

COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

MEETING DATE: September 9, 2024

SUBMITTED BY: Darrell Melvie, General Manager, Community & Protective Services

PREPARED BY: Amanda Ulrickson, Manager, Family & Community Support Services (FCSS);
Ashley Lazowski, FCSS Community Navigator;
Michael Stadnyk, Sergeant, Community Peace Officer; and
Laura Howarth, Director, Community & Social Development

REPORT TITLE: Augmentation of Current Extreme Weather Service Levels for the Unhoused

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 8, 2024, Council passed a motion directing that *Administration investigate options (including external funding sources) to augment the service level currently being offered by the City of Leduc which includes the activation of the Communications Extreme Weather Plan and designated Diversion Services through City staffed navigation services.* Administration assessed current service levels for supporting the unhoused through the City's life safety, navigation, and enforcement service models. Enhancing these services would directly and indirectly help mitigate risks for those experiencing homelessness, as well as reduce the impact on the community and organization during (and in between) extreme weather activations. Working with impacted internal departments, Administration identified current gaps and barriers and explored strategies to address them.

Below are Administration's recommendations based on this collaborative assessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council approve all extreme weather communication, life safety, navigation, and enforcement service level enhancements, as well as initiate coordinated regional and provincial advocacy, as recommended in the Council Agenda Report titled "Augmentation of Current Extreme Weather Service Levels for the Unhoused" dated September 9, 2024; and

That funding for one-time and ongoing costs be included in the 2025-2027 draft operating budget; and

That alternate sources of revenue, specifically through partnerships with the Government of Alberta, be explored to minimize the total financial impact of the three-year enhancement project on the City of Leduc.

HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS

Extreme Weather Communication Plan:

The City has implemented its Extreme Weather Communication Plan (EWCP) for four years, which has involved communicating with housed and unhoused residents about which civic facilities are open for respite during bouts of extreme weather. The EWCP has also provided other departments that serve our most vulnerable

COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

(e.g., Enforcement, Fire, Parks, Recreation, Transit) with updated information related to respite locations, dates, and times to better serve all residents.

Council approved an enhancement to the EWCP in December 2023 by directing Administration to temporarily stop regular housing pathway navigation duties of the FCSS Community Navigator position when the EWCP is activated and to instead focus on life safety planning for those without shelter. Since then, the FCSS Community Navigator position has provided both navigation and life safety support (largely, but not exclusively, during extreme cold / heat / air quality conditions). Administration continues to activate this enhanced (communication plus life safety) Extreme Weather Plan (EWP) as directed by Council.

Life Safety Planning and Housing Pathway Navigation Services:

The FCSS navigation process has been active since March of 2023. There is currently one permanent full-time position dedicated to working with the unhoused and those at risk of being unhoused to connect them to resources, work on housing plans, and become paper-ready to be housed (ID, access to income, finding appropriate housing options etc.). The FCSS Community Navigator position also supports other City facilities with daily outreach, responds to serve and connect with the unhoused more effectively, dedicates time to build capacity of City facility staff by role modeling interactions, and provides educational opportunities for staff regarding consistent service to the unhoused demographic.

The FCSS Community Navigator role and scope has needed to evolve. Built-in flexibility is necessary to respond to an unhoused individual's basic needs as they access service, and this has impacted the ability to immediately work with them on a housing pathway plan. Many unhoused individuals are presenting with unmet basic needs that must be met prior to successfully discussing housing pathways.

As such, the current (and any future) navigation position(s) will continue to evolve to reflect the needs of our community climate. Until life safety services are being delivered more wholly by other agencies and organizations in our community, this will continue to be a need. Staff make referrals wherever possible.

Enforcement Services:

A dedicated temporary Community Safety Officer (CSO) position was created in 2023 to respond to the increase in high-risk / undesirable behaviours at civic facilities, encampments, and downtown businesses. The CSO worked closely with the vulnerable population spending time in City facilities and public spaces, making sure these locations were safe and desirable for all citizens to visit. Although not a formalized team, both the FCSS Navigator and CSO found ample success working together to serve Leduc's vulnerable populations, allowing the RCMP and Leduc Enforcement Services (LES) to allocate resources on other pressing issues in the community.

Feedback from the community has been positive stating that the CSO has provided quick, effective, and compassionate responses to complicated social concerns. City staff are appreciative of the CSO position and feel they have an increased level of safety when they are present. The CSO has been able to create a rapport with vulnerable individuals within the community which has led to more efficient encampment clean-ups. Over the past six months the CSO position has taken on more challenges and areas to patrol within the community due to an increase in interactions with vulnerable individuals. This position is currently funded as a term employee extended by Council to December 31, 2025.



COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALE

Extreme Weather Plan

Augmented Service Level Recommendation:

An enhanced service level to the EWP will include:

- Reviewing the communications plan to add additional community partners / businesses to the distribution list and add City-owned electronic road signs (when available) as an approach to communicate with all residents.
- Documenting the activation process into a formalized procedure and share this with internal and external stakeholders.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COSTS: \$0

Life Safety Planning and Housing Pathway Navigation Services

Augmented Service Level Recommendation:

Two of the most significant barriers to securing housing pathways are 1) staff being able to immediately respond when an unhoused resident is ready to make change, and 2) the financial barriers encountered to being successful, for example damage deposit, first month's rent, renters' insurance, etc. Reducing both barriers would support more success in housing navigation services for the unhoused and those at risk of becoming unhoused.

Enhancing our navigation services with a second position will allow for increased capacity to serve the unhoused daily with little interruption to operations, as well as the increased ability to navigate at multiple City buildings more often and more effectively. Also, two navigators would allow for pairing (team) to establish outreach services outside of City buildings, when necessary. Lastly, the addition of a second Navigator will allow for housing pathway navigation work to continue when the EWP is activated, thus not impacting others who wish to continue working towards being housed. As previously mentioned, the FCSS Community Navigator position ceases housing pathway navigation support and focuses on life safety planning with the unhoused when the EWP is activated. This creates a delay in housing pathway navigation services and increases pressure on the community and other service providers. Combining the two expertise responses into one position should help alleviate this challenge.

An enhanced service level to the Life Safety Planning and Housing Pathway Navigation will include:

- Establishing changes to the current FCSS Community Navigator position, to reflect the new diversion (life safety) service level as directed by Council in December 2023. This position will be re-titled "Life Safety and Navigation Coordinator", and the City would hire a second Life Safety and Navigation Coordinator, full time, 3-year term, starting December 1, 2024. During extreme weather responses this could potentially allow for enhanced coverage in evenings and weekends; pairing with a CSO at these times would be an effective practice.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COSTS: \$118,500 year 1, and then \$111,000 year 2 and 3

COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

- Enhancing our current data collection to become leaders in producing outcomes for the community that we will need to be successful in any further planning regarding the unhoused. Our current data collection is strong but to gain public trust, develop effective and respectful consultations, and secure the support of key decision-makers, stakeholders, and potential funders, we can improve how and what we are collecting. Common definitions and enhanced real time data will help measure progress and success and capitalize on opportunities.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COSTS: \$10,000 (one-time cost in year one only)

- Implementing a financial support pilot program aimed at reducing financial start-up costs to housing pathways (for example, damage deposit, first month's rent, renters' insurance, etc.) for those who cannot access similar traditional programs (provincial initiatives); this will help prevent instances of homelessness and support pathways out of homelessness in Leduc. This initiative will have the ability to help secure and maintain housing. This would be managed through an experienced third-party provider who has already established infrastructure for this program.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COSTS: \$50,000 per year for 3 years

Enforcement Services

Augmented Service Level Recommendation:

This year, the CSO has often been re-assigned to additional facilities, as needs arise, to support/maintain enforcement service levels relating to our vulnerable population; this unintentionally takes time away from the initial planned purpose and locations identified for the position. LES has experienced encampment complaints within City parkland and urban settings increase from 31 to 115 when comparing January - August 2023 to January - August 2024 (recorded as number of interactions, not unique individuals). In addition, Administration received feedback from businesses, facility operators, and the public that evenings and weekends are some of the most challenging times for behaviour management, specifically when community and government social service agencies are closed. Adding a second CSO position would allow the CSOs to work closely with the newly developed Life Safety and Navigation Coordinators, providing an increase in service hours extending into evenings and weekends during extreme weather activations, as well as handle the increase in vulnerable population calls around encampments within the community. A second CSO would also allow a CSO to be on shift seven days a week and allow for more flexibility when modifying shifts is required. As more services and pilot programs are implemented in Leduc for our vulnerable population, the need for increased safety for all citizens and vulnerable populations persists; adding a second CSO will help alleviate the growing concerns within the community.

An enhanced service level to Enforcement Services will include:

- Making the current CSO position permanent demonstrates a commitment to this important and specialized service and acknowledges the value the community sees from this response. As Council has already approved funding for the current temporary position until December 2025, no *new* funding is required in 2025 to make the position permanent.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COST: \$0 new funds for year 1 (Council funding approved);
And then \$110,000 new in 2026 and ongoing

COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

- Hiring a second full-time CSO 3-year term position starting as soon as possible. This would allow for seven day a week coverage and positively impact additional locations. During EWP activation, this could potentially allow for enhanced coverage in evenings and weekends; pairing with a Life Safety and Navigation Coordinator at these times would be effective practice.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COST: \$7,500 start-up and vehicle \$140,000 year 1 only;
And \$110,000 per year for 3 years

Initiate Coordinated Regional and Provincial Advocacy

Advocacy Recommendation:

- Coordinated regional political advocacy is necessary to leverage systemic change for the unhoused locally, regionally, and provincially. Suggested topics of advocacy include (but are not limited to):
 - Increased access to designated health professionals.
 - Creation of regional Task Force of stakeholders and political decision makers
 - Increase in current Rent Assistance Benefit, specifically for low-income individuals.

TOTAL ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COST: \$0

FUNDING

At this time, Administration believes that alternate sources of revenue through the Government of Alberta may be available for specific services included in this project.

STRATEGIC / RELEVANT PLANS ALIGNMENT

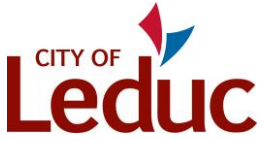
City of Leduc Homelessness Prevention and Poverty Framework

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

ADMINISTRATION: Two new positions would require cross-departmental support and collaboration.

RISK ANALYSIS: FINANCIAL / LEGAL: As these recommendations are an augmentation of current service levels and are not significantly different enough to be considered a *new* business area/service, the recommendation is not expected to increase the legal risk to the City. Funding for these recommendations is not in the current budget. If full or partial funding is not secured from the province, full or partial costs will be covered by the City.

Service Level Augmentation	2025	2026	2027	Funding
Extreme Weather Communication	\$0	\$0	\$0	None
Life Safety & Navigation Coordinator (temporary only)	\$118,500	\$111,000	\$111,000	One-Time
Data Collection	\$10,000	\$0	\$0	One-Time
Financial Support Program (pilot)	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	One-Time
Community Safety Officer (make permanent)	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$110,000	Ongoing
Community Safety Officer (temporary only)	\$117,500	\$110,000	\$110,000	One-Time
Enforcement Vehicle	\$140,000	\$0	\$0	One-Time
Political Advocacy	\$0	\$0	\$0	None
TOTAL	\$546,000	\$381,000	\$381,000	



COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

IMPLEMENTATION / COMMUNICATIONS: Recruitment and regular hiring processes apply. Approved service level adjustments would be communicated externally to ensure residents and business owners remain updated about what the City is doing to support vulnerable community members, and how these supports are being funded.

ALTERNATIVES: The Recommendation from Administration augments all service levels in combination, however, Council could separate and select only part of the Recommendation. NOTE: any outcome of the segmented option(s) will be much less impactful than when it is combined with all service level augmentations.

ATTACHMENTS: PowerPoint - Augmentation of Current Extreme Weather Services for the Unhoused