



County of Grey Housing and Homelessness 10 Year Plan 2014-2024

Introduction

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy focuses on reviewing the way housing services are presently delivered and providing a local integrated system of service delivery. A 10 year Housing and Homelessness Plan is required under the Housing Services Act, 2011 (HSA) and the Ontario Housing Policy Statement by January 1, 2014. The Plan must address matters of provincial interest and meet local relevant issues.

The County of Grey Housing and Homelessness Plan encompasses the entire housing continuum including homelessness prevention, transitional and emergency housing, supportive housing, rent geared to income housing, private rental housing and affordable homeownership.

Addressing housing and homelessness issues are linked to positive outcomes for communities and individuals. Economic stimulus, healthy lifestyles and less public costs on health care and emergency services are the results of permanent affordable housing and homelessness prevention.

The Grey County Housing and Homelessness Plan will outline the vision and direction that will form a 10 year strategy to improve the housing and homelessness system in Grey County. The plan will build on past successes, enhance current programs and promote and strengthen community networks. The plan will also describe how this will be achieved through a list of recommendations aimed at creating positive outcomes.





About Grey County

The County of Grey is the fourth largest County in Ontario. In 2011, Grey County's population was approximately 92,565, comprising of 0.7% of Ontario's total population. From 1996 to 2011, the County's permanent population grew by 5.6% from 87,621 to 92,565; this rate of growth is positive but considerably lower than the Provincial growth rate.

The County of Grey consists of nine local municipalities; City of Owen Sound, Township of Georgian Bluffs, Township of Chatsworth, Municipality of Meaford, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Municipality of West Grey, Township of Southgate, Town of Hanover and the Town of The Blue Mountains

The Housing and Homelessness plan is linked with Grey County's corporate strategic plan. One goal of the strategic plan is "enabling healthy and resilient communities"; to pursue strategies and offer services that strengthen communities, put people first, and improve quality of life opportunities. An action item for this goal is to support the creation of more affordable housing in all nine areas of the County through the implementation of a Housing Strategy.

The County of Grey Official Plan also includes a number of relevant policies and goals related to housing including ensuring a variety of housing types, densities and price ranges and encouraging the maintenance of affordable housing.

Currently the County of Grey spends approximately 17% of its gross annual budget on housing and homelessness programs, including shelter costs within Ontario Works, the Sustainable Housing Benefit, rent geared to income housing, non profit housing, domiciliary hostels and other homelessness prevention initiatives.



Consultation Sessions: What We Heard

As part of the development of the Grey County Housing and Homelessness 10 Year Plan community consultations were conducted involving a number of focus groups, information sharing sessions and surveys. The purpose of the community consultation was to identify issues and obtain recommendations from community partners, local municipalities, people with lived experience and the general public.

Here is what we heard:

- The need for affordable, safe, accessible, well maintained housing
- The demand for affordable housing exceeds the supply
- A lack of economic resources is the prime reason for housing issues
- People need housing first
- The need for accessible supportive housing
- The need for an emergency housing system
- The need for advocacy to change limiting legislation
- The education of landlords and tenants on their rights and responsibilities
- The need for inter-agency cooperation - *No Wrong Door*

For more information please refer to Appendix A: County of Grey Housing and Homelessness Plan Community Consultation.



Trends and Analysis Information

The Housing Services Act, 2011 requires that the Housing and Homelessness Plan include an assessment of current and future housing needs in the service area. An assessment was created to provide an overview of population characteristics and trends, examine the current state of housing in Grey County, and explore housing assets, housing needs and housing affordability.

The report outlines a brief environmental scan of the indicators that identify why a housing and homelessness plan is needed for our community and the level of need in the community (refer to Appendix B: Housing and Homeless Plan Grey County Housing Trends and Analysis Summary).

The information was gathered from a number of documents and reports such as:

- Grey County Housing Study 2010
- Socio Economic and Housing Trends Analysis Report, Housing Services Corporation
- Statistics Canada
- HHRC data Profiles, Services Canada
- United Way 2011 Hunger Report: Hunger Games
- Various informal statistics gathered from our community partners and programs

Key findings from the report are:

- Grey County has an aging rental housing stock
- Over 3,300 households are paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs, 73% of these households are renters
- Household incomes are below the Ontario average, especially renters
- There is a lack of mixed dwelling types of housing especially in rural areas
- There is an increasing number of people accessing homelessness services

The Plan

Mission Statement

To collaborate with community partners and private enterprises to develop a coordinated system of services needed by residents of the County of Grey to obtain, maintain and sustain safe, appropriate and affordable housing.

The County of Grey has identified 4 Key Strategic Areas to accomplish our mission:

- Sustain and Create Affordable Housing
- Homelessness Prevention
- Transitional Housing
- Service Coordination and Collaboration

Each Key Strategic Area contains recommendations meant to act as a guide to initiate a starting point for addressing gaps and barriers and improving or enhancing already existing services to improve affordable housing for residents in Grey County.

The County of Grey will establish an Oversight Committee comprised of elected officials, municipal staff, community agencies and people with lived experience to oversee the implementation, evaluation and annual report of the Housing and Homelessness Plan.

The County of Grey will have a leadership role for the plan but the plan will require collaboration and commitment from all levels of government, community partners and the general public to be successful.

"A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm." -- Henrik Ibsen

Sustain and Create Affordable Housing

The County of Grey has a demonstrated need for affordable housing units. Affordable housing is an important factor for a thriving community. Communities need a diverse range of housing types and prices and the units need to be well kept and secure. The presence of such housing will allow people to stay in their community and attract newcomers.

Affordable housing is defined as housing that is less than 30% of a household income. A number of issues have led to a shortage in affordable housing units in Grey County; lack of affordability, an aging housing stock and lack of appropriate unit types in certain areas of the County.

Recommendations:

- 1. Maximize use of Federal, Provincial, Municipal resources for new affordable rental housing.*

Actions:

- Advocate for at least five year funding models from the Province
- Provide assistance and information sessions on affordable housing programs to ensure communities are shovel ready when funding becomes available
- Develop affordable units using private and non profit partnerships as funds become available for specific groups such as seniors, families and singles, people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence
- Maximize Federal/Provincial funding to offer forgivable homeownership down payment loans to families and singles

- 2. Increase number of rent supplement units.*

Actions:

- Explore funding opportunities as they become available to provide a monthly subsidy to landlords on behalf of eligible households
- Emphasize long term funding opportunities to provide stability to households
- Focus on supporting individuals/families in the greatest housing need

3. Investigate strategies to upgrade physical qualities of units.

Actions:

- a. Provide outreach to private landlords to retain existing rent supplement units
- b. Increase number of social and affordable housing units to meet needs of persons with disabilities
- c. Provide resources to seniors, persons with disabilities and persons with limited financial resources for repairs and accessibility requirements for their homes, through programs such as Ontario Renovates and EnAbling Change
- d. Investigate developing emergency winter housing fund for renters and homeowners with limited financial resources
- e. Investigate loans to small landlords (50-50 cost share) for needed repairs and accessibility improvements as senior government funding becomes available

4. Investigate utility costs for homeowners and tenants with limited financial resources.

Actions:

- a. Continue to develop relationships with local utility providers through an established utility group
- b. Communicate education on energy conservation and options for increasing energy efficiency to tenants and homeowners
- c. Seek opportunities to engage with future provincial and federal programs for energy conservation
- d. Advocate for reduction or elimination of deposits required for utility costs for persons with limited financial resources

5. Develop a long term strategy to sustain and support existing social housing.

Actions:

- a. Develop an asset management plan

- b. Continue periodic Building Condition Assessments and energy audits for County and Non Profit Housing
- c. Develop an enhanced preventative maintenance plan for County Buildings
- d. Investigate the impact of end of operating agreements on housing stock, including Non Profit Housing and options for managing changes
- e. Enhance relationship with Non Profits to ensure the ability to continue to provide quality housing and support efforts to increase affordable housing stock
- f. Request on going feedback from tenants, board members and staff
- g. Advocate for funding for social housing from senior levels of government
- h. Explore regeneration opportunities with private/public partnerships
- i. Enhance onsite supports to tenants by Community Relations Workers

6. Support affordable housing in municipal planning documents.

Actions:

- a. Support secondary suites legislation
- b. Support the maintenance and improvement of the existing housing stock. This will be encouraged through local maintenance and occupancy standards bylaws
- c. Investigate waiving or reducing fees in the next review of fees for affordable housing. Promote lower tier municipalities to lower or waive fees for affordable housing
- d. Encourage a diverse range of housing by type, size, tenure, and affordability to meet projected demographic and market requirements of current and future residents of the County
- e. Investigate county or municipal lands for future development
- f. Work with developers to promote affordable housing units

7. Community Improvement Plans: Economic Development.

Actions:

- a. Establish links between affordable housing and economic development strategies

Outcomes

- 200 affordable housing units in the next 10 years through rent supplement, Homeownership and new rental programs
- 100 renovations and repairs for homeowners with limited incomes such as seniors and people with disabilities
- Approximately 100 accessibility renovations for homeowners with limited income through a repairs program
- Minimum 100 heating repairs through winter home repair program for those with limited household income
- Preserve 1380 units of social housing through asset management and preventative maintenance planning

Homelessness Prevention

People who become homeless typically have common risk factors and interact with similar public systems. For example, those at high risk of long-term homelessness often interact with key public institutions, such as health care, addiction treatment, correctional facilities, child intervention and domestic violence services.

Risk factors that contribute to homelessness include:

- Poverty;
- Lack of affordable housing;
- Health issues, such as the presence of mental health, substance abuse and chronic physical health problems;
- Systems interactions, such as a history of incarceration and out-of-home placement as a child;
- Experiences of trauma and abuse, such as adverse childhood experiences including physical and sexual abuse, and domestic violence;¹and
- Lack of network of social supports; isolation.

There is no one comprehensive picture of homelessness in Grey County or a single access point for services for people experiencing homelessness. Generally homelessness in rural areas is harder to identify and therefore hard to quantify. Homelessness may consist of people who are couch surfing or living in their cars or other unsafe conditions. Services need to be distinguished for those that are

¹ Calgary Homeless Foundation. "10 year Plan to End Homelessness", 2008.

experiencing transitional homelessness and those that are experiencing long term homelessness.

Recommendations:

8. Promote the formation of an eviction diversion program for Grey County.

Actions:

- a. Collaborate with working groups/local agencies/ programs already working in eviction diversion
- b. Support the provision of education and information sessions on housing rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants

9. Initiate a tracking system to identify individuals experiencing homelessness.

Actions:

- a. Collaborate with local agencies to develop a means of tracking data to establish needs of individuals experiencing homelessness

10. Focus on supports for those individuals with long term homelessness.

Actions:

- a. Promote collaboration on case management such as outreach services when leaving the shelter
- b. Promote the *No Wrong Door* approach to encourage seamless support and service integration
- c. Explore options for populations experiencing difficulty obtaining affordable housing and/or populations in high risk situations including youth and Aboriginal populations
- d. Use supports such as pay direct and trustees to stabilize tenancies where appropriate

11. Ensure appropriate discharge plans for local hospitals, police, child welfare system, corrections.

Actions:

- a. Develop strategy for future protocols between service agencies

12. Advocate with other levels of government for changes in legislation to reduce homelessness.

Actions:

- a. Advocate for an increase in social assistance rates
- b. Advocate for the provision of Ontario Disability Support Program to issue benefits at the beginning of the month (instead of the end of the month for the previous month)
- c. Investigate a living wage policy and relevant labour law restrictions
- d. Advocate for the removal of last months rent as a stipulation of renting for private and non profit landlords for households with limited financial resources
- e. Advocate for the ongoing review and reprioritization of eligibility guidelines of the Sustainable Housing Benefit

Outcomes

- An interagency tracking system to identify homeless
- A community housing stability system to coordinate services for people experiencing homelessness and assist in maintaining housing
- Increase number of successful tenancies and prevent evictions in public and non profit housing

Transitional Housing

Causes of homelessness and the resources needed to solve homelessness are complex. Collaboration between community partners is needed to connect and stabilize housing opportunities for those in temporary or long term need of housing.

A Housing First program would find appropriate housing first and then assist people experiencing homelessness to address the issues that have contributed to their homelessness such as mental illness or addictions. A safe and affordable home ensures security and stability.

Research demonstrates that it costs less to provide appropriate housing and support to a person at risk of or experiencing homelessness compared with providing that same person with short-term and ongoing emergency housing.

Recommendations:

13. Enhance supportive housing with on-going supports through collaborative community partnerships.

Actions:

- a. Investigate options for second stage housing in other areas of the County to meet the demand
- b. Continue the stabilization of existing domiciliary hostels
- c. Maintain the currently supported transitional housing spaces through domiciliary hostel program
- d. Review existing emergency shelter services/programs to investigate alternative options for supportive services

14. Work with community partners to enhance existing support services through case management and focused collaboration.

Actions:

- a. Liaise and collaborate with local, provincial and federal housing providers such as LHIN's and community partners such as Hope Grey Bruce to explore a supportive housing and outreach services model
- b. Explore concept of a Housing First Model that meets the needs of Grey County
- c. Increase the number of supportive housing units through Provincial funding.
- d. Explore funding possibilities
- e. Engage the private sector to participate in a housing with supports model for Grey County
- f. Consult with partners and persons with lived experience
- g. Direct limited resources to those most vulnerable

Outcomes

- Preserve 110 transitional housing spaces with current domiciliary hostel program
- 2-5 second stage units for victims of domestic violence in the southern half of Grey County
- Increase the amount of supportive housing units through provincial funding

Service Coordination and Collaboration

The County can enhance services for people by encouraging community partners to work together, to share resources, to form partnerships and involve people who use services to improve program delivery.

Recommendations:

15. Continue to support the Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force.

Actions:

- a. Support the development of working groups within the task force to look at issues effecting housing and homelessness in the Grey County
- b. Support increased coordination and partnerships among groups and agencies focusing on a housing first model unique to Grey County
- c. Explore options to bring services to rural communities

16. Develop Citizen Engagement Strategies.

Actions:

- a. Provide satisfaction surveys for people accessing housing and homelessness services in Grey County
- b. Provide regular tenant/landlord surveys

17. Collaborate with community partners to explore the needs of off reserve housing for Aboriginal populations.

Actions:

- a. Acknowledge cultural identity and diversity to promote cooperation and collaboration and explore unique housing needs
- b. Advocate with the Province for funding for options for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.
- c. Work with Aboriginal people to ensure access to financial assistance and housing resources
- d. Work with shelter and second stage housing to ensure appropriate supports for Aboriginal women fleeing from violence
- e. Establish linkages with Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre



18. Encourage organizations to engage in integrated service and system planning.

Actions:

- a. Participate in current working group for establishing a *No Wrong Door* model to access services in the County of Grey
- b. Provide a single gateway for access to multiple County services
- c. Investigate collaborative opportunities through existing Community Connection 211 infrastructure

Outcome

- Formalize partnerships and collaborations to improve services and mechanisms to provide awareness and feedback to enhance housing and homelessness related services.

We can begin by doing small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems, not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.

-- Grace Lee Boggs

Summary of Outcomes

- 200 affordable housing units in the next 10 years through rent supplement, Homeownership and new rental programs
- 2-5 second stage units for victims of domestic violence in the southern half of Grey County
- 100 renovations and repairs for homeowners with limited incomes such as seniors and people with disabilities
- Approximately 100 accessibility renovations for homeowners with limited income through a repairs program
- Minimum 100 heating repairs through winter home repair program for those with limited household income
- Preserve 1380 units of social housing through asset management and preventative maintenance planning
- Preserve 110 transitional housing spaces with current domiciliary hostel program
- Increase number of successful tenancies and prevent evictions in public and non profit housing
- An interagency tracking system to identify homeless populations
- A community housing stability system to coordinate services for people experiencing homelessness and assist in maintaining housing
- Increase the amount of supportive housing units through provincial funding

How will we measure success?

Monitoring plan progress

The Oversight Committee comprised of elected officials, municipal staff, community agencies and people with lived experience to oversee the implementation, evaluation and annual report of the Housing and Homelessness Plan.

A tracking system for each action item will measure the progress of the plan and allow communication of efforts on an ongoing basis.

The housing and homelessness plan is required to be reassessed once every five years. A community consultation process to identify successes and any changes needed in the strategic plan will take place at the five year mark.

Measuring Outcomes



We will develop key housing indicators to measure the success of strategies listed in our plan. The key indicators will measure any changes that may be happening in the community and allow for planning. Any future measurement indicators from the Province will be included in our monitoring. Examples of key indicators are:

- number of affordable units created over the next 10 years
- number of second stage stays
- number of shelter stays
- number of winter fund consumers
- number that transition from homelessness to permanent housing
- number who maintain housing at 6 month mark
- turnover rate within social housing
- number of evictions prevented
- OW/ODSP caseloads
- number of private sector units funded

Other measures of success

- Tenant surveys to ensure on the right track with housing plan
- Partner surveys/consultation