



**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
MEMORANDUM**

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TO: MAYOR, J. LEHMAN AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

RE: EMERGENCY SHELTERS/WARMING CENTRES AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC WASHROOMS 24/7

DATE: NOVEMBER 1, 2021

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide members of Council with additional information related to questions that have been raised concerning a warming centre(s) and access to City park washrooms 24/7.

County of Simcoe as Service Manager for Emergency Shelters and Homelessness Services

In 1998, the province designated the County of Simcoe as the Service Manager under the *Housing Services Act*. The Service Manager is responsible for planning, funding, and managing social housing programs, emergency shelters and homelessness services within the county, as well as the two separated cities of Barrie and Orillia. The costs of providing these services (net of any Provincial dollars received) are funded by the county, City of Barrie, and City of Orillia based on the terms of the Municipal Services Management Agreement.

The County of Simcoe does not operate emergency shelters on its own. The county provides funding to local organizations for the operation of emergency shelters.

The City of Barrie is not the Service Manager and has never been an emergency shelter provider. As such, it does not have a budget or facilities that were designed to function as seasonal or ongoing emergency shelters, warming centres, or any staff who have the training or experience to operate these facilities.

In addition to the annual funding provided to the county for both operating and capital costs associated with social housing, emergency shelters and homelessness services, the City has provided capital funds to emergency shelter providers. In 2018, the David Busby Centre and Out of the Cold Barrie merged, whereas the David Busby Centre committed to offering emergency group lodging at 88 Mulcaster. On December 17, 2018, City Council authorized the provision of a grant in the amount of \$200,000 to the David Busby Centre for the construction required to double the space available at 88 Mulcaster for emergency group lodging. The total value of the construction project was identified as \$920,000, at the time.

COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Shelter Response

In 2020, the health and safety restrictions to address the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the capacity within local emergency shelters. The county determined early into the pandemic, that it would provide funding for sheltering organizations to relocate and house their clients within motel spaces, with the intent to ensure adequate space for physical distancing and isolation, as required.

In addition to the actual room costs, the county provided funding to the sheltering organizations for 24/7 staffing and security at motel locations, personal protective equipment, deep cleaning supplies, etc. Of the four homeless sheltering programs in the City of Barrie, three used the motel model (David Busby Street Centre, Elizabeth Fry, and Youth Haven), while the fourth continued to operate from its normal location (Salvation Army Barrie Bayside Mission).



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The County of Simcoe has paid for over 180 individuals housed in local motels across the region daily, with an average of over 85 persons per day located in Barrie motel sites. Paramedic Services have attended the motel sites twice weekly for wellness checks and COVID testing, and the CMHA has also been attending. Approximately \$450,000 per month has been spent by the county to provide these services using provincial and federal COVID-19 funding. The county also provided enhanced funding to increase outreach efforts, including but not limited to encouraging individuals who were unhoused to come into shelters.

Temporary Use of the Terminal Temporary as a Warming Centre – January to April 2021

There continued to be a number of individuals in the community who were unhoused, despite the motel model and extensive efforts of various outreach and service coordinating organizations (County of Simcoe Social and Community Services, Paramedic Services, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), David Busby Street Centre, Elizabeth Fry Society, John Howard Society, Gilbert Centre, Redwood, Empower Simcoe, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and Barrie Police Service), as well as individual members of the community. As restaurants, coffee shops and other locations were closed by Provincial Order, fewer places were available for individuals to get out of the cold and warm up during the period of December 2020 to April 2021.

In December 2020, the City announced that the Transit Terminal would be available when Environment Canada issued an extreme cold weather alert for people needing to get out of the cold. When an extreme cold weather alert was issued, the terminal was open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., subject to capacity restrictions, physical distancing protocols, mask wearing, and screening of individuals attending the terminal.

In mid-January 2021, the City of Barrie temporarily made the Transit Terminal available as a place to warm up during the day or night (24/7), regardless of the weather. The Transit Terminal temporary warming centre was subject to capacity restrictions, and health and safety protocols remained in place (screening, a requirement to wear face coverings, and maintain physical distancing). As the facility was not designed for this use, it was not intended for sleeping, and it did not offer the traditional services of an overnight shelter. The amount of service provided by the City's security contractor was doubled during the period of this use.

The use of the Transit Terminal as a temporary warming centre was incompatible with providing transit service, at the same time, since the building wasn't designed for this use. The transit patrons, staff, and the City's transit and security contractors commented on feeling less safe and a number of complaints were received about behaviours that occurred during this period. Over the period of use, issues escalated. The types of challenges included:

- Threatening and aggressive behaviour, as well as fighting;
- Verbal abuse and physical assaults of other patrons, transit users, City staff, and the City's security and transit contractors' staff;
- Not wearing masks or observing social distancing, as required by COVID regulations;
- Failure to observe 2-person limit per washroom (required to ensure physical distancing), with the washrooms being used to sell and consume drugs and alcohol;
- Smoking/vaping onsite;
- Overdoses;
- Shouting of profanities, racial slurs, and other offensive language;
- Damaging/defacing of City property;
- Leaving/throwing debris and garbage, as well as abandoned clothing and other belongings within the building;
- Urinating within/on the building and on a Transit driver;
- Blocking others from accessing the Terminal; and



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- Failure to leave when asked, forcing the contracted security firm or Barrie Police Service to remove the persons with negative reactions, including the above.

To address the personal safety concerns and avoid the need to shut down the warming centre entirely, before the end of the coldest weather, a difficult decision was made to ban people who were causing disturbances. Subsequently, signage was installed identifying rules while using the Transit Terminal. Various outreach organizations provided staff and/or volunteers to link individuals to support services and assist with the behaviours that were being experienced. Despite these efforts, Barrie Police Service continued to be called almost daily (and sometimes more than once per day) to attend the Transit Terminal to deal with the challenges.

Daily concerns were raised by both City Transit staff and the City's contractor with members requiring leaves of absence to address mental and physical health issues experienced, due to the working conditions.

The use of the Transit Terminal for a temporary warming centre placed the delivery of the City's transit service to the community at risk.

Winter Planning 2021/2022

The county has advised that it will continue to fund motel rooms and staffing costs for the shelter providers until March 2022, if required. The county continues to offer to provide funding for as many spaces as are required and advised that the shelter providers are not constrained in the number of spaces that can be supported due to staffing shortages.

The county has been having discussions with representatives of the David Busby Street Centre, Elizabeth Fry Society, Salvation Army Barrie Bayside Mission and Youth Haven regarding other winter services (shelter, food, and clothing). Staff are of the understanding that they have developed a collective plan for both drop in and outreach support through the winter months, in addition to information on the availability of meals. The shelter providers in Barrie are updating an information package on all available services from shelter to meals, which will be shared broadly in the coming days. The county has advised that the 130 beds at the Travelodge will be expanded to 198 beds/cots for November 15th, as well as accommodating an additional 22-24 cots at the David Busby Street Centre's 88 Mulcaster Street location.

If an extreme weather alert is issued by Environment Canada, the City will also open a facility for the duration of the event only, subject to any restrictions that may be in place to address health and safety.

Should City Council wish to augment the above and directly provide a warming centre or other shelter services, funding and resources, the following would be required:

- Determining with the province and County of Simcoe whether any service provision would be contrary to existing agreements and the *Housing Services Act*;
- The lease/acquisition of an appropriate facility;
- Hiring of a supervisor to manage the warming centre operations;
- Several staff with social services experience and/or education; and
- Additional security contractor resources

As City staff have no prior experience in these operations, staff would need to investigate and report back on the costs and timeline that would be associated with the above.



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Parks Washroom Access 24/7

The current funding approved by City Council provides for the following level of service for waterfront park washroom hours:

Location	June 1 – October 31	November 1 – May 31
Centennial Park	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, all washrooms. During COVID-19 extended shifts were implemented through reallocation of resources from closed facilities	8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, single fixture family washrooms only. The main washroom / changeroom area was designed for seasonal use only. They are not believed to have been used for winter use in the past and are only minimally heated to prevent freezing
Heritage Park	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily	Not available as the building is not fully heated and plumbing freezes
Southshore Community Centre's externally accessible washroom (located near Allandale Station Park and Military Heritage Park)	8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily	8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily
Washrooms at Tyndale Park, Minet's Point Park, Queens Park, Shear Park, St. Vincent's Park and Johnson's Beach Park	7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily	Not available as the buildings are not heated and plumbing freezes

In addition, the Transit Terminal is also open with washrooms available, from 7 a.m. until 10 p.m. daily. All washroom hours are based on the available funding for resources to clean and to provide security.

Currently, with indoor dining available, restaurants, coffee shops and other locations, such as the David Busby Street Centre, have washrooms available. The provincial regulation requiring proof of vaccination does not apply to individuals accessing a facility to use a washroom.

Other than the Centennial Park building, the remaining park building washrooms do not have heat to the buildings and, therefore, do not have running water and the pipes freeze during the winter. The Centennial Park family washrooms have not been open 24/7 year-round for several years and current staff do not recall them ever being 24/7 during the winter. When the park washrooms were open later into the evening, there was significant damage to the washrooms and residents complained about them only being used for inappropriate purposes. The washrooms were closed earlier in the day to address these concerns and provide savings to achieve tax rate increases that are acceptable to the public.

In 2020 and 2021, the waterfront park washroom hours required additional staff to address COVID-19 cleaning requirements, compared to other years, which was beyond the budget allotment. The additional expenditures have been funded utilizing the Provincial Safe Restart Funding. At the time of preparation of this memorandum, the province has not advised of any COVID-19 funding available to municipalities in 2022. A change in the level of service that is not associated with COVID-19 may not qualify for these funds, if they are announced.



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Last year, a portable washroom was also available at City Hall. Although checked daily, this portable washroom had to be taken to a special hazardous materials handler in Toronto as it was filled with needles, and the contractor was unable to clean/empty it, or even accept it back without the hazards being removed by a qualified company.

Opening the washrooms for longer hours would require additional crews of cleaning staff and additional security resources, as well as additional funds to repair damage. If Council supports a level of service change with the associated funding for staffing, security, and repairs to damaged buildings/building components, extended hours can be implemented, as long as sufficient time is provided to implement the change.