



## Legislation Text

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File #: PM-22-012, Version: 1

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TAMRMS#: B06

### **Feasibility Study - Convert Fire Station**

Notice given by: Councillor Biermanski

### **BUDGET POSTPONED MOTION:**

That \$115,000 be approved from the Capital Reserve to fund a feasibility study which would consider converting Fire Hall #1 into an Emergency Homeless Shelter including cost sharing and operating models with external entities.

### **Administration's Understanding of the Intent of the Motion:**

That a feasibility study is planned to examine the feasibility of converting Fire Station 1 into an emergency shelter.

### **Operational or Organizational Impacts if Motion is Approved:**

If an emergency shelter were to be explored staff resources would need to be re-deployed from the current identified priority of a youth transitional home (Charter CSD-001 Youth Transitional Housing in the 2022 budget for consideration). This would duplicate work already completed by the Mayor's Task Force and a new focus would require staff to shift from initial work already completed on the youth transitional home priority, including conversations with stakeholders.

### **Financial Implications of Motions:**

\$115,000 was included for year 1 of Charter No. CSD-001 Youth Transitional Housing (unfunded) for a feasibility study that would include cost estimates (capital and operating), building requirements, location options (site/facility considerations), plan development and implementing collaborative partnerships to support a youth transitional home in St. Albert.

If Council chooses to look at an emergency shelter, it is anticipated that the feasibility study costs would be similar. The goals of the feasibility study would also be similar, however, rather than exploring location options the study would consider factors related to the conversion of the building to an emergency shelter. The St. Albert Fire Hall #1 Feasibility Study completed in 2017 by ACI Architects Inc. would be used as resource to inform the feasibility study. (attachment B)

### **Stakeholder Consultations:**

The Mayor's Task Force continues to support and advocate for the coordination of homelessness prevention strategies among local, regional, provincial, and national organizations, as well as the public and private sectors.

If Council wishes to change the direction from the initial Task Force recommendations, it would be

advisable to consult with Task Force members, which includes local agencies and sector specialists.

The City, while not intended to operate the youth transition home, will work with community partners to secure capital and operational funding and rely on those who have the expertise and experience in supporting youth in a transitional home setting.

Dialogue would have to occur with community partners and stakeholders to help mitigate possible risks in changing the project direction.

### **Background:**

The Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness was formed in January 2018 to formulate a response to the increasing numbers of homeless people living in St. Albert and elevate the collective effort within the city. Homelessness is a complex issue that impacts our whole community and stable housing is a key determinant of health for individuals, families, and communities. There is strong evidence that shows prevention is much more cost effective in addressing homelessness.

When discussing housing and homelessness prevention we refer to the housing spectrum that ranges from homelessness to market home ownership.

The Mayor's Task Force on Ending Homelessness Final Report (attachment A) provided definitions in terms of housing, including:

Emergency Shelter - Emergency shelters are temporary by nature, staying in overnight emergency shelters designed for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness - Refers to individuals and/or families without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability to acquire it.

Transitional Housing - Supportive, yet temporary, types of housing, meant to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing by offering structure, supervision, support, life skills, education, etc.

The Task Force Final Report states that chronic homeless individuals cost Alberta taxpayers approximately \$100,000 per year in direct and in-direct costs, which includes shelters, police, legal and health care systems.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness highlights that not only is putting people into safe, sustainable, permanent housing cheaper, it is also much more human-centered. The longer someone remains homeless, the greater likelihood that their physical and mental health will deteriorate. Additionally, reports show that the cost per month at a shelter are up to 10 times that of a month in social housing.

Emergency shelters are not 'one size fits all', due to the unique needs of various populations. It is not practical, nor effective, to consider that families leaving domestic violence should be within the same emergency shelter as chronic homeless individuals who may be experiencing mental health and addictions challenges, for example. Shelter are targeted to specific populations (men, women, families, youth) in order to best serve the needs of individuals and reduce risks.

Without appropriate wraparound supports including addictions treatment, mental health supports, and employment skills training to address the complex needs that contribute to homelessness, incidences of homelessness in St. Albert can be expected to rise, compounded by Pandemic impacts.

Changing land development bylaws, which would be required for Fire Hall 1, requires comprehensive consultation.

Report Date: December 2, 2021

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