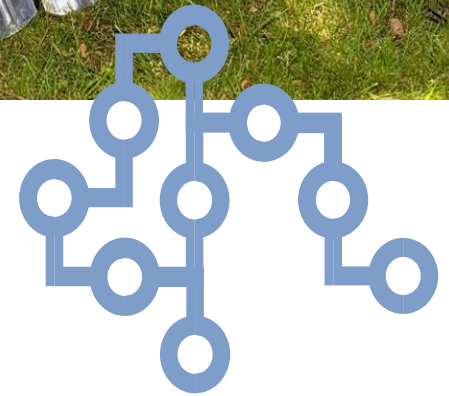
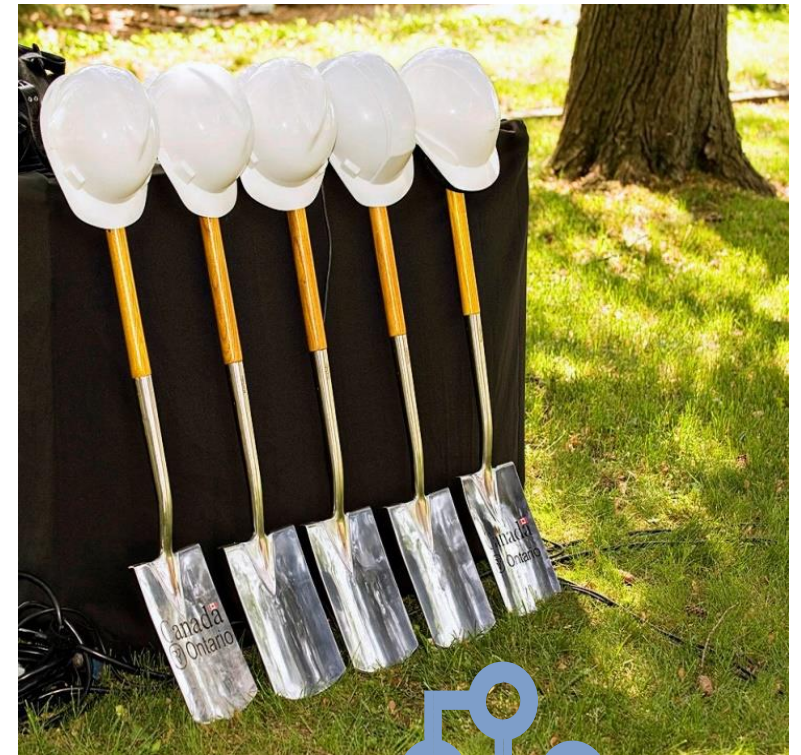


# ST. THOMAS AND ELGIN HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

## TAKING STOCK WORKING TOGETHER

2020 Progress Report



# Introduction

The City of St. Thomas, in its role as the Service Manager for St. Thomas and Elgin County, is responsible for delivering social and community services throughout the City and the County. These services are delivered by St. Thomas – Elgin Social Services Department. As part of its mandate, the Department administers and/or delivers a range of housing and homelessness programs including existing social housing, new affordable housing, rent supplements, housing allowances, portable housing benefits, home repair assistance, homeownership down-payment assistance, funding for emergency shelters and transitional housing, and other homelessness prevention programs including the Housing Links for People (HeLP) program. The City also owns and manages 558 units of housing, including 512 units of rent-geared to income housing.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services Department works in collaboration with existing housing providers, homelessness service providers, and other stakeholders and organizations in the community to help meet the housing and homelessness prevention needs of residents of St. Thomas and Elgin County.

In the past, the Department has undertaken numerous reports and studies about community housing and homeless needs and has worked with organizations to implement many of the key recommendations from those studies.

As required in the *Housing Services Act*, City of St. Thomas Council approved a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan for St. Thomas and Elgin County in December 2013. The Plan was implemented on January 1, 2014. Service Managers are required in the *Act* to report annually to the public by June 30 on progress in achieving the recommendations in their Plans during the preceding year.

**This is the 2020 Progress Report for St. Thomas/Elgin County.**



Service Managers are required to report annually to the public on progress in achieving the recommendations in their 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plans.

# Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County recognize the importance of having affordable, adequate and appropriate housing for its residents. In co-operation with not-for-profit and private-sector partners in the community, and with support from federal and provincial levels of governments, St. Thomas and Elgin County will work towards meeting the housing and support needs of the community, with the elimination of long term homelessness as a key goal.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4
Increase housing supply options to meet projected needs.	Provide supports to keep people in the sustainable housing they currently have.	Enhance the current service system to prevent homelessness, and when homeless “rapidly” move people into stable housing.	Pursue community partnerships and broaden community awareness while advocating to senior levels of government to ensure stable housing and poverty reduction for all residents.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

## Increase housing supply options to meet projected need

### Progress in 2020

#### New Affordable Rental Housing

In January of 2020, 28 brand new units located above the new Social Services office at 230 Talbot St. were filled. 4 of the units are 2 bedrooms and the remainder are 1 bedroom. 14 units are rent-geared-to-income (RGI). 8 units are new affordable units and 6 are market rent.

In addition, funding was announced in 2020 for the Aylmer Brown Street project. This new build will include 12 affordable housing units.

#### Current Regeneration of City-owned Property

In 2020, the City entered into a partnership with Indwell – Hope and Homes to operate 16 self contained micro unit apartments of supportive housing for vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness and high hospital recidivism. The units will be located above the City’s transit building at 614 Talbot St and will be occupied in 2021.

#### Future Regeneration of City-owned Property

The City’s partnership with Indwell – Hope and Homes includes two additional builds of supportive and affordable housing on City owned properties within St. Thomas. The second build of up to 45 units is scheduled to begin in 2021 and will be occupied in 2022. A third build of up to 60 units will follow. Both builds will include community services on the main floor of the building.

#### Assistance to Community Groups

During 2020 the City provided technical assistance and support to community groups in St. Thomas and Elgin to assist with the development of affordable housing.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

## Progress in 2020 (continued)

### Rent Supplements

Rental subsidies that are provided under three Provincially funded programs: 1) Canada Ontario Housing Initiative, 2) Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative, and; 3) Canada Ontario Housing Benefit enable individuals and families to find housing appropriate to their needs in the private rental market which they could not otherwise afford. Subsidies are modest, averaging about \$224 per month. An average of 105 households per month were served by these programs in 2020.

### Community Housing Forum

In March of 2020, a Community Housing Forum was held. The forum brought together local developers, builders and neighbouring municipalities to meet with representatives from various City Departments and CMHC Housing. The purpose of the forum was to provide resources and information regarding financial programs offered by various levels of government to assist in building affordable housing.

### Municipal Support

In 2020, Council authorized an increase of Portable Housing Benefits funding of \$10,000 which supported an additional 4 households to achieve housing stability.

In addition, the City purchased a permanent location for the operation of a 24/7 housing focussed emergency shelter. The current emergency shelter provider will be relocated this new permanent location in 2021.

### Portable Housing Benefits

The City of St. Thomas approved the creation and funding of a Portable Housing Benefit (PHB) rental subsidy program together with the policies for administering the program. 54 rental subsidies were delivered in the form of PHBs. They were offered first to those already on the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing, with a goal of reducing the waitlist. Average monthly benefit has been \$361.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

Provide supports to keep people in the sustainable housing they currently have

### Homelessness Prevention

\$226,394 in HeLP funding was allocated to assist 319 low-income households with homelessness prevention supports. The funds were spent as follows:

- 28% for utility arrears
  - (90 households)
- 28% for last month's rent
  - (90 households)
- 18% for furniture
  - (58 households)
- 13% for rent arrears
  - (40 households)
- 14% for moving costs
  - (45 households)

### Progress in 2020

#### Home Repair Program

\$50,000 from the IAH Home Repair Program helped 8 homeowners and one multi-residential landlord pay for new roofs (4), furnace replacement (1) plumbing repairs (1), electrical repairs (1) and structural repairs (1).

### Enhancing Tenant Capacity and Eviction Prevention

The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) continued to be an effective means to individualize supports and matching to resources for tenants to increase their prospect of having successful tenancies.

The City Housing staff compliment has increased to provide more preventative measures on eviction and homelessness prevention. This includes working proactively with tenants, and participating in Coordinated Access and the Situation Table Emergency Case Conferencing.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

Enhance the current service system to prevent homelessness, and when homeless, “rapidly” move people into stable housing

### Youth Homelessness Protocol

57 youth accessed services through the Youth Homelessness Protocol in 2020.

37% of these youth were 16-18

58% of those who applied for service had experienced a family breakdown.

7% were couch surfing.

12% eviction by other.

7% personal safety concerns.

48% exited Housing Based Case Management.

86% were connect with a YWCA Housing Based Case Manager or Youth in Transition worker.

### Progress in 2020

#### Inn Out of the Cold

In fall of 2020 this emergency shelter operated year round. In addition, a day space for individuals experiencing homelessness was opened as part of our local response to COVID 19.

In total, 687 people experiencing homelessness were served at the day space.

165 people experiencing homelessness stayed overnight at Inn Out of the Cold for a total of 4,614 bed nights. This was an increase of 26 individuals.

The average stay was 22 nights. 24% were women. 10% were youth between 16-24. 47% of the women and 52% of the men stayed between 1-5 nights in total. 21 women and 33 men stayed just 1 night.

The supports provided include: basic needs, emergency shelter, and matching to community resources including housing.

#### Client-Centred Supportive Housing

\$653,024 in CHPI funding helped agencies provide client-centred supported housing as follows:

YWCA Residence (17 beds)

Harmony House (6 beds)

Horizon House (3 beds)

Fairwinds (3 beds)

Unity House (3 beds)

Second Story (6 beds)

Fresh Start (10 beds)

CMHA residential care home program (avg. 60 beds)

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

### Progress in 2020 (continued)

#### CMHA Housing Support

Due to COVID 19, CMHA Elgin suspended its weekly housing drop-in centre which served as an “intake” point for many individuals who were homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness. In its place, CMHA employed a Housing and Homelessness System Navigator to collaborate in partnership with Inn out of the Cold to meet with people experiencing homelessness 1:1 to work on housing plans.

#### Crisis Beds

CMHA Elgin and the YWCA operated a total of 9 “safe beds” serving as temporary emergency shelter for individuals applying for transitional and/or supportive housing services from them, and moved individuals from those beds into appropriate housing when it became available.

#### Family Central Apartments

In addition to operating its 6 supportive affordable housing units, Family Central Apartments renovated its basement to provide Monday to Friday day time drop in services to vulnerable people.

#### Women’s Homelessness

The Taking Action on Women’s Homelessness Advisory Group met regularly in 2020. Member organizations across St. Thomas and Elgin include homelessness service providers, health care providers, and the Ministry of Community, Safety and Correctional Services.

The following action areas provided by OrgCode continue to guide the Taking Action on Women’s Homelessness Advisory Group:

1. Annual Housing and Homelessness Symposium
2. Community of Practice for Housing & Shelter Providers
3. Improved Access to Transportation
4. System Navigation for Women at Risk of Homelessness
5. Creation of Affordable Housing
6. Support Creation of Coordinated Access System

#### Coordinated Access System

In July of 2020 a Coordinated Access System was implemented. This Coordinated Access System utilizes the By Name List to match people experiencing homelessness to housing resources based on willingness, need and priority. The By Name List is a list of names of people in our community actively experiencing homelessness. Throughout 2020 the practices of our local Coordinated Access System continued to be developed and refined to enhance efficiency and best practices.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

Pursue community partnerships and broaden community awareness while advocating to senior levels of government to ensure stable housing and poverty reduction for all residents

### Progress in 2020

#### Committees

The Housing and Homeless Action Group was suspended mid-year due to the pandemic and a change in City staff with the goal of reconvening in early 2021.

In December 2020, a West Elgin Rural Housing Stability Coalition was formed to look closer at the housing and homelessness needs of West Elgin. The coalition's focus is to determine a short-term emergency housing solution and plans for increasing long-term affordable housing stock.

Other committees including Access to Affordable Housing, Coordinated Access, Youth Homelessness Protocol and Taking Action on Women's Homelessness met on a regular basis. The committees consist of a wide range of community partners including members from CMHA, CCHC, YWCA, Inn Out of the Cold, Fresh Start, Poverty Coalition, United Way, Drug and Alcohol Strategy, Residential Care Homes and others.

#### Street Outreach

In 2020, a Street Outreach Advisory Board was established between the City, YWCA, CMHA and CCHC. OrgCode was retained to work with the Advisory Board to write a proposal to senior levels of government for funding to implement a Housing Focused Street Outreach service with the goal of operationalizing the service in 2021.

#### Provincial Activities

City staff have continued their ongoing involvement with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding existing service provisions and future opportunities for increasing affordable housing stock. In addition, City membership in OMSSA and City Staff's active participation in OMSSA discussions at various levels has contributed to OMSSA's lobbying efforts with MMAH.

#### Poverty Coalition

The Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty has continued to work closely with three main priority groups: Housing, Economic Security and Food Security. Throughout 2020, the Poverty Coalition worked collaboratively to address urgent needs throughout the pandemic such as access to food. The coalition also implemented a communication campaign to raise awareness about poverty across Elgin County.

[www.povertycoalition.ca](http://www.povertycoalition.ca)