

## BRIEFING NOTE HS06-22

For Information or  For Approval

**Date:** February 23, 2022

**Purpose:** North Bay Warming Centre Update

**Prepared by:** Stacey Cyopeck, Director, Housing Services

**Reviewed by:** Justin Avery, Manager of Finance

**Approved by:** Catherine Matheson, Chief Administrative Officer

---

### *Alignment with Strategic Plan: Healthy, Sustainable Communities*

Maximize Impact  Remove Barriers  Seamless Access  Learn & Grow

Report HS06-22 provides an update on the North Bay Warming Centre for information purposes.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In October 2021, the Province of Ontario began to lift the pandemic restrictions for access to public spaces. The lessening of restrictions made it possible for homeless individuals to access public spaces, including malls and restaurants, also providing opportunity to shelter from extreme weather. The Day Programming at the Chippewa site was also expected to open at the beginning of November, however, staffing challenges prevented program implementation. On November 28, the Province announced that restrictions would be re-introduced and access for many public spaces would only be available with proof of vaccination, a barrier for many vulnerable homeless individuals.

### **CURRENT STATUS/STEPS TAKEN TO DATE:**

**December 2021** – At the December Homelessness Community Advisory Board (CAB) meeting, a discussion about daytime options for vulnerable populations identified that many of the options that were believed to be available for the community's homeless population were not accessible. Many specialized programs were restricting access to members only or by appointment only and were structured such that they were not open for individuals to come in and rest or seek shelter from the elements. A smaller task group met after the CAB meeting to discuss options. Greater risks were identified as a result of the onset of colder weather, the delay of the opening of the Day Programming at the Chippewa Site due to staffing shortages

and the expected re-instatement of pandemic restrictions in public spaces. The availability of staffing for a warming centre continued to be identified as a significant challenge. The owner of the former Health Unit site on Commercial Street, offered the building free of charge to be used for the warming centre.

A budget was created by utilizing funding that was originally set aside for the opening of the Chippewa Day Program.

Over the holiday season, staffing shortages and increased capacity challenges, combined with the newly increased pandemic protocols meant that no one community agency had the capacity to take the lead on the implementation of a warming centre.

**January 2022** - The North Bay Transit Terminal continued to be available as an interim option for individuals to come out of the cold. The costs for extra security at the bus terminal will be covered as part of the warming centre funding.

The Gathering Place agreed to take the lead in the planning and opening of the site and work in collaboration with other community partners.

**February 2022** – The Gathering Place opened the new daytime warming centre on February 7, 2022 at the former Health Unit site on Commercial Street, staffing the site with Gathering Place staff and volunteers in the morning and with community agency staff and students in the afternoons. To begin, the centre will be open Monday to Friday in the mornings, and some afternoons where community staffing supports are available. The Gathering Place hopes to add services on weekends before the end of the month. The centre will be open until March or until the extreme weather risk is mitigated.

#### **RESOURCES REQUIRED:**

The funding for the warming centre and for the extra security for the transit station will be met by a reallocation of Social Services Relief Funding that was originally allocated for the Day Programming at the Chippewa Campus.

#### **RISK IDENTIFICATION AND MITIGATION:**

The pandemic restrictions and winter weather have created significant risks for vulnerable, unsheltered individuals. The creation of a temporary warming centre with leadership from the Gathering Place and support from community agencies will help mitigate those risks.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Although the lessening of pandemic restrictions will open other options for vulnerable, unsheltered individuals, the need for ongoing daytime spaces and programming continues to be an identified need within the District. The DNSSAB will work with community partners to proactively plan and implement solutions before the next winter season.