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Council asks for in-depth study of homelessness in Dufferin County

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A deep analysis of local homelessness issues would serve Dufferin County well.

That was one of the needs broached as part of an update county council requested on the Choices Shelter's financial outlook to 2028.

Council heard that Choices Shelter, which consists of a location for youth and another location for men, continues to face financial sustainability challenges despite temporary emergency money from the county in 2025 and provincial Homeless and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub funding.

Brenda Wagner, the county's health and human services director, said in a report to council that consolidation into a single shelter location is the most financially viable option. But Choices' board of directors has concerns about service accessibility and organizational impacts of consolidation.

Three options were identified during council's Jan. 8 meeting. They include completing a shelter needs assessment for Dufferin County while providing interim financial support to Choices; terminating the agreements with Choices; or continuing ongoing financial support for the organization under its current operating model.

Wagner said funding to the shelter has just recently started to flow despite it becoming a HART Hub in November. The projected $600,000 allocation has been prorated due to the later-than-planned opening, as original funding assumed a mid-year launch.

Ten per cent of that, which is a $60,000 administrative portion, may be used to offset general operating costs.

?While helpful, this amount is insufficient to address Choices' ongoing operational deficits or ensure long-term sustainability in its current model,? Wagner said.

From August 2025 to December 2025, Choices has been supported financially in the following way with $134,951 from the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), a $55,305 federal Reaching Home grant, and the $100,855 of the county emergency money.

That's a total of $291,111.

Councillor Fred Nix, who is also Mono's deputy mayor, said $291,111 over the last five months for an average number of 17 people at the shelter works out to about $3,400 per person a month.

For that kind of money, Nix asked if apartments could be found for those shelter clients.

?It seems to be a very expensive way to handle emergency beds for that price,? he said.

Wagner drew council's attention to the option that calls for a comprehensive review of existing housing and homelessness programs across Dufferin County, including a gap analysis. A data-driven assessment would help determine the level of shelter services required

?It really would provide us the opportunity to really do a deep dive and come up with an approach that would be data-informed,? Wagner said.

Jaime Edge, the shelter's executive director, said the tally of 17 people included in a recent report was the number of people who

were in the shelters on the day that report was written.

?Each day we could have new intakes coming in,? Edge said.

The numbers that make more sense, she said, are the number of ?bed stays.?

?And in nine months, we've offered 5,000 bed stays,? she said. ?That number is a little bit more significant because, although I was saying about our average stay, there was some people who were only in shelter for a week or two weeks.?

They were able to be re-housed.

Edge said the actual number of people who availed of the shelter's services in that who time was 77 people.

Coun. Todd Taylor, who is also Orangeville's deputy mayor, said the shelter's financial outlook is a difficult question with many facets. The reality is, the Choices Shelter is a required option for Dufferin County.

There are people in the county who would be significantly inconvenienced by the shelter's absence.

He supported county staff conducting the recommended housing and homelessness program review and an accompanying service gap analysis.

?Lots of time I feel that we're just missing the data,? Taylor said.