

If you require this information in an alternate format, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator at accessibility@northumberland.ca or 1-800-354-7050 ext. 2327



Report 2024-044

Report Title: Community Engagement on Modernization of Shelter Services at 310 Division Street, Cobourg and Thematic Analysis of Feedback

Prepared by: Kate Campbell
Director, Communications & IT
Communications

Reviewed by: Rebecca Carman
Associate Director, Housing & Homelessness
Community and Social Services

Approved by: Jennifer Moore, CAO

Council Meeting Date: March 20, 2024

Report Not Considered by

Standing Committee Because:

- Time-sensitive Issue (information received too late for Committee consideration)
- Urgent Matter (issue arose after this month's Committee meeting)
- Other

Strategic Plan Priorities: Innovate for Service Excellence
 Ignite Economic Opportunity
 Foster a Thriving Community
 Propel Sustainable Growth
 Champion a Vibrant Future

Recommendation

“Whereas at the January 24, 2024 County Council meeting, Council adopted the recommendation from the January 10, 2024 Social Services Committee meeting, directing staff to provide a report on the thematic analysis of feedback gathered through community engagement pertaining to the modernization of shelter services at 310 Division Street, Cobourg;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved That County Council, having considered Report 2024-044 'Community Engagement on Modernization of Shelter Services at 310 Division Street, Cobourg and Thematic Analysis of Feedback', direct staff to address identified recommendations in agreements and plans for shelter services at 310 Division Street, in line with budget and

operational parameters, to support successful integration of the shelter within the neighbourhood and the broader community.”

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the themes that emerged through community engagement regarding the planned relocation of Transition House emergency shelter services from 10 Chapel Street to 310 Division Street, Cobourg, along with a summary of related recommendations to help shape the positive integration of shelter services within the neighbourhood and the broader community. This report also includes an overview of the communications and engagement activities undertaken to raise awareness of this initiative and encourage input from the community. Full details are available in the attached report by LURA Consulting, who was retained to support community engagement activities during the planning phase for 310 Division Street.

Background

Homelessness is one of Northumberland County’s most pressing priorities. As the System Manager for Social Services in Northumberland, the County is using all available resources to address this issue. From enhancing shelter spaces and investing in street outreach services to implementing rent supplement programs and building rent-g geared-to-income housing, the County’s approach is comprehensive.

This approach is informed by the County’s 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan (2019-2029). In 2024, the County will enter year six of this plan, with a vision that “[b]y 2029, the Northumberland housing and homelessness system is responsive to the needs of all residents, providing safe, appropriate and affordable housing options within healthy and inclusive communities.”

Transition House Shelter is a key community partner in achieving this vision. As a registered charity operating at 10 Chapel Street in the Town of Cobourg for approximately 20 years, Transition House delivers emergency shelter services for people 18 years of age and older who are experiencing homelessness in Northumberland. In 2018, Transition House was the successful respondent to the County’s public Request for Proposals (RFP) procurement process to continue providing emergency shelter services for Northumberland. Today, Transition House oversees operations of the overarching sheltering system.

The decision to relocate emergency shelter services from 10 Chapel Street, Cobourg to the nearby 310 Division Street, Cobourg is rooted in the need for a modernized approach to shelter services, and the need for a more suitable facility for those experiencing homelessness. The sale of this former retirement residence, which shares a property line with 10 Chapel Street, created an opportunity to modernize and improve shelter services significantly for the community. At the direction of County Council, in December 2023, the County purchased this vacant property for \$2.4M for the purpose of a new modernized shelter. The County then signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Transition House Shelter to relocate shelter services to this location and enter into a vendor take-back mortgage agreement.

There are currently 37 emergency shelter spaces in Cobourg: 22 spaces at Transition House, and 15 overflow motel spaces. These numbers reflect an increase to the system since summer 2023, in response to the increased number of individuals living rough in the community. Prior to

this, the capacity was 18 spaces at Transition House and 7 motel spaces. There are also 20 winter Warming Hub spaces available from November through April. The facility at 310 Division Street will enhance the emergency shelter system by centralizing supports to better address immediate need, with a total of 47 self-contained units – approximately 35 of which are planned to be used as emergency shelter spaces – along with space for a warming and cooling hub, and for community partners to offer supports onsite. Over the longer-term, services will evolve to include transitional housing accommodations, improving pathways out of homelessness.

The move to 310 Division Street builds upon the recommendations from a third-party review of the shelter system commissioned by the County in 2023. The most significant recommendations resulting from this review included relocation to an updated shelter facility, a minimum of 25 shelter spaces for adults, and the creation of supportive and transitional housing spaces. Until transitional housing spaces were available, more shelter spaces would be required.

Based on direction from County Council at a December 6th, 2023, meeting of Council, the County finalized the purchase of 310 Division Street for the purposes of a modernized shelter and partnered with Transition House to coordinate robust community engagement.

Consultations

Community engagement in planning and decision-making improves the County's understanding of prevailing concerns, expectations, and priorities, and ensures that diverse perspectives inform decision-making.

The announcement of the 310 Division Street initiative sparked widespread conversation across Northumberland. The County and Transition House were committed to meaningful community engagement through intentional methods as part of planning for 310 Division Street, striving to ensure that the new facility meets the needs of service users as well as the broader community.

Goal

The goal for community engagement was to raise awareness about plans for the modernization of shelter services at 310 Division Street, Cobourg and create a diversity of opportunities for residents, stakeholders, service providers, and service users to share questions, concerns, and ideas, helping to positively shape integration of shelter services within the neighbourhood and the broader community.

Objectives

- Generate visits from 2,000 unique individuals to the Join In Northumberland - 310 Division Street project page, as a measure of awareness.
- Generate interest from a minimum of 20 attendees for each of the four small group discussion sessions.
- Drive 100 attendees to the virtual Public Meeting on February 6, 2024.
- Drive 100 attendees to the in-person Open House on February 12, 2024.

Northumberland County, Transition House and LURA Consulting developed an engagement plan that had three phases of engagement:

1. **Listening:** Holding space to hear what residents, stakeholders, and clients have to say.

2. **Engaging:** Responding to questions and concerns and creating opportunity for meaningful dialogue.
3. **Sharing:** Offering information to the community to ensure shared understanding of past, present, and future decision-making.

Each phase included a series of engagement activities, including small group discussions and public Q&A sessions. Each engagement opportunity was designed to gather valuable input from residents, stakeholders, community partners, and people with lived experience of homelessness. Over a 12-week period – from December 4, 2023, to February 23, 2024, – these opportunities were vigorously promoted through a strategic communications campaign.

The following is an overview of audiences engaged.

Table 1: Audiences Engaged

Audience	Participant Groups
Service Users	Transition House clients and individuals living in encampments
Cobourg Residents	Neighbours within a two-block radius of 310 Chapel Street and residents/businesses in the broader Cobourg community
Service Provider Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northumberland Paramedics Community Paramedicine program • Northumberland Hills Hospital Community Mental Health Services • Salvation Army • The Help Centre • Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre • Canadian Mental Health Association HKPR • Rebound Child and Youth Services • PARN
Northumberland Community	General public, including residents, businesses, local government, and municipal staff.

The County used a variety of methods to generate awareness about the 310 Division Street initiative and notify the community about engagement activities. The following is an overview of marketing and communications tactics and reach.

Table 2: Marketing and Communications Tactics and Reach

Tactic	Reach
Join In Northumberland project webpage	Information page about the 310 Division Street initiative, including engagement dates, regularly updated frequently asked questions, access to key documents, registration to receive update emails, and a platform to submit email comments and questions – generated 3,798 visits from 2,626 unique visitors during the identified period.
Postcard delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information postcards mailed out to approximately 10,000 households and businesses in the Town of Cobourg, advising of the initiative, dates, times and locations of engagement activities, and the Join In Northumberland website address for further details. • Postcards were also shared via door-knocking in a 2-block vicinity of 310 Division Street as an additional measure to ensure that neighbours received this information and to encourage participation in the various engagement activities.
Handout, information boards, retractable banners	Approximately 150 handouts distributed at in-person engagement events, providing an overview of the modernization of shelter services through relocation to 310 Division Street and the anticipated benefits. Information signage and banners also created as visual aids for events.
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carousel campaign – 5 carousel Q&A ‘slide deck’ packages promoted through Facebook and Instagram advertising, featuring information about homelessness in Northumberland, and the benefits of and plans for shelter services at 310 Division Street. Also 8 organic posts about the Join In Northumberland web page, information available, and engagement opportunities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reach: 32,613 accounts ○ Engagement rate: 14% • 10 organic posts to X (Twitter). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Impressions: 3,011 ○ Engagement rate: 3% • 5 organic posts to LinkedIn. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Impressions: 2,176

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engagement rate: 8%
News release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 180 views of media release on County website announcing the purchase of 310 Division Street, inviting the public to make delegations at the December 6, 2023, Special Meeting of Council, and promoting the Join In Northumberland project webpage as the source for upcoming information about community engagement activities. ● Pick-up from 6 local media outlets generating 13 articles, including Northumberland News, Cobourg News Blog, Today's Northumberland, KawarthaNOW, MyFM 93.3/Classic Rock 107.9/Brighton Oldies 100.9 radio, Consider This Northumberland radio program.
Media interviews/ responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 12 live interviews with, or written responses for, outlets including Today's Northumberland, Northumberland News, KawarthaNOW, MyFM 93.3, Northumberland 89.7, Consider This Northumberland radio program, Chex/Global Newswatch. ● In total, 43 articles were written/stories aired by local media during the identified period. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Direct key message pick-up: 68% ○ Spokesperson quote included: 45% ○ Positive tone: 2%; Balanced tone: 86%; Negative tone: 12%
E-newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 notice to 37 Join In Northumberland - 310 Division Street project page subscribers (open rate of 90+%), 1 notice to 870 total Join In Northumberland subscribers (open rate of 74%), 1 notice to 81 Join In Northumberland - 310 Division Street project page subscribers (88% open rate). ● 1 newsletter to 1,049 Council News subscribers (open rate of 44%) ● 6 Bi-weekly update newsletters to County Council for sharing at member municipality committee and council meetings.
Digital promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Homepage banner at Northumberland.ca.

Throughout this process, engagement activities generated more than 435 total participants, with over 130 unique individuals directly engaged. Over 2,600 unique individuals became more informed about this initiative by accessing the dedicated web page nearly 3,800 times. And communications efforts between December 4, 2023 and February 23, 2024, improved awareness of this undertaking by reaching a conservative estimate of at least 40,000 people.

The following is an overview of engagement activities and participation.

Table 3a: Engagement activities and participation – Listening

Listening			
Activity	Date/Time	Location	Participants
Delegations to Committee and County Council	December 6 th , 2023/ March 6, 2024	Northumberland County – 555 Courthouse Road, Cobourg + Virtual Meeting	9 people/ 7 Delegations
In-Person Small Group Session 1	January 16 th , 2024, 12:30pm – 2:00pm	Northumberland County Boardroom – 600 William Street, Cobourg	24
In-Person Small Group Session 2	January 16 th , 2024, 5:30pm – 7:00pm	Northumberland County Boardroom – 600 William Street, Cobourg	17
Virtual Small Group Session 1	January 25 th , 2024, 6:00pm – 7:30pm	Virtual Zoom Meeting	26
Virtual Small Group Session 2	January 26 th , 2024, 10:00am – 11:00am	Virtual Zoom Meeting	21
Service User Session	February 13 th , 2024 9:30am – 11:30am	Transition House – 10 Chapel Street, Cobourg	25
Transition House Executive Director & Board Chair interviews	February 13 th , 2024	Questionnaire	2

Table 3b: Engagement activities and participation - Engaging

Engaging			
Activity	Date/Time	Location	Participants
Virtual Service Provider Partner Session	January 10 th , 2024 2:00pm-3:30pm	Virtual Zoom Meeting	17
Virtual Public Information and Q&A Session	February 6 th , 2024 6:00pm-7:30pm	Virtual Zoom Meeting	77
Presentation by Transition House to Cobourg Town Council	January 31, 2024	Victoria Hall – 55 King St. W, Cobourg + Virtual meeting	--
Meeting of Town of Cobourg and Northumberland County Senior Staff	February 14, 2024	Victoria Hall – 55 King St. W, Cobourg	6
Join in Northumberland Question & Answer Portal	December 4, 2024 – ongoing	Virtual platform	63 participants 71 submissions
E-mail Correspondence	December 4, 2024 - ongoing	Direct email correspondence	50

Table 3c: Engagement activities and participation - Sharing

Sharing			
Activity	Date/Time	Location	Participants
In-person Public Open House	February 12 th , 2024 6:00pm-7:30pm	Royal Canadian Legion Br.133	~75-100 attendees
Presentation to County Council	March 20, 2024 9:30 a.m.	555 Courthouse Road, Cobourg + Virtual Zoom Meeting	--

Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations

N/A

Discussion / Options

Input gathered through the community engagement phase of the planning process for 310 Division Street, Cobourg, can ultimately be characterized according to four themes. An executive summary is provided here, with full details available in the attached report.

- **Project support and opportunities for improved services for unhoused residents**
 - Many participants expressed hope that 310 Division Street, through the work of Transition House, community partners, and the County, will improve shelter and housing supports, with greater dignity for neighbours in need.
 - Participants highlighted the opportunity for 310 Division Street to be a hub of enhanced services that could help people experiencing hardship find a path out of homelessness.
 - Service providers saw an opportunity to partner to offer services onsite, improving access for clients.

- **Community Safety and Impact**
 - Residents expressed apprehension about the connections between increased homelessness and risks to safety and security within the broader community.
 - While there was recognition of the need for enhanced homelessness services and supports for the community, and the anticipated benefits of planned services via 310 Division Street, participants voiced concerns about the suitability of the location for a homeless shelter in a densely-populated area.
 - Neighbours shared concerns about damage and drug paraphernalia on adjacent properties.

- Neighbours shared that loitering and behavioural issues by individuals in the vicinity of Transition House's 10 Chapel Street location make people uncomfortable or afraid to be in the area, and there is concern that these issues will transition to Division Street, and potentially increase, following the relocation of shelter services.
 - Participants proposed solutions such as enhancing lighting and installing security cameras at 310 Division Street, enhanced staffing and staff training at the shelter to ensure appropriate levels of support for clients, engagement of professional security services, and participation in community cleanups.
- **Operations and Management**
 - Many participants had questions about facility management and proposed plans.
 - Many participants had questions about the decision to make 310 Division Street a 'low barrier' shelter and what that meant exactly in terms of rules and guidelines for Transition House clients.
 - Some participants suggested that the County retain ownership of the 310 Division Street property rather than enter into a Vendor Take Back mortgage with Transition House, as a means of optimizing asset management and enhancing oversight and accountability measures.
 - Many participants wondered about the length of stay and the support that Transition House clients would receive to transition out of homelessness.
 - Participants highlighted the importance of learning from successful shelter practices elsewhere, and applying best practices at 310 Division Street.
- **Community Involvement**
 - Participants expressed dissatisfaction and transparency concerns pertaining to the County's process for purchase of 310 Division Street for use as a shelter and sought information on community consultation processes for municipal real estate transactions.
 - Participants wanted clarification on what the role of the County is on an ongoing basis pertaining to Transition House, what role the Town of Cobourg holds, and how the Cobourg Police Service informs and monitors safety concerns; an agreement between the County and Town was often recommended, similar to the agreement in place between Durham Region and the Town of Whitby for shelter services in that community.
 - Participants expressed wanting to be better informed about how decisions about Transition House services are made, including interest in ongoing engagement to improve awareness and understanding.
 - Participants wanted to know how they could be more involved with Transition House, including opportunities for donations, volunteerism, and collaborative problem-solving through Transition House's creation of a Community Liaison Community.

The full report reflects the diverse perspectives and priorities of community members who participated in community engagement opportunities regarding the relocation to and modernization of shelter services at 310 Division Street, Cobourg.

This feedback is meant to inform the planning and agreements for, and operations of, shelter services at this location, to support successful integration of the shelter within the neighbourhood and the broader community. It is therefore recommended that, according to their respective areas of accountability, Northumberland County and Transition House address actions arising from this feedback across the following nine categories:

1. Modernization of shelter services
2. Enhanced community services
3. Transitional and affordable housing
4. Community safety and well-being
5. Operational management
6. Community engagement and accountability
7. Awareness and education through information sharing
8. Addressing service user needs
9. Legal agreement and commitment

Financial Impact

- Northumberland County retained LURA Consulting – an organization with facilitation and community engagement expertise – to support the engagement phase of planning for 310 Division Street: **\$49,790.00**
- Advertising and promotion
 - In-home mailer (information postcard) – **\$4,454**
 - Social media advertising - **\$400**
 - Event handouts and postcard copies - **\$1,439**
 - Retractable event banners – **\$576**
 - Open House information poster boards - **\$544**
- Community event management
 - Rental of Cobourg Legion hall for Open House - **\$226**
 - Event hospitality - **\$1,260**
- Total: **\$58,689 + HST**

Member Municipality Impacts

Homelessness is a growing concern across Northumberland. Participants in community engagement activities pointed to the particular impacts to the Town of Cobourg, where there has been a notable increase in visible homelessness. Feedback emphasized the necessity for solutions to come from increased collaboration between the County and the Town of Cobourg. While homelessness services are currently largely concentrated in Cobourg given the high congregation of related community services in this urban centre, participants did also recommend strategies for expanding homelessness services to other communities in Northumberland to ensure effective supports for the broader community.

With the housing, health, and social service needs of people experiencing homelessness increasing in complexity, including mental health and addiction challenges, there is a need to adapt homelessness service models. There is a role for member municipalities to collaborate on advocacy to other levels of government for expansion of mental health and addiction services for Northumberland as part of more integrated services. More broadly, engagement is encouraged with sector-wide advocacy to the province for a modernized funding model for municipalities – one that is based on predictable revenue sources that keep pace with increasing responsibilities, while reducing over-reliance on the property tax base.

Conclusion / Outcomes

Community engagement activities enabled Northumberland County and Transition House Shelter to capture diverse perspectives, aspirations, and concerns regarding the modernization of shelter services at 310 Division Street. Valuable insight was gained by listening to residents, stakeholders, service provider partners, and service users, and the feedback gathered will inform the path forward for meaningful collaboration, integration, and decision-making.

Modernization of the shelter system is imperative to addressing the ongoing and increasing impacts of homelessness within the community. Enhancing safety and security measures and addressing operational concerns identified through this process will support improved integration within the neighbourhood, and fostering ongoing community engagement – particularly through the creation of a Community Liaison Committee – will help to build positive relationships for enhanced collaboration and problem-solving.

By integrating the input gathered through this process into planning and agreements for, and operations of, shelter services at 310 Division Street, the County and Transition House will continue to contribute to a more inclusive, supportive, and resilient community for all residents of Northumberland.

Attachments

1. Report 2024-044 ATTACH 1 'Community Engagement Initiative Report'