governments in order to operationalize its Regional Reception Centre. It said funding will move with asylum claimants if they settle outside of Peel.

Peel said regardless of whether it gets the funding, it will create asylum claimant-focused shelters. However, it said if it doesn't get funding, the approach will cause further strain on homelessness prevention efforts and hinder asylum claimants in their efforts to integrate into the community.

The Region also wants the Federal Government to commit to one-time capital and annual operating costs for the Regional Reception Centre, which it currently estimates at \$10 million and \$9.3 million respectively.

Peel's commissioner of human services Sean Baird said the continued arrival of asylum seekers in Peel Region represents a growing social crisis. He said Peel's already-strained homelessness support system is nearing collapse.

?We cannot continue to simply lease additional hotels to provide temporary housing for thousands of asylum seekers,? said Baird. ?A new model is necessary to ensure all levels of government can work together and proper supports can be provided to those who

are here and working to establish themselves in Canada, as well as the tens of thousands expected to continue to arrive into the GTHA.?

Region of Peel Council Chair Nando Iannicca said Peel staff have gone above and beyond to support asylum claimants on their journeys to settling in Canada.

?This is incredibly complex work that touches so many lives,? he said. ?As we move from a crisis-level response to a more sustainable solution, an all-governments approach is required. I look forward to sharing Peel's proposed response and actioning its solutions together.?