



## **The Corporation of the City of Stratford Social Services Sub-committee**

### **MINUTES**

Date: June 10, 2025  
Time: 4:30 P.M.  
Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

Sub-committee Present: Councillor Henderson - Chair Presiding, Councillor Briscoe - Vice Chair, Councillor Biehn, Councillor Nijjar, Councillor Wordofa

Staff Present: Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Audrey Pascual - Deputy Clerk, Miranda Franken - Council Clerk Secretary

Also present: Members of the public and media

#### **1. Call to Order**

The Chair called the Meeting to Order.

Land Acknowledgment

Moment of Silent Reflection

Respectful Conduct Statement

#### **2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof**

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature of Pecuniary Interest

No disclosures of pecuniary interest were made by a member at the June 10, 2025, Social Services Sub-committee meeting.

**3. ADDED - Adoption of the Addenda to the Agenda:**

Motion by Councillor Biehn

**THAT the Addenda to the Social Services Sub-committee dated June 10, 2025, be added to the Agenda as printed.**

**Carried**

**4. Delegations**

**4.1 AMENDED - Request for Delegation regarding Housing and the Cost-of-Living Crisis in Stratford**

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

**THAT Tanner Bergsma, Patricia Gallant, Ken Wood and Martine Lee be heard.**

**Carried**

Tanner Bergsma spoke to Sub-committee. Highlights of the presentation included:

- noted society having failed and cited risks for homeless individuals in winter, for seniors and for families;
- being that Stratford is writing a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan the public should be consulted to fix the crisis with public input having been surveyed for the Official Plan;
- statistics were provided on housing needs and it was noted 254 households being on the housing waitlist and 160 people being homeless in the region with the numbers not reflecting people who disappear or are afraid to speak up;
- requested council implement the following:
  - a full pause in residential development until clear affordable housing targets are met;
  - immediate public consultation on the 10-year Housing Plan;
  - a permanent lived experience advisory committee;
  - an emergency shelter and mobile outreach team;

- permanent protection of City owned land for non-market and co-op housing;
- stronger tenant protections and rent control;
- housing being a basic human right and the purpose of governance to serve the Canadian people;
- noted no one should be invisible in the place they call home; and
- a vision of a Stratford that will lead the nation to solve the problem.

Discussion occurred between the Sub-committee, Staff and Tanner Bergsma. Highlights of the discussion included the following:

- the crisis being across Canada;
- the City priority being to build permanent housing not temporary;
- the Director of Social Services clarified public consultation is always being requested in housing plans including a larger public consultation and consultation with various community agencies;
- Tanner Bergsma having surveyed over 700 residents and willing to share with staff and help to connect staff to people;
- the City working together with community groups including United Way and investStratford;
- the City overseeing Stratford, County of Perth and St. Marys with supported housing requiring staffing for support at all hours;
- the City providing housing to women, children and men as available with no requirement that the women have been abused;
- challenges noted include individuals not wanting to relocate if housing is available outside their area and the length of time to access housing; and
- staffing hired in this regard under the 2025 budget to start over the summer.

Patricia Gallant spoke to Sub-committee to share their story about homelessness and challenges with City housing. Highlights of the presentation included:

- having been homeless in October 2022 and noted underhoused through the Supported Housing of Perth Program (SHOPP) with the intention that it be temporary;
- information on housing transitions having changed with units sitting empty;
- a toll being taken by the fear of losing children;
- their brother having died in winter 2025 from homelessness;
- commented many will have a hot meal and warm bed while someone else will push a cart and hope someone will be kind enough to feed them; and
- it was questioned why the City doesn't choose a shelter and noted the 10-year plan not helping individuals tonight.

Discussion occurred between the Sub-committee and Patricia Gallant regarding the length of wait time for housing and the risks that the time period can have.

Ken Wood spoke to Sub-committee. Highlights of the presentation included:

- it was noted that requests have been made to the City to prioritize rental accommodations above luxury family homes since 2014;
- Councillors and City Directors having power to make decisions and action them;
- it was recommended that Members and Staff put themselves in position of others and monitor social media where people share stories;
- noted the safety of the citizens being failed and the City gentrified;
- the homeless population not having money for housing with wages not having kept pace with inflation or housing costs;
- this being a complicated problem but there being immediate things that can be done;

- the 10 Year Provincial Plan having ended in 2024, and it being wise to hire someone to continue monitoring;
- mental illness and lack of supports being contributing barriers for some to be housed;
- Optimism Place, ShelterLink and Emily Murphy being provided with limited funds and having to narrow parameters with people not fitting within them and stated women should not have to prove abuse to receive assistance;
- they want to leave their housing unit citing challenges with other tenants and noted much has been cleaned up but there still being evictions and it taking time to identify how to help;
- units sitting empty with some people capable of creating significant damage to units;
- recommended the monitoring of move ins, outs and evictions and evictions prevented through assistance and programs;
- recommended the City prioritize keeping citizens healthy and alive as was done with Climate Change and Diversity Equity and Inclusion; and
- it being noted Strong Mayor Powers could be used to create a task force on housing and homelessness to identify blockages and problems.

Discussion occurred between Sub-committee and Ken Wood regarding support staff for the City housing and requests to developers to build affordable units.

Martine Lee spoke to Sub-committee. Highlights of the presentation included:

- related the stories of two friends who experienced homelessness and contributing factors;
- factors contributing to homelessness being job loss, abuse or mental illness and these could affect anyone or loved ones;
- an overview of Martine Lee's current housing situation, contributing factors and personal experiences;

- an overview of the circumstances that led to access to low-income housing and the challenge that others may face in accessing the service if under different circumstances;
- it was noted the economy is getting worse with a minimum wage part time job not being sufficient to afford rent and noted mental health challenges leading to unemployment at times; and
- requested that if Council cannot build homeless shelter to take small steps to build one in the next five to ten years.

Discussion occurred between Members and Patricia Gallant regarding clarification on their housing situation and additional comments by Tanner Bergsma. A Member suggested Tanner Bergsma speak to the Stratford Builders.

Motion by Councillor Biehn

**THAT Amber Timmons be heard.**

**Carried**

Amber Timmons spoke to Sub-committee. Highlights of the presentation included:

- having looked at the City Budget for a number of years;
- noting some spending received from the Province with the City having the budget for this and overspending in other areas; and
- the area of overspending noted being tourism.

Discussion occurred between Members and Amber Timmons regarding the budget and provincial funding. Highlights of the discussion included the following:

- the City not funding the Stratford Festival and does contribute to Hospital funding;
- tourism providing job;
- Amber Timmons spoke of their experience with homelessness and contributing factors including mental health and noted the loss of family members to homelessness; and
- Amber Timmons noted the Grand Trunk Renewal project being an opportunity if utilized appropriately and meaningfully.

Discussion occurred between Members and the Director of Social Services. Highlights of the discussion included the following:

- the delegations were thanked for their vulnerability, for sharing their stories and being advocates;
- the City needing mixed housing and right fit of housing;
- a shelter being a short-term solution and not keeping people housed;
- the priority and biggest impact being supportive or supported housing in working with the Ministry of Health to provide supports to keep people housed;
- it was noted without supportive housing there being a cycle of eviction, unhoused and rehoused again;
- the question being how to house people who for reasons beyond their control cannot live independently and finding these supports;
- it was noted that if there is proper operational funding 398 Erie Street can make an impact on community homelessness, with supports for individuals at all hours;
- a basic shelter cost being 35-50 million dollars to build barring a no delays labour structures;
- Council and staff pushing government to create better structure that incentives creating affordable housing,
- it was noted at the Federal level for profit builders receiving a GST tax break to build housing with this not extended to not for profit builders who are focused on building affordable homes with this being an advocacy point;
- funding from the Province being provided with an obligation to be spent on specific things;
- the City not having received accelerated funding for homelessness with this being provided for shovel ready projects and making this a challenge; and
- noted a unified voice having potential to affect change.

## **5. Department Update**

The following Department Update Infographics of April, 2025 were provided for the information of Sub-committee:

- Monthly Children's Services Report
- Monthly Homelessness Report
- Monthly Housing Report
- Monthly Ontario Works Report
- Monthly Social Services Stratford Report

## **6. Next Sub-committee Meeting**

The next Social Services Sub-committee meeting is July 15, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall.

## **7. Adjournment**

Motion by Councillor Biehn

**Sub-committee Decision: THAT the Social Services Sub-committee meeting adjourn.**

**Carried**

Meeting Start Time: 4:30 P.M.

Meeting End Time: 6:02 P.M.