



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: Northumberland Sleeping Cabin Collective Proposal

Report to: Planning & Development Committee

Date of meeting: January 24, 2023

Report Author:

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Department responsible:

Planning & Development

Report Number: PD-03-23

Recommendation:

That Report PD-03-23 be received for information.

Highlights:

- Delegation from Northumberland Sleeping Cabin Collective to Municipal Committee of the Whole meeting on December 06, 2022
- Direction was provided to staff to prepare a report speaking to the delegation presentation and their specific requests related to municipal property and by-law or permitting hurdles.

Background:

On December 6, 2022 a delegation from the Northumberland Sleeping Cabin Collective (NSCC) provided a presentation to the Committee of the Whole (COW) outlining their proposed initiative in the Municipality of Port Hope. In turn, Council provided direction to staff to prepare a report for information regarding the material provided by the delegation and their specific requests.

The NSCC is a volunteer-based organization that is focused on those living unsheltered in the Municipality of Port Hope and surrounding area. NSCC has proposed a pilot project consisting of the construction and placement of 4-6 cabins within the Municipality of Port Hope. NSCC has also made a similar presentation to the Town of Cobourg. The proposed cabins are each 8'x10', and are insulated, heated, and provided with a bed with space for belongings.

NSCC has proposed several site locations including the Ruth Clarke Centre, south of the Ruth Clarke Centre (former Firefighter Museum) as well as the former George Hamilton Public School property located in Welcome.

Discussion:

The discussion regarding those who are unsheltered is one that encompasses a wide variety of considerations and issues that are serious and concerning in nature. This is not an issue which is isolated to the Municipality of Port Hope and is something that is affecting many communities across Ontario.

Currently, the County of Northumberland is the upper tier Municipal government agency which provides support to those experiencing homelessness and provides emergency shelter services.

The County of Northumberland provides the following information to residents on their website to aid and support those in need:

Shelter benefit

If you are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, we may be able to help you get or keep housing through the shelter benefit.

If you are eligible, the shelter benefit can help you with:

- Last month's rent
- Rent arrears
- Moving costs
- Utility deposits, arrears and/or reconnection fees

Transition House shelter

Emergency shelter services for individuals experiencing homelessness in Northumberland are provided by [Transition House shelter](#) located in the Town of Cobourg. Community members can access emergency shelter services through the coordinated entry system managed by Transition House, either through local agencies or through self-referral by calling 905-376-9562.

Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre

[Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre](#) provides shelter services for women and families fleeing violence and abuse. Cornerstone delivers a coordinated care approach, connecting women with counselors, housing, and family support workers, all under one roof.

Anishnaabe Kwewag Gamig (AKG)

[Anishnaabe Kwewag Gamig \(AKG\)](#) is an emergency shelter facility that accommodates indigenous and non-indigenous women and their children who are experiencing family violence. A 24-hour support line and walk-in services are also available. For more information call 905-352-3708 or toll free at 1-800-388-5171.

Overnight Warming Room

As of November 30, 2022, overnight warming room services are available at **St. Peter's Anglican Church, 240 College Street, Cobourg**, where residents in need can take

shelter from the cold and access washrooms and light refreshments. These services will be available seven days a week from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. until the end of March 2023.

Additional services are also available at the warming room location Mondays from 1:00-4:00 p.m. and Fridays 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., including:

- Wellness checks
- Vaccine clinics
- Crisis intervention
- Housing search supports
- Addiction harm reduction supports
- Ontario Works and other social services

Warming room services are provided by Transition House Emergency Shelter in partnership with St. Peter's Church, with funding from Northumberland County. For more information, please contact Transition House Shelter at 905-376-9562.

Additional supports for unsheltered residents

If you are homeless or need help finding more suitable housing, you can contact:

- Northumberland County Community and Social Services: 905-372-6846 or 1-800-354-7050 ext. 2001
- [The Salvation Army Community and Family Services](#): 905-373-9440 or 1-866-865-0678
- [The Help Centre of Northumberland](#): 905-372-2646 or 1-888-698-3382

The services provided by the County of Northumberland are accessible and available to those who currently reside in the Municipality of Port Hope or anywhere across the County. These services have the requisite support programs in place to assist those in need in a variety of areas including but not limited to crisis intervention, addiction harm reduction supports and wellness checks.

The services are well established and relied upon by those in need daily. They include but are not limited to providing warming rooms, offering transition services as well as shelter services to those residents who are in need and have the structure and staff in place to adequately support those who require their services.

The wrap around service model implemented by the County starts from the intake and tracking of clientele, to the end goal of providing long term housing and lifestyle assistance to those in need who struggle with addiction and mental health issues.

The Town of Cobourg has started the process to potentially enter into an agreement with NSCC to undertake a pilot project regarding the sleeping cabin initiative as they currently have a potential municipal site and the wrap around services required are locally available to undertake a project of this nature. Having continuity of support provides the best chance of success. Data collected from a potential pilot project in a

local community will be able to be further analyzed and incorporated to future strategies undertaken by the Municipality of Port Hope.

Currently, there is no reliable data that has been collected and analyzed to accurately determine the need for any additional support mechanisms within the Municipality of Port Hope.

The NSCC delegation was unable to provide detailed information in relation to support structure or services that would be in place to support those who may utilize the cabins, as well were not able to speak to an exit or transition strategy for the project. Their delegation ask was specific to finding a location, or any barriers to a location at this time.

Comparative Projects:

While sleeping cabins are a relatively new approach to serving homeless community members, some communities have experience with established sleeping cabin projects. The concept of sleeping cabins has been undertaken in several communities in the Province of Ontario, including but not limited to Kingston, Oshawa, and Kitchener.

While the concept of providing a sleeping cabin to an individual may seem like an effective strategy to deal with those who are un-sheltered, there are a wide variety of risks and associated items that must be addressed.

In the City of Kingston, the temporarily authorized encampment at Belle Park was supported by health and hygiene services and community-based food programming. When authorization of the encampment expired in the summer of 2020, the City worked with service agency partners to establish the Integrated Care Hub (ICH) which provides low-barrier, wrap-around services to meet immediate needs such as personal security, food, and resting space. The ICH also provides for longer-term addiction and health services including on-site substance consumption and treatment programming. Based on data collected over the last 7 months, the majority of the clientele at the ICH have significant mental health and/or addictions challenges which cannot be addressed through housing solutions alone.

In San Jose, California individual sleeping units with shared washroom, bathing, kitchen, and laundry facilities comprise what they call Bridge House Communities. To-date San Jose has opened two Bridge House Communities with 40 units each, or 80 units in total.

The Bridge House Communities have a series of controls in place to ensure the facilities are secure, safe, and clean. Program participants typically reside in the Bridge House Community for a few months before moving into longer-term housing.

To ensure safety for program participants and the adjacent community, Bridge House Communities are enclosed by a fence to control foot traffic in and out of the site. On-site security ensures resident and neighbourhood safety. The philosophy of the Bridge House Community is to provide program participants an opportunity to stabilize their lives while working towards self-sufficiency.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in Duncan, British Columbia a variety of public and private stakeholders came together to establish 39 eight foot by eight foot sleeping cabins amongst two independent sites. The two projects are located on land provided by the local municipal government and the local First Nation. Based on the success of the program the operator is looking to establish a new project site in Duncan with an additional 20 sleeping cabin units and associated wrap-around services.

In Kitchener Ontario, a sleeping cabin project was initiated in the spring of 2020 when a private landowner invited homeless community members to set up tents inside an unused industrial building. Over time approximately 50 homeless individuals came to reside on the property and sleeping cabins were installed; the community has been named A Better Tent City. Washroom facilities are provided within the pre-existing building located on-site and a portable building was installed providing laundry and shower facilities.

Local social services and meal programming provided services to the site. When it was determined the use did not comply with the zoning bylaw, the local Council approved a motion to waive zoning enforcement. Upon the death of the private landowner and sale of the property Council agreed for the Better Tent City project to be relocated to the municipal snow storage site for an interim period expiring in October 2021. A new location is currently being sought to relocate the sleeping cabins following the pending termination of occupancy at the municipal snow storage site.

The Better Tent City project in Kitchener has been primarily funded through community-based donations. Of note, the Region of Waterloo, who is the Service Manager for housing and homelessness programs, has indicated the Better Tent City model is outside of the established homelessness services system which prioritizes and invests in Housing First and housing-focussed programs. The Service Manager also indicated investments in sanctioned encampments and the Better Tent City project would take away resources from programs and services available in the formalized housing and homelessness system.

Although sleeping cabins arrangements are a relatively new concept, common features of established programs typically include:

- Sleeping cabins are not considered a long-term housing solution and should not replace permanent housing solutions such as Housing First programs and traditional supportive and transitional housing projects.
- To be successful sleeping cabin projects need a lead agency or a partnership of agencies to plan, administer, and operate the facility and conduct outreach efforts to connect program participants to resources and support programs.
- Often community-based donations and in-kind contributions are necessary to fund the capital and ongoing operating costs of the project.

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- Individual sleeping cabins typically provide a locking door, operable window, a sleeping platform or bed, a light, insulated exterior walls and roof, electrical outlet, space heater or wall mounted heater, and a smoke/fire detector.
 - Collections of multiple sleeping cabins are serviced by an existing building or portable trailer which houses washroom, bathing, laundry, and kitchen facilities.
 - Sleeping cabin projects typically include a meal delivery program of one to three meals per day which are often provided through community-based food/meal programs.
 - In order to ensure sleeping cabin program participants stabilize and move towards recovery and self-sufficiency, services such as addictions treatment, harm reduction, mental health services, and skills development are embedded in the program design as long-term residency is not an objective of the sleeping cabin model.
 - Sleeping cabins typically have a small square footage to reduce construction costs. In Ontario, buildings under 108 square feet, that do not have plumbing, typically do not require a building permit and would be exempt from regulations under the Ontario Building Code.
 - Authorized sleeping cabin projects typically include perimeter fencing and access control to ensure safety for program participants and the adjacent community.
 - To avoid compatibility issues and neighbourhood impacts, sleeping cabin projects are typically located outside of existing residential neighbourhoods such as underutilized industrial sites or rural areas.
 - Sleeping cabins should not be confused with tiny homes, also known as accessory dwelling units, which are typically between 300 and 500 square feet in size and provide independent washroom, bathing, and kitchen facilities in addition to sleeping space and modest living space.
 - Due to the high costs of servicing and services a minimum number of cabins may be required to justify the investment.

While the sleeping cabin model has come to the forefront because of the homeless encampments that occurred in many communities with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is undetermined at this time if the sleeping cabin model provides a long-term benefit in terms of ending chronic homelessness.

Advocates of the sleeping cabin model argue sleeping cabins provide more dignity for residents as tenuous camping existence in parks, wooded areas, or vacant lands is unstable and imposes certain health and security risks.

While encampments are reflective of an unmet need for homelessness and housing services, it is undetermined if the authorization of encampments leads to longer-term positive outcomes for those experiencing homelessness and the broader community.

In late 2020, similar type wooden sleeping cabins were being constructed and placed on municipal property in the City of Toronto. The City by-laws did not allow for sleeping/camping on municipal property, nor the placement of the sleeping cabins. A court injunction was sought by the City of Toronto against those involved in the production and placement of the cabins to cease and desist due to the contravention of the municipal by-laws which are in place.

In February of 2021, a fire occurred involving one of the sleeping cabins in the City of Toronto where an individual was unfortunately killed. This incident highlights some of the associated hazards with individuals occupying and sleeping in structures and the importance of fire and building safety requirements.

On December 06, 2022, a fire occurred involving sleeping cabins in the City of Kingston. Three cabins were affected by the fire and were left uninhabitable, with one person receiving minor injuries.

Municipality of Port Hope- Planning and Development:

The proposal from NSCC identified 3 potential properties owned by the Municipality that they felt should be considered to host a pilot project. The civic addresses for these properties are 81 Mill Street South, 95 Mill Street South and 3200 County Road 10.

The 81 Mill Street South property is the former Ruth Clarke Activity Centre location, it is 0.23 Acres in size, currently zoned COM 2 – General Commercial, has a municipal building on the property (former Ruth Clarke Activity Centre) and is in the identified flood plain based on its proximity to the Ganaraska river. The current zoning does not support residential as its primary use and its location in the flood plain makes the location inappropriate to host sleeping cabins from a liability and health and safety perspective.

Four properties south is a larger now vacant property at 95 Mill Street South (former Fire Fighters Museum) that has just been remediated by PHAI and recently returned to the Municipality. The property is 2.01 acres in size, fronting both Mill Street and King Street. It is zoned COM 3 – Downtown Commercial which does not currently support residential as its primary use. Its proximity to the river and its location in the flood plain makes this location inappropriate as a host site for sleeping cabins.

The potential for flooding creates health and safety concerns and increase municipal liability for the site to be used in this way.

The final proposed location by NSCC is 3200 County Road 10 the former George Hamilton school located in the hamlet of Welcome. The property is 5.75 acres with the now vacant school buildings on the site. It is zoned IR - Rural Institutional and the

building is serviced with private water (well) and wastewater (septic), with the water supply not currently being considered potable. Its location outside of the urban boundary with zoning that does not support residential uses, in close proximity to a number of residential properties and not accessible to basic commercial businesses or transit services make it an unsuitable location.

There is no current zone in the Municipality that would support the addition of permanent or temporary sleeping cabins. There are currently no properties in the view of staff that are owned by the Municipality that would be good candidates for a pilot project of this nature. Council could consider, one of its current parkland properties or a site with current municipal facilities but would require a Municipally initiated Zoning By-Law amendment to support the change in use. Beyond land use planning considerations, any identified potential site would have to consider water, wastewater, hydro and emergency access as part of any potential location.

Building Services

Building safety and construction requirements to reduce risks for residents is an important factor of consideration for the sleeping cabins and associated accessory building. The Ontario Building Code (Code) sets out technical requirements for public health and safety, fire protection, structural sufficiency, energy conservation, water conservation, environmental integrity and barrier-free accessibility of buildings.

Under the Code a residential use is required to be supported by sanitary facilities, whether within the building providing sleeping accommodation, or within a separate building on the property accessible to residents of the site, which would require a building permit. These facilities provide for a minimum number of plumbing fixtures based on the number of persons being supported. Spatial separation distances along with the number of related openings to fire protection, structural integrity to account for snow and wind loads, and environmental conditions relating to insulation requirements, heating, ventilation and plumbing will be reviewed to ensure the maintenance of a safe occupant environment.

The proposed pilot project consists of the construction and placement of 4-6 sleeping cabins which are 8'x10' each. The cabins are insulated, heated and equipped with a bed and room for personal items.

The sleeping cabin project consists of potentially 6 units that are approx. 10'x10' and are not equipped with plumbing. Therefore, they are not classified as a "Building" under the *Ontario Building Code* but is classified as a Building and Occupancy under the *Ontario Fire Code (OFC)*. Therefore, a building permit is not required for the construction of the sleeping cabin structures as outlined in the proposal.

OFC "Building" Definition: means any structure used or intended for supporting or sheltering any use or occupancy:

OFC "Occupancy" Definition: means the use or intended use of a building or part thereof for the shelter or support of persons, animals or property

OFC “Residential Occupancy” Definition: means an occupancy in which sleeping accommodation is provided to residents who are not harboured for the purpose of receiving special care or treatment and are not involuntarily detained.

Fire & Life Safety

Fire and life safety concerns for residents are a consideration to reduce the risks and provide a safe sleeping cabin program.

Fire department staff would work with the project proponent and service providers if a suitable location is found to incorporate fire and life safety planning into the design of the facility and also ensuring residents receive a timely response by emergency services.

Combination smoke and carbon monoxide alarms should be installed, including an exterior indicator light on the façade of the sleeping cabin that remains lit while the smoke and carbon monoxide alarm is operating. If the alarm is disabled, the indicator light will go out and supervisory staff would further investigate.

A fire access route internal to the site would be incorporated to aid first responders to reach each cabin. A continuous source of water supply (identifying nearby hydrants) and the availability of fire extinguishers would need to be incorporated into the site. Sufficient spatial separation between cabins is recommended. Information on fire and life safety hazards and emergency procedures would be provided by the fire department to educate and support occupant safety in the event of a fire occurring.

The *Ontario Fire Code* requirements for the proposed sleeping cabins are as follows:

- 1) Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms shall be installed and properly maintained in each cabin.
- 2) Any use of fuel-fired appliances inside a cabin shall be prohibited and strictly enforced
- 3) Open air burning (Ex. Campfires) anywhere on the site shall be prohibited and strictly enforced
- 4) Unsafe use of electrical extension cords shall be prohibited
- 5) The accumulation of excessive amounts of combustible materials in and around the cabins shall be prohibited and strictly enforced
- 6) A minimum spatial separation of 3 meters shall be maintained between each cabin and all other structures
- 7) Suitable access for emergency vehicles shall be maintained throughout the site. All access roads shall be minimum of 6 meters in width and capable of bearing the weight of 45,000lbs fire apparatus

Port Hope Fire and Emergency Services also makes the following recommendations related to fire life safety:

- 1) Recommended that the plywood interior with a recommended fire-retardant paint or spray to increase the fire resistance rating
- 2) One fire extinguisher per cabin and one in an outdoor cabinet with glass break

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- 3) Recommended that ceiling mounted CSA approved infrared heaters be provided as a heat source for the cabin
 - 4) All cabins be fitted with doors that swing in an outward direction
 - 5) Interconnection of smoke / CO alarms between cabins equipped with outdoor sounding device(s) and external visual indicator(s)
 - 6) Smoking is the leading cause of fatal fires in Ontario. Establish and enforce no smoking policy within the sleeping cabins

Financial Considerations:

The costs to develop a sleeping cabin project are difficult to assess as there are few comparable projects. In addition, the level of services provided (e.g. health and social support services, food program, security, transportation, etc.) can greatly impact the annual operating costs.

Research has indicated individual sleeping cabins can range in price from \$5,000 to \$18,000 depending on the materials, construction technique, and the profit margin extracted by the manufacturer. In many cases, in-kind material and labour contributions have been utilized to reduce the capital cost.

Beyond the cost of the sleeping cabin structures a proposed project should consider costing for the following:

- Soft costs including permits, approvals, design services, engineering services, legal services, etc.
- Land cost (i.e. purchase, lease, or in-kind contribution from willing host)
- Insurance
- Site construction and servicing (e.g. site grading, parking and driveways/surface preparation, water and sanitary system hookups, electrical system and distribution throughout the site, fencing, sleeping cabin installation, and other necessary site-related capital investments)
- Common washroom, bathing, laundry, and possibly kitchen facilities
- On-site staff support to ensure facility is operated in a safe manner while limiting impacts on adjacent properties and neighbours
- Security services
- Transportation services if required
- Meal program requirements
- Utility costs (i.e. water, electrical, etc.)
- Health and social support services (e.g. social services, health care and addiction services, housing search services, skills development services)
- Solid waste management and collection
- Telecommunications and internet
- Site maintenance (i.e. snow and ice clearing, grass cutting, etc.)
- Other ongoing maintenance, damage, and repairs
- Emergency Access route and associated maintenance

Potential considerations to control costs include utilizing a location that has existing necessary site infrastructure including washroom, bathing, laundry, and kitchen

facilities. Other communities have demonstrated community-based contributions can lessen the diversion of funding from existing housing and homelessness services programs. As noted earlier in the report, costs and requirements for service may lead to an economies of scale perspective.

Communication and Public Engagement:

Based on the current request and presentation, NSCC has engaged in significant public consultation about their ideas and have brought forward a sample structure for community viewing at a number of community-based events, activities and locations.

Should a property be identified for this activity and in future Council direct staff to prepare a temporary use by-law or other land use planning tool to allow for the use compliance with the Planning Act, a full slate of public notices and consultations would be required.

Conclusion:

The issue of homelessness, and those of who are unsheltered is of serious concern. In order to adequately support those in need the County of Northumberland has established policy and programs that are currently available to residents of the Municipality of Port Hope.

Port Hope does not have the existing support structure and/or resources to support the NCSS proposed project as it was presented and more engagement and a significant allotment of resources would be required to attain the recommendations as outlined in the report which would require direction from Council. NSCC could be encouraged to continue engagement with other service providers working in this field.

As the County is local government's lead service provider in this area, and the Town of Cobourg are in the process of working with NCSS, Port Hope municipal staff could with Council support, stay closely connected to that project and report back to Council on a regular basis. In addition, staff could further review municipal land holding options to identify a possible location if the Cobourg pilot is successful.

At this time sleeping cabin projects are a developing homelessness solution that tend to be community-led initiatives as they are outside of established homelessness service programs. While it remains yet to be determined if sleeping cabin projects are a long-term solution to chronic homelessness, some unhoused individuals and their advocates argue sleeping cabins present a viable option to provide simple, short-term housing.

Based on the site servicing requirements and ongoing operating costs it is difficult to determine if sleeping cabin projects are less costly than monthly rent subsidization for a modest rental unit especially on the scale proposed by NCSS.

The key challenge to housing the current population residing in local emergency shelters and the Integrated Care Hub or sleeping rough is that many of these individuals experience drug dependency and mental health issues. Accordingly, a sleeping cabin project intending to serve the local homeless population will need to provide ready access to addiction and mental health services.

Staff intend to continue supporting community members that are interested in developing a sleeping cabin program and working with them to ensure the areas covered in this report are addressed. In this regard it is understood the challenges to develop and operate such a facility are considerable, however, staff will continue to be a resource to community members pursuing the development of sleeping cabins as solution to homelessness.

If the proposed project does proceed in Port Hope compliance with all applicable Municipal and Provincial laws and regulations governing such a project is a requirement, which would include Municipal Bylaws and the *Ontario Fire Code* will be critical.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Presentation Materials from NSCC