

# Report to Council



**Date:** February 22, 2021  
**To:** Council  
**From:** City Manager  
**Subject:** Community Emergency Shelter Plan - Workshop  
**Department:** Active Living & Culture and Real Estate Services

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT Council receives, for information, the Report from Active Living and Culture and Real Estate Services departments dated February 22, 2021, on the development of the Community Emergency Shelter Plan and the Emergency Shelter Location Considerations.

## **Purpose:**

To facilitate a workshop with Council so that Council can provide comment and feedback into the development of the Community Emergency Shelter Plan and the Emergency Shelter Location Considerations.

## **Background:**

Communities across the Province are faced with the housing and overdose crises, both of which are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, all levels of senior government are focused on investing in addressing homelessness and ensuring the housing needs of the most vulnerable are met. Over the past several years, our community has experienced unprecedented senior government investment in housing with supports. While the focus on housing is crucial, just as important in the efforts to address homelessness is the need to ensure that the local shelter system is functioning effectively. In fact, evidence demonstrates that emergency shelters have a vital role to play in applying Housing First and best practices approaches to addressing homelessness.

At the September 28, 2020, Council meeting, staff presented an update on progress made related to the outcomes from the Emergency Shelter Design Lab. The report explained that the Design Lab outcomes have been instrumental in informing a number of emergency shelter planning initiatives including the development of a comprehensive Community Emergency Shelter Plan, a framework to guide emergency shelter location considerations, and input into the Complex Needs Advocacy Paper development. The community conversation at the Design Lab was pivotal for the visioning of an effective emergency shelter system that would address community needs and concerns.

### **Lived Experience Principles**

The principles introduced by the Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness (LECoH) at the Design Lab proved to be transformational and have formed the foundation for the development of both a Community Emergency Shelter Plan and consideration to guide the location of future emergency shelters in our community. These principles: Choice, Community, Safety and Healing, have provided a new and innovative framework to guide discussions and systems planning related to the creating a more effective delivery of emergency shelter services in Kelowna.

### **Community Emergency Shelter Plan**

At the Design Lab, through the process of applying the LECoH principles along with best practices, the local shelter system's strengths and areas requiring improvement were explored. A consensus emerged regarding an optimal blueprint for a Kelowna-grown emergency shelter delivery model. Three primary themes were endorsed:

- Lived Experience principles embedded as foundational
- Replacing the concept of Emergency Shelter with Navigation Centre, in alignment with a Housing First approach
- Emergency shelters functioning as one system through smaller, dispersed shelters, designed to accommodate a range of population needs.

The Design Lab highlighted the need for a comprehensive overarching vision and plan for the delivery of shelter services in Kelowna that reflects the community's strengths, uniqueness, and values. In addition, there was recognition that clear articulation of the community's needs, as was demonstrated by the Journey Home Strategy, is crucial in successfully positioning and advocating for senior government investment in the emergency shelter system.

On January 20, 2021, the outcomes from the Design Lab, along with the framework for the development of a Community Emergency Shelter Plan were co-presented by the Central Okanagan Journey Home Society and the City, with the support of Urban Matters, to a stakeholder group for feedback and input. The original stakeholder group that contributed to the planning of the Design Lab was convened including representatives from LECoH, shelter and housing providers, outreach and support services, Interior Health and BC Housing.

The stakeholders embraced the concept of developing a community vision and plan for the future delivery of shelters. The foundational elements presented for discussion were both endorsed and enhanced through the engagement process.

Building on themes and outcomes from the Design Lab, key foundational elements for a comprehensive Community Emergency Shelter Plan endorsed by the stakeholders include adoption of:

- System-wide approach for the delivery of emergency shelter services, where independently operated shelters operate as one system based on:
  - 'Navigation Site' framework focused on choice-centred, housing-focused approaches

- Coordinated shelter system delivery with smaller, dispersed shelters, accommodating a range of populations choice and needs
- Model that is based on providing a continuity of care through:
  - Coordination, collaboration, and system-wide application of operation standards
  - Provision of a range of health and wellness services
- Person-centred, housing-focused approach
  - Lived Experience principles and leadership embedded
- Equity and inclusion plan encompassing operation standards, physical design, and staff training.

Key Operational Elements that emerged from the Design Lab and were embraced and enhanced by the stakeholder include:

- Navigation Centre Model – based on Housing First principles and best practices.
- Anchor Agency- supporting the delivery of one system of shelters and ensuring continuity of care across the shelter system.
- Special Populations Focus – through the provision of smaller shelter settings dispersed throughout the community.
- Accommodating People with Complex Care Needs – creating specialized shelter services designed to provide integrated health and support services for individuals with complex care needs.
- Data Driven Decisions – supporting the integration of system-wide data to inform planning and service delivery ensuring that the shelter system is adaptable and responsive to the changing and emerging needs.
- Indigenous Led/ Culturally Appropriate - to guide the design and delivery of culturally informed services encompassing physical design and décor, cultural healing, and staff training.
- Builds a Sense of Community – both within the shelters and with the broader community.
- Lived Experience and Elders Knowledge – principles, knowledge, and leadership embedded and guiding the delivery of shelter services.

Conversations at the Design Lab indicated there was a gap in providing community direction related to successfully determining the location of emergency shelters in the community. The Emergency Shelter Location Considerations will be included as a component in the overall Community Emergency Shelter Plan that emerges from this process.

### **Emergency Shelter Location Considerations**

As previously noted to Council on September 28, 2020, City staff, Journey Home and Urban Matters have been developing a multi-dimensional framework to guide considerations on the future location of purpose-built emergency shelter(s). This framework will highlight the multiple factors influencing emergency shelter creation and will emphasize that, in addition to the voices of those accessing shelters, factors of program considerations, policy, community engagement, and location also need to complement the consideration criteria. This includes highlighting the smart practices that justify location selection considerations with the intent of supporting ongoing housing and homelessness efforts within the City of Kelowna. This framework will help with navigating the complexity of inputs to guide location considerations, recognizing that there is no one-size fits all approach to this process.

As with the Community Emergency Shelter Plan itself, the shelter consideration framework is guided by the outcomes of the Journey Home Emergency Shelter Design Lab and the four key principles. Further to this, the document will offer a mechanism to integrate these considerations to contribute to building a successful delivery model for emergency shelter services in Kelowna.

### Equity and Inclusion

The adoption of an equity and inclusion lens during the creation and location selection of emergency shelter(s) serves to make visible and address social inequities and structural barriers to better serve those within vulnerable populations who face additional barriers in navigating services and supports.

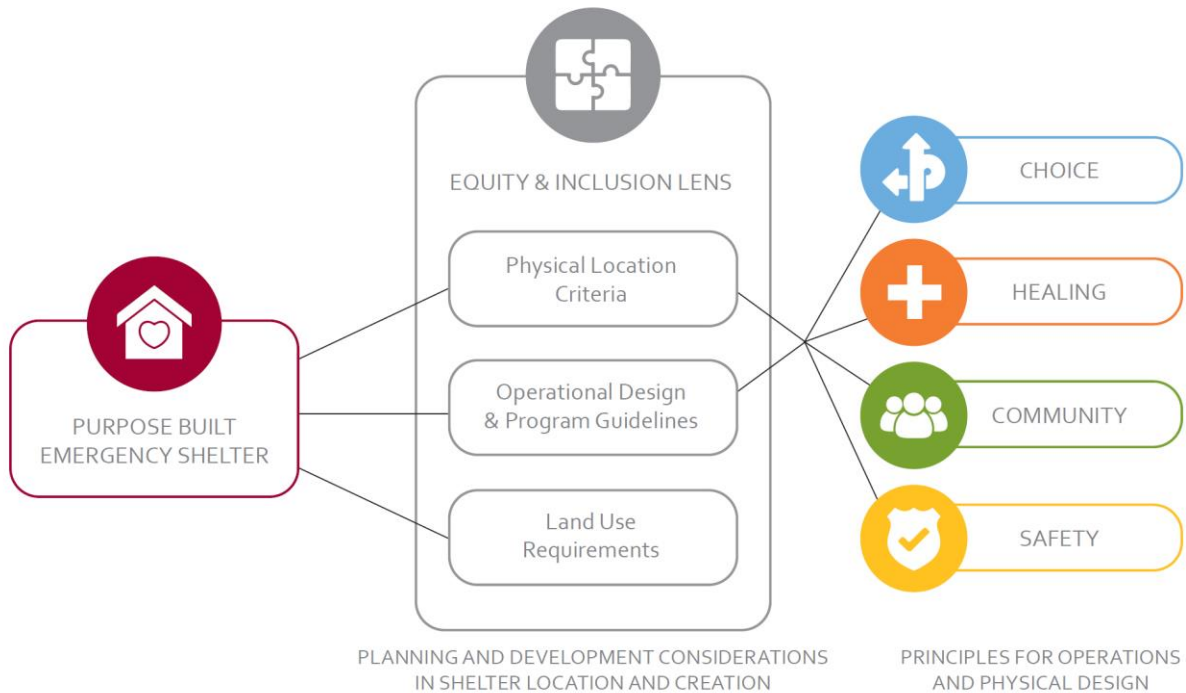
When it comes to shelter planning, equity and inclusion play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging for those who access shelters, as well as a sense of safety for clients, staff, and community. Accounting for socio-cultural considerations, ensuring accessibility, maintaining proximity to services, protecting, and advocating for client dignity, as well as upholding cultural appropriateness are a few considerations needed in determining shelter location. These represent different dimensions of an equitable lens that facilitates inclusion. Emergency shelters will be expected to respond to social inequities rather than promote them.

### Purpose Built Emergency Shelter Design Approach

The creation and location selection of emergency shelters requires consideration of a range of factors to meet the complex needs of shelter users and fulfill planning and development requirements.

- First, emergency shelter formation should be informed through an equity and inclusion lens that draws in the voices of people with lived and living experience of homelessness to identify their needs and determine how an emergency shelter can assist in addressing their emergency needs.
- Second, emergency shelter operational design and program guidelines established by funders (e.g. BC Housing) also influence location and design characteristics.
- Third, municipal land-use requirements strongly influence location and design related to form and character, which supports neighbourhood integration.
- Finally, determining location requires the consideration of integrated supports and access to community services in order to create enabling conditions for people to pursue a path of health and well-being.

The graphic below illustrates the interconnected factors to be considered during the planning and development of emergency shelters to create spaces that reflect equity and inclusion to better meet community needs. These factors are to be considered in tandem at the system level throughout the consideration process rather than checking off a list of criteria.



### Key Principles

As previously noted, the Design Lab outcomes identified four key principles for operations and physical design: **choice, community, safety, and healing** and their incorporation into the context of shelter location considerations in this document:

- Choice - The principle of choice in terms of access to types of shelter is foundational in the operation and physical design of emergency shelters as identified during the Emergency Shelter Design Lab. Choice also has an influential role when determining a physical location in the community.
- Community – This principle highlights the importance of nurturing a sense of community cohesion and belonging within the shelter system. In defining an emergency shelter, community influences not only physical characteristics (location and design) but also operations.
- Safety – This principle emphasizes the need to ensure the safety of individuals who access services as they experience heightened vulnerabilities and challenges when seeking support in times of crisis.
- Healing - Healing is considered an essential part of defining a shelter in the community through both its operational and design features. It is critical to facilitate healing for shelter users who are in need of a safe place to heal from their traumatic experiences.

### Selection Considerations (Prescriptive vs. Non-Prescriptive)

Designing shelters that are human-centered, decolonized (i.e. understanding how location and programming can promote and enhance mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional wellness) and

focused on supporting people who are navigating their way through a critical time in their life is complex. Establishing a prescriptive list of location characteristics disables opportunities for equity, inclusion, and accessibility. A non-prescriptive set of location criteria to support shelter location decision making is a preferred method for local government policy as it allows the City to address social equity and inclusion barriers that exist for certain populations in our community. This non-prescriptive approach has the potential to reduce stigmatization towards vulnerable populations by considering the unique characteristics and needs of the diversity of people who may need access to a shelter. This is particularly important from gender and race perspectives. Women with children seeking shelter after fleeing domestic violence and youth seeking shelter require a different set of location considerations to ensure safety, privacy, and stabilization to reduce the traumatic effects of their need for shelter. Indigenous people may also have a different set of location requirements that connect them to their culture and reduce colonial harms that can come from more institutionalized shelters located in commercial centres.

Having a non-prescriptive location approach allows for the opportunity to better meet the needs of the intended shelter population while considering various neighbourhood features that anonymize the shelter into the community thus increasing the level of safety and trauma-informed spaces. It also enables consultation with those who are most likely impacted by the placement of shelters in the community that includes gathering an understanding of who is benefitting, who may be excluded, and what may be some unintended consequences of a prescriptive list of location criteria.

The emphasis when planning for shelter locations in the community should be on ensuring a robust process is enacted that incorporates the operational design and program model, land use requirements regulated by local governments, inclusive location considerations, and most importantly engagement with a wide variety of people and organizations. Permitting shelters across several zones, as Kelowna currently does, allows homeless-serving agencies and government partners to respond to community needs. This is critical to ensuring those without a home have options for emergency shelter until they can access short- or long-term housing. It also creates the opportunity for shelters to be in locations across the city.

There is no one size fits all criteria for emergency shelter creation. It is important that location considerations are viewed through a multi-layered lens that will help to identify locations that support health and wellness, and dignity for those accessing shelter services and the neighbourhoods they are located in.

#### Community Integration and Impact

At the Design Lab participants highlighted the importance of addressing neighbourhood impact through a transformation in the delivery of shelter services in the community. The recommendations that emerged to support the successful community integration of shelters included pivoting the shelter system to one that included smaller shelters, that have a specific population focus and are dispersed throughout the community. Embedded into the proposed consideration criteria, is consideration of community integration potential.

The layered and multi-faceted consideration approach proposed for determining shelter location recognizes that communities struggle with misconceptions of shelter use, who clients are, and programming. The importance of community engagement is embedded into the shelter location consideration criteria. Research suggests that bridging the conversation around shelter location has a higher likelihood of mitigating community concerns, which ultimately contributes to successful community integration. The lived experience principles also speak to the importance of community integration to increase the likelihood shelter users successfully moving through the shelter system into permanent housing. The development of shelter services requires a robust and diverse community engagement plan that allows for input and understanding from a broad range of stakeholders (e.g. community partners, Indigenous communities, people with lived/living experience, businesses, neighbourhood associations, citizens). This approach will increase the likelihood of neighbourhood buy-in and reduced stigma for shelter users who need to access emergency shelter services.

**Next Steps:**

Over the course of the next few months, the Community Emergency Shelter Plan will be finalized.

Estimated Timeline	Activity
Quarter One	Presentation of draft Community Emergency Shelter Plan to a broad range of community stakeholders
Quarter Two	Presentation of Final Community Emergency Shelter Plan to Council for endorsement

**Conclusion:**

Local stakeholders have embraced the framework for the development of a Community Emergency Shelter Plan. Based on the feedback and input received from Council, this document will be finalized and presented to stakeholders for confirmation and support. The final document will be presented to Council in early quarter two for endorsement.

The Journey Home Strategy's success at attracting senior government investment has demonstrated that having a clearly articulated community vision and plan will well position Kelowna to advocate for provincial support for a new innovative best practice-based approach to emergency shelter service delivery in our community.

**Internal Circulation:**

Active Living & Culture  
Policy & Planning  
Real Estate Services  
Communications  
Community Safety

**Existing Policy:**

The development of a Community Emergency Shelter Plan and Emergency Shelter Location Considerations are aligned with a number of Council and Corporate Priorities, as supported by Council through the City's Imagine Kelowna: Vision into Action. A summary of these is provided below.

Emergency Shelter Plan + Location Considerations	
COUNCIL PRIORITIES:	DETAILS:
- <b>Community Safety</b>	Crime rates are decreasing Residents feel safe Data and analysis are used to understand problems + target resources
- <b>Social and Inclusive</b>	Homelessness is decreasing Inclusivity and diversity are increasing Policy guides where the City invests resources
CORPORATE PRIORITIES:	DETAILS:
- <b>People</b>	Collaboration is improving problem solving

**Considerations not applicable to this report:**

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Communications Comments:

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J. Saufferer, Department Manager, Real Estate

**Attachment:** 1. Schedule A – PowerPoint Presentation

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C. Matte, Community Communications Manager  
D. Caul, Community Safety Director