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County of Dufferin approves funding request to help residents facing homelessness

By Paula Brown

Dufferin County Council has ap proved a request to move funds from the social housing reserve to continue helping residents seeking municipal housing support.

During Dufferin County Council's meeting on July 11, Councillor Lisa Post, chair of the health and human services committee, shared with council that there isn't sufficient funding to continue supporting those experiencing homelessness.

?Due to some funding uncertainties at both the provincial and federal levels, staff have recognized that there's a gap and in the short term they're looking to draw $100,000 from the reserves that's specifically allocated for social housing and that will allow staff to continue to move clients from homelessness to housing,? said Post.

According to the report to council, there are approximately four housing allowances left before the budgets are exhausted.

?The current situation, because of the lack of announcements from the provincial and federal government, is that we only have about enough money left to help four more families so that $100,000 will help us fill that gap in the interim,? explained Post.

Anna McGregor, director of community services for the County of Dufferin, told the health and human services committee at their June 27 meeting, that there has been a lot of back and forth with changes to the National Housing Strategy as well as how much money the county would be receiving in funding.

She said, that as a result it has made it harder to manage the By Name List (BNL) and other housing support programs.

The By Name List (BNL) is a real-time list of people experiencing homelessness in Dufferin County, who have agreed to accept services. Dufferin County implemented its own BNL in May of 2019, as a tool to identify the most vulnerable community members who were experiencing housing instability and connect them to services to support them in finding and maintaining housing.

According to the report, Dufferin County's By Name List recorded one of the lowest numbers in years in mid-June, with a total of 19 homeless individuals.

?One of the challenges what we have when we're working with our folks on the By Name List, is how do we get them onto that longer term solution,? said McGregor.

The County of Dufferin has a municipally funded program called the Chronic Homelessness Housing Allowance Program (CHHAP), which is a short-term solution for eligible clients on the By Name List and is designed to get people out of homelessness until other programs become available. Clients are then transferred to either provincially or federally funded housing allowance programs when new funding becomes available or when other clients leave the program.

Dufferin County said housing allowances and services have led to a reduction in homelessness.

In anticipation of future funding difficulties and recognizing the need to bridge the funding gap in the short term, the social housing reserve was created to set money aside to continue assisting vulnerable community members.

?We had deliberately set aside money in reserves knowing that this might happen at some point. This reserve is designed to help with those fluctuations in funding and this is so when we put people in the By Name List, we have something to offer them while we work on those other programs,? said McGregor.

The reserve for social housing has a balance of $701,304 and with a withdrawal of $100,000, the reserve will be left with a balance of $601,304.

The report states that the additional financial support provided will help Dufferin County work towards ending chronic homelessness, not just managing it.