

Peel's emergency shelter system operating at 270 per cent capacity

Region taking steps to address increase in homelessness

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There are more people than ever experiencing homelessness in Peel.

According to an October 26 report from Sean Baird, the Region of Peel's Commissioner of Human Services, Peel's emergency shelter system is operating at above 270 per cent capacity.

The report said the number of people living on the streets and in encampments in Peel is increasing to unprecedented levels.

"The system is unable to keep up with demand," reads the report.

Most people experiencing homelessness in Peel are single men and women between the ages of 25 and 54, though the Region is seeing an increase in seniors and youth living rough too.

In 2023, the Region counted 128 encampments where people are living rough, a 167 per cent increase from 2022. It said encampments in Peel are often small and hidden from sight, unlike larger encampments in neighbouring municipalities like Toronto.

The Region is seeing a drastic increase in expenses from overflow in its shelter system. Overflow expenses for 2023 are expected to be nearly \$27 million, and in 2024, overflow expenses are expected to be around \$42 million.

Peel owns, operates or funds eight emergency shelters with a combined total of 449 beds. When these are full, Peel provides temporary emergency shelter through hotel rooms.

In 2022, over 4,000 people used Peel's shelter system.

The October 26 report, which was brought forward at a Region of Peel Council meeting held that day, listed recommendations for Council to approve.

It said while the recommendations would help the issue of homelessness in Peel, ultimately, significantly more resources than what the Region can generate would be needed to reduce and eliminate homelessness in Peel.

In addition to the actions recommended in the report, Council was also urged to continue advocacy to secure more funding from the Provincial and Federal governments.

Council approved the staff recommendations.

The recommendations included the extension of contracts for additional security services, provision of temporary overflow hotel accommodations, and the securing of as-required catering services for supply of meals for those living rough.

Actions the Region will take include expanding its outreach program and maintaining its "do not turn away" policy at its shelters.

Peel will be working to create 338 new shelter beds, 186 of which are replacement beds, by 2028. These beds will come from three different projects that are already in progress.

The Region will be working to improve access to social support for those experiencing homelessness, as well as hiring more housing support workers.

It's also looking to find space for asylum claimants outside of the shelter system, as there's been a large increase in the number of asylum claimants in Peel. Staff said they'd bring more information on this to Council in a future report.

Actions the Region will be researching, but does not yet have budget approval to begin implementing, include expanding drop-in programs; creating encampment policies and protocols; enhancing homelessness prevention; removing barriers to shelter use; building even more shelter beds; and advocating for a more sustainable response program for asylum claimants.