

Here are the highlights from the regular Lanark County Council meeting held Wednesday, Jan. 13.

- **Council Takes Steps to Address Housing Crisis:** Council has approved five recommendations following a special community services committee meeting that updated councillors on the growing housing crisis for precariously housed individuals.

Housing Manager Shawna Stone provided an overview to councillors outlining the increasing needs and some of the key issues beyond a general lack of affordable housing in the community (and across the province). This includes factors such as mental health, addictions, evictions, family break-up, job loss, poverty and the added complications with COVID-19. “The wait list numbers for housing are up 12.5% in 2020,” she said, noting fewer people are moving from units and Carleton Place continues to have the longest wait time at about 8.5 years. As well, the number of individuals who are homeless and requiring hotel stays subsidized through the county and emergency relief funds has risen dramatically, she said. In 2019, 73 people were supported with hotel stays that averaged three to five days. “In 2020, this number has grown to approximately 179, with stays of one to two months,” Stone said, noting there are currently 34 people in hotels and that COVID-19 has made the situation more complicated.

Stone and Director of Social Services Emily Hollington outlined a range of options to increase the housing supply, including undertaking a new build; acquiring and converting property; releasing an expression of interest; adding more portable housing benefits and rent supplement spaces; and replacing lost rent supplement spaces with portable housing benefit spaces.

Council approved recommendations to:

- release an expression of interest (no cost) to currently contracted non-profit housing providers for a third-party housing build;
- add 10 more portable housing benefit spaces (\$32,400 from reserves);
- add 10 rent supplement spaces (\$72,000 from reserves); and
- to replace lost rent supplement units (when property owners don't renew) with portable housing benefits spaces.

In addition, the county has approved an agreement with Lanark County Mental Health for up to \$100,000 to employ a registered counsellor/psychotherapist until December 2021. The position would be an employee of LCMH but would work with county staff. Hollington explained it is hoped the position will be able to connect with those in hotels who need mental health services and, consequently, alleviate the number of precariously housed.

Council also provided staff direction to:

- host an information session with municipal staff and councillors that would provide further education and opportunity to share municipal best practices; and
- to form a Housing Working Group.

Stone recapped the county's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, which seeks to increase affordable housing supply; plan for a diverse range of housing choices; stabilize and revitalize current housing stock; ensure adequate supply of appropriate, supportive and universal housing; and educate the community on local housing needs and offer incentives to build affordable housing.

It has also set a schedule to increase affordable housing supply over the next 10 years to meet mandated targets that features a combination of new builds and housing programs.

Stone noted a partnership with the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville and Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Addictions and Mental Health to conduct a current environmental scan around homelessness that will recommend tangible outcomes and solutions. Stone noted the county has worked with and continues to seek partnerships in the community to increase housing and supports to meet demand.

The report also highlighted ways local municipalities could help to increase housing stock, as well as available programs to support municipalities and developers. "These recommendations represent one step in a complex issue," Warden Christa Lowry (Mississippi Mills Mayor) said. "Housing is a priority for council and is a critical component of health and well-being for our citizens." For more information, contact Emily Hollington, Director of Social Services, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 2101.

- **Council Approves Appointments:** Council has formalized the appointments to two emergency management components for Lanark County in order to comply with requirements of the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management. Deputy Clerk Casey Whiticar has been appointed as the primary Community Emergency Management Coordinator, with Tara Langford as alternate. Appointments to the 2021 Emergency Management Program Committee include Whiticar as Chair, Warden Christa Lowry (Mississippi Mills), CAO Kurt Greaves, County Clerk/Deputy CAO Leslie Drynan, Director of Social Services Emily Hollington and Director of Public Works Terry McCann. For more information, contact Casey Whiticar, Deputy Clerk/CEMC, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1102.
- **Upcoming Meetings: County Council, Wednesday, Jan. 27, 5 p.m.;** Public Works, Jan. 27 (following County Council); Economic Development, Jan. 27 (following Public Works). **County Council, Wednesday, Feb. 10, 5 p.m.;** Community Services, Feb. 10 (following County Council); Corporate Services, Feb. 10 (following Community Services). Watch for details about public access to meetings on agendas and through online notifications. For more information, contact 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1502. Like "LanarkCounty1" on Facebook and follow "@LanarkCounty1" on Twitter!