

Staff Report

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Report To: **General Government Committee**

Date of Meeting: October 7, 2024 **Report Number:** CAO-005-24

Authored by: Melissa Westover, Manager of Communications

Submitted By: Mary-Anne Dempster, CAO

By-law Number: _____ **Resolution Number:** _____

File Number:

Report Subject: Tourism Office - Winter Warming Location

Recommendations:

1. That Report CAO-005-24, and any related delegations or communication items, be received;
2. That Council direct the Deputy CAO/Solicitor to execute a short-term lease of the former Tourism Office located at 181 Liberty Street South to The Regional Municipality of Durham, for the purposes of a Winter Warming Centre from November 2024 to April 2025 for a nominal rent;
3. That Council request The Regional Municipality of Durham to engage and communicate with nearby businesses, residents and appropriate agencies to ensure they are informed of the Warming Centre at this site, what it involves and who to contact if individuals require support; and
4. That all interested parties listed in Report CAO-005-24, and any delegations be advised of Council's decision.

Report Overview

Staff have been working collaboratively with local partners to proactively respond to the growing issue of homelessness in our community.

With the identified need for an accessible Winter Warming Centre in Clarington, the Region of Durham has requested use of a Municipal facility to provide this service, and Staff are recommending use of the former Tourism Office located at Liberty Street and Baseline Road in Bowmanville.

1. Background

Homelessness in Clarington

- 1.1 There are people in Clarington who are living without stable, permanent, appropriate housing. The Regional Municipality of Durham is responsible for all social service delivery in all Durham municipalities, including Clarington, as mandated by the province.
- 1.2 In March 2024, Region of Durham Staff [presented an overview of the Regional homelessness system](#) to Council.
- 1.3 Homelessness is a growing issue across Ontario. As part of the Ontario Big City Mayors Caucus, Clarington has supported their recently launched “[Solve the Crisis](#)” campaign, which highlights how municipalities have been tackling this issue head on, funding various programs and spaces to find solutions with limited resources. The Campaign calls on the Provincial and Federal governments to increase support and funding to ensure that every Ontarian has access to safe, supportive housing and necessary mental health and addiction services.
- 1.4 Council has also called on the Provincial and Federal Governments with a [motion to increase action and support](#) on this issue.
- 1.5 At the local level, Council recently enacted a new [Public Spaces By-law](#) which imposes regulations on the use of temporary overnight shelters (e.g. tents) on Municipal property. Municipal Law Enforcement Staff are responsible for the enforcement of the by-law, and they work closely with other law enforcement and social services agencies to respond appropriately to any situation involving our unsheltered population.
- 1.6 Clarington is committed to cultivating strong, thriving and connected community where everyone is welcome, including prioritizing initiatives that support the proactive management of community safety and well-being—as per our 2024-27 Strategic Plan—despite having limited resources in this regard.

Local Initiatives

- 1.7 Staff have been working collaboratively with the Region of Durham; Clarington Library, Museum and Archives; Clarington Board of Trade; and ICONIC (Integrated Community Outreach Network In Clarington), to identify opportunities to proactively respond to the homelessness crisis. ICONIC is a volunteer group of faith-based leaders, the Region, CLMA, and the Municipality who meet on an ongoing basis to identify opportunities to work together to create an integrated community of care for the unsheltered population in Bowmanville.
- 1.8 Clarington Library, Museums and Archives staff in particular have been developing innovative partnerships to respond and support individuals in need with limited resources. CLMA recently obtained two Social Worker student placements for the September 2024 to April 2025 period. The students are placed at Bowmanville and Courtice Libraries; the Social Work student in Bowmanville helps individuals access food supports and social services.
- 1.9 CLMA has also partnered with Community Development Council Durham and John Howard Society to offer drop-in service access days at the Bowmanville Library.

Winter Warming in Clarington

- 1.10 With an identified need for an overnight winter warming program in Clarington, the Region of Durham partnered with St. Paul's United Church and DUO (a not-for-profit social services organization) to open a Winter Warming Centre in the basement of the church last winter. It operated from January 18 to March 31, 2024; seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- 1.11 Warming Centres provide a safe place for people to sleep when it is cold outside. Warmth and shelter are critical resources for health and safety, as people experiencing homelessness or those who are marginally housed are one of the most at-risk groups for cold-related illnesses.
- 1.12 Durham Region has Warming Centres across the region that operate during the winter months. More information about Durham Region's Winter Warming Program can be found at www.durham.ca/WinterWarming.
- 1.13 The Warming Centre at St. Paul's was the first time an overnight Winter Warming program was implemented in Clarington. The Region of Durham reported that it was well utilized but never reached full capacity (10). It is important to note that Warming Centres are not shelters; they operate on a temporary overnight basis during the winter months.

Daytime Supports and Local Impact

- 1.14 As Clarington is a large geographic area, the unsheltered population is spread out. There is identified “hidden homelessness,” which is defined as individuals with no prospects for permanent housing, but who may move among encampments, sleep in cars or “couch surf”. When the Winter Warming Centre opened last year, the centralized service resulted in more visible homelessness in downtown Bowmanville during the daytime hours.
- 1.15 There is limited daytime programming for the unsheltered population in Clarington. Local churches offer drop-in lunches and coffee on certain days of the week. The John Howard Society is a designated access point for Social Services and provides important services to help connect those in need to local support, but it is not a Hub for individuals to spend time.
- 1.16 Like many other communities, this resulted in the Library becoming a de facto daytime warming centre. Unfortunately, this did result in negative impacts associated with drug use, loitering, and litter; a 50% increase in incidents when compared to 2023. To help increase safety for both staff and customers, Clarington hired a security guard to patrol the Bowmanville Library and Municipal Administrative Centre.
- 1.17 Durham Region’s Outreach Team is an on-the-ground service in which Social Services workers travel across Durham to provide support to those who need it. Clarington and CLMA staff kept in constant contact with the Region of Durham, who increased local presence of the Outreach Team, especially when the Winter Warming Centre closed each day at 8 a.m. Clarington provided the use of one meeting room on the ground floor of the Municipal Administrative Centre to the Street Outreach Team, to provide a closed-door space to meet with individuals and connect them to services. The Outreach Team remained responsive and co-operative with Municipal and CLMA Staff.
- 1.18 At the May 6, 2024 General Government Committee meeting, the Region of Durham presented and spoke to the need to develop a Hub in Clarington for daytime supports. Regional Staff have indicated they are still working towards this model and are interested in ongoing partnerships and support to implement it. Clarington Staff will continue to work with Regional Staff to explore potential support for this in the future.

2. Winter Warming for the 2024-25 season

181 Liberty Street South

- 2.1 The Regional Municipality of Durham engaged Clarington Staff this summer to identify potential locations for Winter Warming for the 2024-25 winter season. Although the Warming Centre at St. Paul’s United Church was a success, it was not accessible as

there were stairs to access the basement and there were individuals with mobility challenges who needed to access the service.

- 2.2 Following a review of potential sites, the former Tourism Office located at 181 Liberty Street South was identified as an ideal location. The building is currently not open to the public and is being used as administrative office space, which could be moved.
- 2.3 Durham Region staff have identified this as an ideal location because:
 - a. The building is fully accessible.
 - b. Proximity and walkability to downtown Bowmanville where local supports and food banks are, without being located right in the downtown.
 - c. There are smaller office rooms within the building that could accommodate those with unique needs or who arrive as a family.
 - d. There are multiple washrooms and a shower on site.
- 2.4 Under the proposed arrangement, the Region would be expected to take responsibility for assessment of the building and for any alterations needed to convert the space for use as a Warming Centre. The Region would also be responsible for all operational expenses associated with the Warming Centre, and for any expenses associated with impacts to the property and the community that arise from the Warming Centre. This might foreseeably include attending to the removal of hazardous litter from the vicinity of the Warming Centre. It is further expected that the Region will respond appropriately to any unforeseen impacts to or conflicts with other community members.
- 2.5 The Region has indicated that individuals using the Warming Centre will be required to sign in and out. Durham Region has committed to ensuring Outreach Workers are on site each morning to support individuals in accessing support and daytime programming, either locally or in neighbouring municipalities.
- 2.6 Regional staff have indicated that they expect, on average, about five people will use the warming centre consistently. Should more individuals arrive at one warming centre than can be accommodated, Regional staff have indicated that service providers could find an alternative space within the service system, and provide transportation.
- 2.7 Clarington Emergency and Fire Services and the Chief Building Official have confirmed there are no major concerns with the use of the building for this purpose, accommodating approximately 10 individuals who need a safe place to sleep when it is cold outside. Minor updates would need to be completed by the Region of Durham to ensure all occupants would be safe in the building as per the Fire Code and Building

Code (e.g. installing exit signage; additional fire extinguishers and alarms; completion of a fire safety plan).

- 2.8 The subject property 181 Liberty Street South is zoned Environmental Protection (EP) within [Zoning by-law 84-63](#). The (EP) zone does not permit residential uses and permits limited non-residential uses. The property contains an existing building utilized by the Municipality and appears to be a legal non-conforming structure. Section 3.18 of the existing Zoning by-law allows the building to be used for the purposes of public services provided by the Corporation of the Municipality of Clarington, any School Board, or any Public Authority including any Department of the Regional Municipality of Durham or any Department or Ministry of the Government of Canada or Ontario, or any Conservation Authority established by the Government of Ontario. Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority (CLOCA) advised that the Region of Durham would be required to develop a flood evacuation plan as the property is located within the floodplain.

3. Financial Considerations

- 3.1 The Solicitor would work with The Regional Municipality of Durham to negotiate a lease for use of the former Tourism Office at 181 Liberty Street South.

4. Strategic Plan

- 4.1 C.2.5: Support the proactive management of community safety and well-being.

5. Climate Change

Not Applicable.

6. Concurrence

This report has been reviewed by the Deputy CAO of Public Services and the Deputy CAO of Legislative Services/Solicitor, who concur with the recommendations.

7. Conclusion

It is respectfully recommended that Council endorse the proposal to rent the former Tourism Office building, 181 Liberty Street South, to The Regional Municipality of Durham for the purposes of a Winter Warming Centre.

Staff Contact: Melissa Westover, Manager of Communications, 905-623-3379 ext. 2019 or mwestover@clarington.net.

Interested Parties:

The following interested parties will be notified of Council's decision:

- Sahar Foroutani, Area Manager, Homeless System Team, The Regional Municipality of Durham
- Inspector Stefanie Finateri, DRPS East Division
- Laura McClelland, St. Paul's United Church/Integrated Community Outreach Network In Clarington