

BRIEFING NOTE HS46-21

For Information For Approval

Date: September 22, 2021

Purpose: Homelessness Landscape in the Nipissing District – Review of Current Programs, Services, Supports and Investments in the Homelessness Sector

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Reviewed by: Catherine Matheson, CAO

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS the number of people experiencing homelessness (unsheltered and sheltered) in North Bay and the broader Nipissing District continues to rise, putting increased pressure on the emergency shelter and first response systems, and community social and health services; and

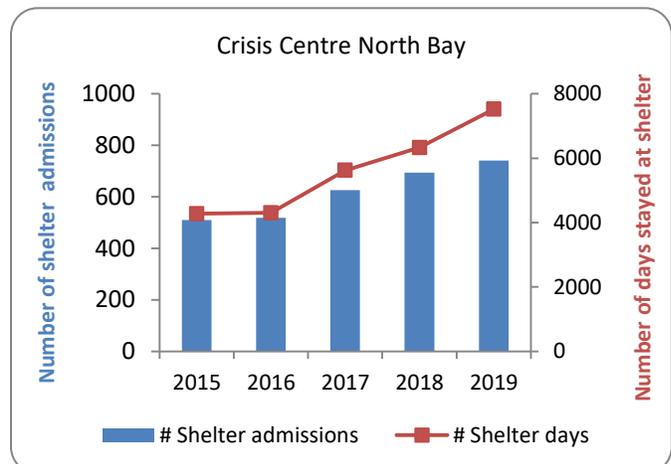
WHEREAS the homelessness situation was exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic which has further changed the landscape and conditions under which the Board was previously addressing homelessness and related issues;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Board accept the report “Homelessness Landscape in the Nipissing District” as described in HS46-21 and attached “A” (same title), which will then be followed by a Homelessness Action Plan in October.

BACKGROUND:

In view of the changing landscape and action taken to date, the supply of shelter beds and the current homelessness services are not meeting the demand as evidenced through an increase in homelessness, and data, research, and general observation.

This problem is occurring despite significant investment by the Board of \$19.5 Million over the past five years in the area of homelessness prevention, shelter solutions, and housing supports and services. The problem is also occurring despite the various community housing plans, strategies, and



recommendations underway to address homelessness and the associated mental health and addictions issues. This discrepancy illustrates societal changes and pressures on mental health, addictions, and housing leading to a needed reassessment of the situation and approach, and make any necessary changes to addressing homelessness going forward.

This paper and examination serve as an opportunity to reflect on the overall homelessness system and how funding investments should be prioritized and allocated for programs, supports, and services moving forward.

REPORT:

Homeless Landscape:

The homelessness landscape in North Bay looks very different today than it did a few years ago. Prior to 2019, the Board's involvement in addressing homelessness was mainly through priorities identified in various strategic plans (such as the Nipissing District 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan) and working with the Nipissing District Housing and Homelessness Partnership/ CAB on various community homelessness projects and initiatives. The turning point came in the fall of 2019 when the concern of North Bay residents for the number of homeless individuals in the downtown core reached a tipping point. At this same time, social service providers and those working in the area of mental health and addictions were experiencing a significant increase in the complexity of clients they were serving. In response to these concerns - and to what some were referring to as a community crisis - the Mayor of North Bay hosted a roundtable comprised of community leaders and stakeholders to discuss the concerns and issues, and form priorities for addressing them (Mayor's Roundtable Report, February 2020).¹

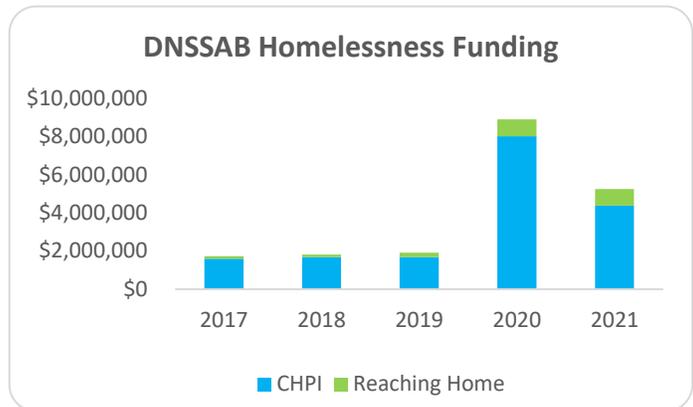
Plans and strategies have also been developed to address and reduce homelessness. At the local municipal level, and over the past decade, the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB) and various community partners have also endeavoured to mitigate, lower, and ultimately eradicate homelessness through various plans and strategies. This has resulted in multiple plans and strategies with a wide array of action items all with a common vision: reducing or ending homelessness in the Nipissing District. Although a lot of planning has been done and various strategies are underway to combat local homelessness, the current problem still exists. It may be that the local plans (above) do not directly address the current problem - and new solutions are required - or the appropriate strategies have not yet been implemented or the commitment to execute them.

Homelessness Funding and Expenditure

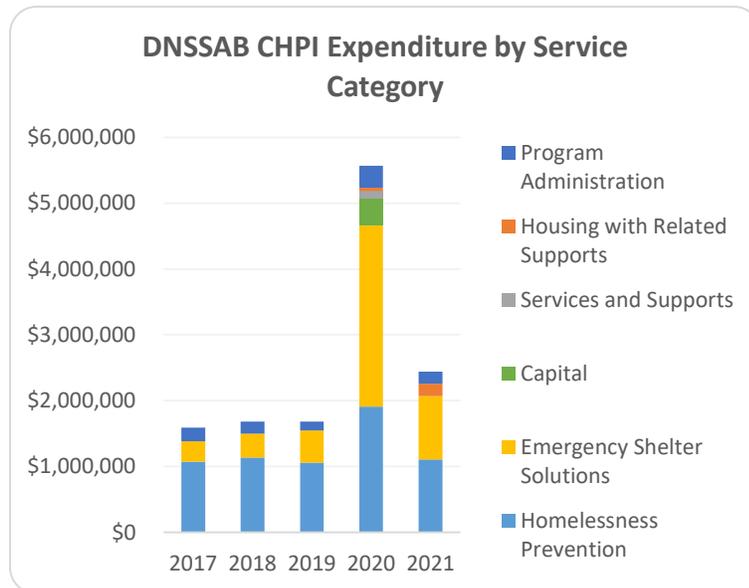
Prior to 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, through the provincial and federal governments, the Board was investing an average of \$1.8 Million/ year into various homelessness initiatives through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Reaching Home Funds.

¹ The three main priorities coming out of the Mayor's roundtable were *increasing addictions programming, notably Community Withdrawal Management Services (WMS); forming a variety of short-term transitional housing options; and providing 24/7 access to supports for mental health and addictions outside of a hospital Emergency Room setting.*

With the onset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, the province rolled out emergency COVID funding in three phases to assist vulnerable populations during the virus outbreak. This boosted the local CHPI fund to about \$8 Million in 2020 and another \$4.5 Million this year (2021). The annual Reaching Home fund was also increased significantly by the federal government during this time, to the \$800,000+ range (from \$200,000+). Since this infusion of government pandemic funding, the Board's average investment in homelessness has nearly quadrupled to about \$7 Million annually. Note: at the time of this writing, the Board has learned that it will be receiving a further \$3 Million through the fourth phase of SSRF/CHPI funding.



In terms of CHPI Service Categories, over the past five years, close to half (48.5%) of the total CHPI funding has been allocated to homelessness prevention, on average. It can be noted, however, that prior to 2020 and the emergency COVID funding about two-thirds of the CHPI funds were going towards homelessness prevention services/ programs.



The next largest share of CHPI funding during the period has been directed to *Emergency Shelter Solutions* that accounts for an average of 37.6% of the total funding. Although before 2020 and emergency COVID funding, a little under one-quarter (23.5%) of CHPI was allocated to this service area. A significant increase can be noted in 2020 when about half the available CHPI funds for that year, went to delivering shelter solutions.

Shifting to funded programs and services, the two largest homelessness programs are

currently the CHPI Client Benefits and the Gateway House/Low-Barrier Shelter. Beginning with CHPI Client Benefits, the program provides emergency financial assistance to households at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Eligible benefits include first and last month's rent, rent and utility arrears, moving expenses, utility deposits, winter fuel heating, and select emergency household items. Since 2017, the program has averaged annual expenditures of \$658,484. Current pressures on the program are increased rental housing costs and rising expenditures for necessary household items.

More recently, the Board has engaged itself in the development of transitional/supportive housing and a low-barrier shelter. To date, the Board has invested \$2,838,768 in developing the low-barrier shelter and Gateway House (supportive housing). The low-barrier shelter has

accounted for 9.7% (\$276,051) of this funding with the Gateway House development accounting for the remaining 90.3%, (\$2,562,716). The shelter and supportive housing design and concept is still evolving and under development. Upon completion, this integrated housing with wrap-around services and supports will provide 24/7 supports to residents and will focus on life skills.

The annual operating costs for the low-barrier shelter are \$1,606,300. This includes 6 months of day programming that allow the low-barrier shelter to be open 24 hours per day. At this time, operating funding will allow services to continue at the low-barrier shelter until December 31st, 2021. Concerning Gateway House, the annual operating costs are \$1,238,122, which includes support services 24 hours per day.

RISK IDENTIFICATION AND MITIGATION:

Although this report does not contain any tangible actions and recommendations, it does serve as an opportunity to reflect on the current homelessness landscape. As illustrated in the report, the actions and investments to date have not resulted in a meaningful reduction in homelessness, given the increase in demand. The continuation of investing in long-funded programs, services, and supports is an option, however, meeting planning outcomes and reaching the goal of eradicating homelessness will require a reevaluation of the homelessness service system.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, this report illustrates the current homelessness landscape in North Bay and the broader Nipissing District. Although the current approach has served and supported numerous households and completed many homelessness projects, it has not led to a meaningful reduction in homelessness, given the increase in demand, and has added pressure on already stringent funding. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, added pressures have been placed on the homelessness system and have resulted in the DNSSAB taking on a more direct role in homelessness services by funding the creation and operations of a low-barrier shelter and a supportive housing complex. On a positive note, the additional funding tied to the pandemic has facilitated much-needed bricks and mortar developments that are expected to have a big impact on stabilizing vulnerable individuals for years to come. This opportunity presents a time to reflect on the overall homelessness system and how funding investments should be prioritized and allocated for programs, supports, and services moving forward.

