

October 2006

# Winter Emergency Response Plan

**Prepared by  
Boyle Street Community Services  
In consultation with:  
the Winter Emergency Committee,  
Community Agencies and  
People without Homes**

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## Overview

The Winter Emergency Committee was initiated several years ago by the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund (EHTF) and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCOH). It is comprised of representatives of EHTF, EJPCOH, the three orders of government and community service agencies. Boyle Street Community Services has led a community process to develop a 2006-07 Winter Emergency Response Plan. Boyle Street has been part of past winter emergency responses, offering transportation and outreach program for 2 years and extended drop-in during one year.

This Winter Emergency Response Plan has been based on a series of consultations with stakeholders including service agencies, government representatives and people without homes. The primary focus of the plan is services that would mitigate the problems that plague people who are homeless in the winter. Effective winter strategies are rarely discrete activities. The key strategies recommended in this plan and detailed herein are:

Winter shelter:	There are 536 regularly funded shelter beds in Edmonton. It is recommended that 400 additional winter emergency mats be funded. These would be provided in existing shelters and a city facility. <b>Estimated Cost: \$ 305,000</b>
Special Needs:	This plan recognizes that there are special requirements for different populations, from chronically homeless to families to those with health and disabilities issues. As well, the need of secondary migrants for assistance has grown dramatically. In addition to appropriate shelter responses for these groups, appropriate support and additional health care are required. <b>Estimated Cost: \$ 90,000</b>
Transportation:	It is proposed that the Winter Emergency Van and follow-up service operated by Boyle Street Community Services be funded. It is recognized that transportation and logistics will be a more significant issue this year, depending on overflow locations and family shelter options. <b>Estimated Cost: \$196,000</b>
Drop-ins:	Emphasis is on the use of existing facilities throughout the day and with extended hours for drop in facilities so services are available 7 days per week and when the shelters are closed. <b>Estimated Cost: \$759,000</b>
Coordination:	In order to make the most effective use of existing and new resources, focused coordination of Winter Emergency Response initiatives is required. This will also involve monitoring of shelter use and initiation of appropriate responses depending on need. <b>Estimated Cost: \$ 44,000</b>
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Projected Winter Plan Cost: \$ 1,394,000</b>

Extreme Situation: In light of the current context, there needs to be a contingency for additional shelter spaces should client numbers and weather indicate a need. These spaces could be provided in some existing facilities, but some additional facilities would need to be identified. Funding will be required for staff, materials and perhaps a facility costs.

**Estimated Cost: \$ 965,000**

<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Projected Additional Cost in Extreme Situation: \$965,000</b>
<b>Total Estimated Cost:</b>	<b>\$2,359,000</b>

Funding for Winter Emergency strategies has been previously provided through the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, with all orders of government absorbing some of the increased costs associated with winter demand as is appropriate to their department or programs. While the trend in past years has been a reduction in the costs of winter emergency projects, it is expected that this year will reverse that trend – significantly. As the cause of this anticipated cost increase is a direct result of Edmonton's current economic boom, new funding must be found to meet housing needs in the winter. The Winter Emergency Committee is requesting additional funding be provided by the federal and provincial governments, and that those funds be administered through the EHTF.

Application letters have been submitted separately to EHTF for elements this Plan that need to be implemented by November 1, 2006 and the City is working on securing an overflow facility. Funding applications for other components of the plan will be forwarded following stakeholder review of the plan. Some initiatives will be undertaken as part of regular service delivery by the stakeholders and represent an in-kind contribution to implementation of the plan.

## **A Different Context**

The current economic climate in Edmonton has introduced a number of challenges to implementing Winter Emergency plans this year. The in-migration of individuals looking to benefit from the current boom has put significant stress on the housing market. Some individuals arrive with employment lined up but no place to live and have difficulty finding affordable housing, increasing the numbers of working poor in our community. Many arrive without jobs, few resources, and again, no place to live. Secondary migrants experience this reality with the additional barriers of language, culture and a new setting. While it is clear the number of people needing shelter has increased, it is difficult to project numbers as many of those that may need emergency shelter are unknown to the agencies that would provide shelter.

The increased demand for housing has caused rental rates to soar and vacancy rates to plummet. Some renters are seeing \$300 per month increases and the vacancy rate is heading to 1%. Landlords are becoming increasingly selective, requiring prospective tenants to have references, excellent credit ratings, incomes three times greater than the rent and clear criminal record checks. Short supply, high rents and stringent screening mean many people are unable to rent a home. The availability of affordable rental accommodation has been further eroded by the conversion of apartments to condos, redevelopment of older neighbourhoods, the demolition of rooming houses and the enforcement of safer housing standards. Many older hotels, formerly occupied on a weekly basis and used for emergency housing are also raising rates and are frequently fully booked by workers in from resource industry camps. It is anticipated that the demand for emergency shelter will increase as these factors squeeze more people out of the housing market.

Paradoxically, while there are more people coming to our city in search of work, hiring and retaining staff in the social sector has become extremely difficult. Wages in many agencies serving people who are homeless are far below market, leaving staff in poverty and experiencing their own housing instability. It is a highly competitive environment. Some programs have increased operating costs in an effort to pay a living wage. Others struggle with staff shortages at a time when community needs have increased workloads. The level of violence amongst clients and directed at staff have increased, adding to worker stress and retention challenges. The culmination of these working conditions is causing staff to leave the sector. Consequently, agencies are no better positioned than any other sector to hire new staff to respond quickly to increased demand for services. The wage issue is being examined on a broader scale, but staffing needs to address winter emergency issues must be taken into account in related funding decisions.

Finally, as Hurricane Katrina made clear, weather emergencies kill the homeless. Unless efforts are made in advance to plan for and test emergency preparedness readiness in reaching and intervening to reduce morbidity and mortality in these populations, the same results will occur here. A seasonally tested and validated cold weather emergency response plan would ensure that these citizens are properly protected.

All of these impacts have emphasized the need for early commitments on the part of all stakeholders to a plan to ensure staff, resources and space is available for the winter months.

## **The Need**

The 2004 Homeless Count identified approximately 2,192 homeless Edmontonians. The 2006 biennial Homeless Count was conducted on October 17, and it is expected that the number of homeless has increased significantly. Existing shelters have found September and October occupancy to compare to that of last winter and some shelters are routinely turning away clients. Over the summer over 280 camps were identified in the river valley, most with 2 or more individuals. In addition, about 100 people have been identified as absolutely homeless in the west end and there is a growing camp of people on Fort Road. The number of women and seniors with nowhere to go is increasing.

There is growing concern for people that existing shelters are unable to serve. A number of people who are aggressive and sometimes violent are barred from many services and in some cases, are restricted by court order from being in the downtown. Youth using crystal meth are particularly volatile and difficult to assist. Youth under 18 without child welfare status have few options. People with restricted mobility or requiring oxygen are unable to access shelters. The number of seniors on the street is increasing.

Women, couples and families with adult children are underserved by existing shelters. Housing instability for families is growing, particularly for larger families. More families are seeking assistance from the Family Shelter Network, outreach and immigrant serving agencies. Many services, including Health for Two, report families are requesting assistance with housing because they are homeless or about to be, often due to costs and overcrowding.

Drop-in centers downtown and in the west end have people regularly report that they had nowhere to sleep the previous night and are thus exhausted. The physical and mental health of this group is particularly bad. Homeless people on the south side, many of whom never cross the river, have no day or night shelter opportunities. Outreach workers are currently assisting about 70 individuals in the Whyte Avenue area. The availability of evening, weekend or holiday drop-ins is limited throughout the city.

## **Strategies**

The Winter Emergency Committee has greatly improved coordination and collaboration amongst stakeholders involved in providing emergency shelter and services. All those involved acknowledge the need for a comprehensive response with several elements and shared responsibilities. This year, there is great concern over the lack of information available regarding the number of individuals who will be needing assistance, and stress on existing organizations to coordinate their roles to respond as effectively and efficiently as possible.

## **Shelter**

### **Winter Emergency Immediate Need and Plans**

Shelter usage is currently at approximately 25% above prior years, and the 2006 Homeless Count is expected to reflect a similar increase of the visibly homeless. There is considerable concern amongst community service providers that winter emergency needs will be much greater than this - up to an additional 25% - as they have identified a significant increase in the homeless individuals that have not yet entered the shelter system but have been known to be "couch surfing" or in the "rough" throughout the summer, while accessing support services and seeking housing assistance. It is, therefore, recommended that immediate priority be placed on provision of 936 mats and beds, with a contingency of an additional 339 in the event that need becomes urgent and extreme.

Currently, there are 536 existing shelter mats/beds available in Edmonton. Hope Mission and the Salvation Army can offer a total of 400 winter emergency mats in addition to their regular programming, however, require additional funding to do so. Of the 400, Hope Mission has committed to providing 250 additional spaces at the Herb Jamieson throughout the Winter Emergency period, and will also commit to staffing a facility provided by the City of Edmonton with an additional 100 mats, should funding be available. Pending funding approval, Salvation Army has committed to providing 50 mats for sober individuals in its downtown location. This would bring the available mat/bed space to 936.

### **WINTER SHELTER BUDGET**

**\$305,000**

### **Extreme Situation Contingency**

Hope Mission projects that they can accommodate up to an additional 100 mats throughout its services in an extreme situation, but again, would require additional funding for staffing. Space and a provider for an additional 240 contingency mats are still to be identified. A per mat cost of \$20/day is estimated for the 240 contingency spaces. This cost is higher than winter emergency because it reflects start up in addition to staff and facility operating costs. The contingency budget represents 181 days operating all contingency mats. The intent, however, is to bring these mats forward as the need is identified through the winter emergency coordination. The cost may be offset by the facility chosen and the type of staffing needed to serve the overflow population.

Historically, the main police station has been a warming center of last resort for hard to serve and barred individuals. This winter, the station will be locked at 9 pm and will not be an option. It has also been suggested that people will only be incarcerated for crimes that threaten public safety and not for outstanding fines. Therefore, individuals relying on unpaid fines to secure shelter in a jail may add to the agency shelter demand. It is essential that an appropriately designed and supported tolerant option be available to shelter such individuals. Therefore, additional resources are required for any other shelter/warming facilities required satisfying the need for 240 more spaces. Some food service is associated with all shelter spaces and contingency mats would require additional purchases of supplies including blankets and mats.

### **EXTREME SITUATION BUDGET**

**\$965,000**

## Summary of All Shelter Beds and Mats

Shelter Resources	Existing	Immediate Winter Need	Extreme Situation	Additional Winter Budget
<b>Winter Emergency</b>				
Hope Mission				
▪ Herb Jamieson	250			
▪ Intox	70			
▪ Youth	30			
▪ Winter mats (incl. Women & couples)		250		180,000
▪ City facility		100		100,000+
George Spady Centre*	80			
WEAC*	75			
YESS*	16			
ICYHP* - short term	10			
ICHYP – high risk youth	5			
Salvation Army		50		25,000
<b>Sub-Total WE units (936)</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>400</b>		<b>\$305,000</b>

<b>Extreme Situation</b>				
Contingency- HM in-fill			100	100,000 +
Additional contingency mats			240	865,000
<b>Sub-Total ES units (340)</b>			<b>340</b>	<b>\$965,000</b>

<b>Total** WE/ES units (1276)</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>\$1,270,000</b>
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+ Staff cost only

\*All shelters are listed however those noted are unable to provide more space than they currently do.

\*\*Maximum based on all mats being required for period of Nov. 1 – Apr. 30. Actual required funding will depend on operating days.

### Housing Policy Consideration

An adequate income is critical to addressing homelessness. In winter, community concern about homelessness and compassion for those affected is high. It is an opportunity to encourage the evolution of social policies that enable low-income earners to participate in the housing market.

Specific interventions that would help to reduce homelessness include:

- income security programs to pay market rents for clients.
- more rent subsidies that support housing market participation.
- restriction on rent increase amounts.

Promoting these solutions in winter and at this time in Alberta's political life can encourage public dialogue and may lead to action. There is no additional winter emergency cost associated with this work.

## ***Transportation and Services***

### **Families and People with Special Circumstances**

It is not possible to ascertain the number of families who are currently homeless or at risk of being homeless in Edmonton. However, anecdotal information indicates that this is an area of growing concern. The province provides emergency assistance to eligible homeless families through Alberta Works. The province will continue to meet this need within its existing budget; however, the logistics of finding available space at the time required is a concern. The YMCA and lower cost hotels were used in the past, but current bookings indicate there will be no room available for emergencies. Therefore, it is recommended that the feasibility of blocking a set number of rooms at the YMCA or area hotels for the duration of the winter emergency period be explored. These rooms could be released prior should the rooms not be required for emergency housing, possibly averting the need to expend public funds on vacant rooms.

There is a potential partnership with private sector operators of hotel rooms in this approach. If an agreement can be negotiated with hotel operators whereby they will confirm room holds with the province when they reach a specific occupancy threshold and not charge otherwise, administration would be minimal. Alberta Works is exploring this possibility.

The YMCA has committed to blocking 2 of its family units to be available for short stays during the winter emergency period, if funding is committed prior to November 1, 2006. As done last winter, the client would be referred by Boyle Street Community Services to the YMCA. Financial assistance would be sought from Alberta Works for eligible families. The protocol for this process has been established. The Family Shelter Network, a Bissell Centre/Boyle Street Community Services joint venture is a key resource in this protocol. Cost estimate for holding rooms at the YMCA is **\$30,000**.

In addition to families with children under 16, there are singles and family situations where a shelter bed is not an appropriate placement. This includes people who are unfamiliar with inner city culture and people with health conditions, particularly conditions that limit mobility, require oxygen, are infectious or erode social skills. Temporary accommodation can be a stop-gap pending an appropriate placement. Experience has shown that such an intervention stops a further decline and frequently leads to an outcome that reduces use of public resources. This is particularly true for people with employment who are waiting to be paid.

In addition to the foregoing shelter options, it is proposed to explore how churches could help meet the needs of families. Inn from the Cold, a Calgary program, wherein families are provided shelter at churches, with coordinated transportation to and from churches could be adapted to Edmonton. If combined with wrap-around services and a focus on community inclusion, such a program could facilitate family transition to long-term housing. There is willingness within faith communities to provide families shelter and it has been recommended that the District Council of Churches or the Greater Edmonton Alliance be asked to work with winter emergency stakeholders to explore this option. Contingency mat dollars could be directed to address costs associated with this initiative.

Secondary migrants to Edmonton, attracted by the opportunity for employment, arrive in the city having exhausted all resources. They land on the doorsteps of already overworked and under funded agencies with nowhere to sleep. The dangers posed by winter are extreme and aggravated by overcrowding and makeshift homes. A dedicated staff person could specialize in housing this population and coordinate with other settlement staff to assist families in overcoming language, cultural and unfamiliarity with the city thus avoiding an emergency in winter. The estimated cost of this service including overhead is **\$25,000**.

People who are homeless experience poorer health than the average person. This is particularly the case for people sleeping in the 'rough' or wandering the streets. Once sheltered, illnesses masked by general malaise come to the fore and in a shelter setting can pose a threat to the health of others. In addition, the impact of cold weather introduces a new range of conditions that threaten people's well-being. Therefore, it is proposed that for the winter period, Boyle McCauley Health Centre increase its outreach nursing service by 1 FTE at a cost of **\$35,000** in order to serve the variety of sites that will provide shelter from the winter cold.

#### **WHER Van and Outreach**

As in prior years, Boyle Street Community Services, subject to funding, will operate the winter van to transport individuals to shelter. This service will be available 7 days per week and provide a combination of designated pick-up times in selected locations and an 'on-call' service. As in the past, van staff will help clients address the causes and implications of their homelessness as the first step to a permanent home. This will include working with the Family Shelter Network, a BSCS/Bissell Centre joint venture, to address the specific concerns of families. The Cost of the WHER Van and Outreach is **\$196,000**

**TRANSPORTATION AND SERVICE BUDGET** **\$ 286,000**

#### ***Drop-In & Warming Locations***

Drop-in and warming locations provide people who are homeless with accessible and timely services. They provide people with no fixed address a conduit to the mainstream and a place to access support and practical services including bathrooms. Meeting the urgent needs of the homeless during the winter months can be maximized through the use of existing facilities. Funding is required to extend the hours of existing drop-in locations. Weekends and holidays are particularly high risk periods because few services are available. During the workweek, the gap between shelter and community service hours is also a concern. It is, therefore, recommended that the following services be offered. They utilize existing infrastructure and programs, but require additional resources. All services would be adjusted as deemed appropriate given utilizations and demand.

#### **West Edmonton**

*Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre*

It is proposed that the operating hours be extended to coincide with the van operated by Boyle Street Community Services. JPHAWC will hire required staff. The budget is for drop-in staff, supplies and overhead.

**BUDGET** **\$96,000**

## **118 Ave Warming Centre**

*Salvation Army – Edmonton Crossroads Community Church*

Concerns about 118 Avenue are well known in the community. Night-life is extremely active. Therefore, the Salvation is proposing to operate an overnight warming centre in its existing facility

### **BUDGET**

**\$75,000**

#### **Downtown**

*Boyle Street Community Services and the Bissell Centre* currently operate week-day community services and a drop-in. With the onset of poor weather, needs have increased. The current context has increased the challenges faced. Five possible extensions are recommended.

#### **Weekend and holiday service & drop in**

This would provide a safe warming center during the day for people. Based on past experience it is important to offer intervention and support services to avoid creation of a day time "flop". Hours of operation would be 6 am to 9 pm at one existing drop-in. The 6 am opening is to target people who have failed to secure shelter the previous evening.

### **BUDGET**

**\$192,000**

#### **Early Drop-In**

Operating hours would be 6 am to 9 am. This would meet the warming needs of people who have been up all night and then the needs of people who must leave their shelters by 7 am. Staff would be present until 9:30 am to facilitate transition to day time follow-up. This service would be at Boyle Street so as not to conflict with Bissell's labour ready service.

### **BUDGET**

**\$52,000**

#### **Day time Respite**

This service would assist people who are too tired to access service or go to work. The service would allow people to rest, get some nourishment, get cleaned up and then follow-up with staff to work towards solutions to their homeless state. This would be coordinated with the early drop-in, but could operate in a facility adjacent to Boyle from 7 am to 2 pm.

### **BUDGET**

**\$148,000**

#### **Extended Evening Drop-In**

Operating from 6 pm – 9 pm weeknights in an existing drop-in, an evening drop-in would keep people warm until shelter spaces are generally available.

### **BUDGET**

**\$52,000**

#### **Sober Evening Activity**

Dark cold nights pose a particular challenge for people who are marginalized but are trying to stay sober. Providing an environment where people can join together, socialize and build positive supports is one way to help address one of the leading correlates to homelessness – addictions. This would be offered in a facility separate from existing drop-ins.

### **BUDGET**

**\$144,000**

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**DROP-IN & WARMING BUDGET TOTAL****\$ 759,000*****Coordination***

The success of the Winter Emergency Program hinges on the proactive planning, coordination and communication amongst stakeholders. In particular, the collation and broad dissemination of information regarding services available from traditional and non-traditional partners (the public, business, churches as well as agencies) will be necessary. The Emergency Program coordinator would also be tasked with cold weather emergency planning and preparedness both with homeless agencies and Edmonton and Capital Health emergency preparedness organizations. It is proposed that coordinator be contracted for the 181 days of the winter emergency program, and for an additional month to produce a summary report. This position will be required to work closely with front-line staff and as such, it is proposed that they work out of Boyle Street Community Services. The coordinator's work will be guided by a Steering Committee of Winter Emergency stakeholders and service providers.

The Coordinator will also support initiatives that do not require additional funding. This includes ensuring EPS has accurate information to publish in a winter emergency resource for its officers and facilitating an interagency case management process for assisting people who are chronically homeless.

**EMERGENCY PROGRAM COORDINATOR BUDGET****\$44,000**

# Funding Summary

## Budget Estimates

	ETHF	Province	Federal	City	Total
<b>Shelter</b>					
250 Additional Mats at Hope Mission	\$ 90,000	\$ 90,000			\$ 180,000
100 Overflow Facility (in kind)				\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000
Staffing/Service for City Facility		\$ 100,000			\$ 100,000
50 Mats Salvation Army	\$ 25,000				\$ 25,000
<b>Transportation and Services</b>					
WHER Van & Outreach	\$ 196,000				\$ 196,000
YMCA Room Holds		\$ 30,000			\$ 30,000
BMHC Health Services		\$ 35,000			\$ 35,000
EMCN Housing		\$ 25,000			\$ 25,000
<b>Drop In Facilities</b>					
JPHWC Evening, Weekend, Holidays	\$ 95,000				\$ 95,000
SA 118 Ave. Warming Centre		\$ 75,000			\$ 75,000
Dntn. Weekend and Holiday Services		\$ 192,000			\$ 192,000
Downtown drop-in		\$ 52,000			\$ 52,000
Downtown Day time respite		\$ 148,000			\$ 148,000
Downtown Extended evening		\$ 52,000			\$ 52,000
Downtown Sober Evening Activity			\$ 144,000		\$ 144,000
<b>Coordination</b>	\$ 44,000				\$ 44,000
<b>Subtotal - Winter Emergency</b>	\$ 450,000	\$ 799,000	\$ 144,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 1,453,000
<b>Extreme Situation Contingency</b>					
100 Mat contingency in-fill at HM		\$ 100,000			\$ 100,000
240 Mats - Location TBD		\$ 865,000			\$ 865,000
<b>Subtotal - Extreme Situation</b>		\$ 965,000			\$ 965,000
<b>Total</b>	\$ 450,000	\$ 1,764,000	\$ 144,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 2,418,000

*note: \$60,000 is city inkind contribution*

## **Stakeholders & Agencies Endorsing the Plan**

Boyle McCauley Health Centre  
Boyle Street Community Services  
Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing  
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers  
High Risk Youth Unit (CFSA Region 6)  
Hope Mission  
Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre  
Multi-cultural Health Brokers Co-operative  
Native Counselling services of Alberta  
Old Strathcona Youth Society  
Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton  
Public Health Division, Capital Health  
Salvation Army  
The Bissell Centre  
The George Spady Centre  
Urban Manor  
WEAC  
Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)  
Youth Emergency Shelter Society

## **Funders Participation**

Representatives of the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, City of Edmonton, Service Canada, and the provincial departments of Children's Services, Human Resources and Employment and Seniors and Community Supports have participated in consultation meetings.