



Municipality of Brighton

Homelessness Task Force

Report and Recommendations

December 9 2025

Brighton Homelessness Task Force Report

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Chair's Introduction

The Brighton Homelessness Task Force exists to understand and facilitate understanding of the street-level services provided by Northumberland County Social Services and local nonprofit and community groups; to help coordinate between those groups to strengthen their efforts to support our most vulnerable residents; and to determine what role the Municipality of Brighton can and should have in this matter moving forward.

I want to thank the members of this Task Force for contributing their time and effort. As community volunteers, they form a second layer of safety net for our residents that is unofficial and, often, unrecognized. I am grateful for their contributions to our collective understanding of homelessness in Brighton, and for their commitment to learning more in order to better serve their neighbours. The members of the Task Force are:

Mayor Brian Ostrander
Councillor Hannah MacAusland
Bill Smith, Manager of Homelessness Services at Northumberland County
Laurie Caouette (Vice-Chair), representing residents
Bets Lobban, representing Trinity St Andrews United Church
Heather Ratz, CEO of the Brighton Public Library
Kyle Couperus, representing Brighton Fellowship Christian Reformed Church
Mike O'Neill, representing the Brighton Fare Share Food Bank
Rob Cleave, representing Supper's Ready
Wayne Jefferson, representing the Brighton Downtown Business Improvement Area

At the time Mayor Ostrander requested the formation of this Task Force, visible homelessness in Brighton was as low as a single individual; that is no longer the case, and given the current economic and social context, is likely to get still worse before it gets better. That negative trend, along with the seemingly intractable nature of chronic homelessness, can give us the impression that the situation is hopeless, that we have no ability to help; or worse, it can cause us to attribute poverty and homelessness to the life choices of those who are suffering most from it, allowing us to write off our neighbours. Each of the members of this Task Force, and the many other local nonprofits and community groups who support their neighbours in various ways, are a testament to the values of Brightonians: we are a community that believes that we owe something to one another, whether that be support when we fall on hard times or just the dignity of recognizing one another as neighbours worthy of support even when there's little else that we can offer. At a time when homelessness is increasing across the continent, and many communities are becoming hardened to it, the existence of this Task Force shows that Brighton has not grown calloused, and our goal is to ensure that we do not.

In the pages that follow we will explore homelessness in our context; the way that County services are delivered here; a who's who of local nonprofits and community groups, their capacities and vulnerabilities, and the services they provide for the unhoused; the role of the Municipality of Brighton from a legal standpoint; and recommendations for how the Municipality might further enhance the good work our staff and residents continue to do. This information and these recommendations have been collected from our conversations at the Task Force table, as well as interviews with County and Brighton staff and community volunteers from other organizations. Homelessness is solvable, but doing so requires all hands on deck and a commitment to concrete

actions such as those recommended here. Please join us as we learn how to better love our neighbours.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wheeldon
Chair, Brighton Homelessness Task Force

Context

Homelessness in Brighton

Homelessness exists on a spectrum, and varies significantly depending on the context. We are accustomed to seeing homelessness as a big city problem that manifests as people sleeping in vestibules or under overpasses. We often hear it associated with drug use, mental health issues, and even crime. Sometimes, some or even all of those things are true; other times, none of them are.

In 2024 there were an estimated 81,515 Ontario residents who experienced homelessness.¹ In Northumberland County, there are approximately 85 residents known to be experiencing homelessness according to the By Name List. That list is always in flux: it is the result of an annual enumeration process, regularly adjusted as County Social Services staff meet new residents and note when others find housing, leave the area, or pass away. A resident needs to consent to having their name and information added to the list. When someone is housed they remain on the list for 3 months so that staff can continue to follow up with them. The people on the list are largely experiencing chronic homelessness: they've often been in the homelessness system for a significant amount of time. These people may be sleeping rough, accessing the emergency shelter, living in unofficial rooming houses, or couch surfing, predominantly in Cobourg and Port Hope. In Brighton, we know of roughly 3-5 people who would fall into this category, and we expect that number to rise as housing affordability continues to be out of reach for so many of us.

As difficult as it is to get clear numbers for people experiencing chronic homelessness, the number of people who are precariously housed can only be estimated, because such people are most often not connected to the social services system. This includes people who are already couch surfing or in temporary shelter arrangements with family or friends, renters who are facing eviction or renoeviction, people suffering from domestic abuse or otherwise living in an unsafe home, people being discharged from an institution such as a hospital or prison without housing to return to, or people living in or close to poverty to the extent that one unexpected expense or injury could lead to homelessness. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation identifies "core housing need" as including people who are living in housing that is unaffordable, inadequate, or unsustainable; and in their 2022 Canadian Housing Survey they pegged the rate of core housing need at around 11% of the population.² Ideally, such people are connected to existing services *before* they lose access to shelter. 11% of Brighton's population of roughly 13,000 is roughly 1,430 residents. Such rough calculations are inadequate to guide specific programs, but as a way of making a largely invisible problem apparent to the municipality, such a number is appropriately sobering.

And we cannot neglect rural homelessness, which sometimes looks like someone camping in the woods off a country road and walking long distances for supplies; but also often looks like someone living in a travel trailer in a field, or setting up living quarters in a barn, sometimes with a long extension cord to a nearby house. We have no count of such folks in Brighton, but we know

¹ *Municipalities Under Pressure: The Growing Human and Financial Cost of Ontario's Homelessness Crisis*. AMO, January 2025. References are to the summary here:

<https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-AMOHomelessnessReportSummaryFinal.pdf> Accessed November 16 2025. You can find the full report here:

<https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-EndingChronicHomelessnessinOntario.pdf>

² <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/observer/2024/2022-canadian-housing-survey>, accessed November 29 2025.

that some exist, and across the province rural homelessness has increased by 150% since 2016.³ Such people are faced with a sharp dilemma: because travel trailers and barns are not legal for year-round dwelling, someone who has nowhere else to live must risk being evicted for a building code or zoning by-law violation if they reveal their situation in order to ask for help. This also puts municipal staff in a difficult situation: they have a duty to enforce codes and by-laws that are intended to save lives and ensure that housing is safe and adequate, and yet doing so in such situations is often less safe.

The Costs of Not Solving Homelessness

Social Services are administered by Northumberland County, with funding both from the province and through the county levy. Such services are tremendously costly, and yet still underfunded in ways that ultimately cost significantly more overall. The provincial funding and administrative models, while well-intentioned, have led us to the status quo of increasing chronic homelessness while stretching our Social Services staff's capacity to operate across a large geographic area with mostly centralized services.

In January 2025, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario advocated for an additional \$13 Billion provincial investment over 10 years to end chronic homelessness, highlighting the need for significant capital funding for new affordable and supportive housing units that could provide people who are experiencing homelessness with an exit from the shelter system and chronic homelessness. The province instead provided an additional \$50 Million for affordable housing, an additional \$20 Million for shelter spaces, and \$378 Million to establish HART Hubs, a new program designed to help end encampments by providing wraparound supports to help people transition into permanent housing. AMO estimates that this HART Hub funding will cover 6% of the need.⁴ (Northumberland County applied for, but did not receive, HART Hub funding.) It is worth noting that HART Hubs were introduced in response to pushback against the province's decision to eliminate safe consumption sites across the province, so that investment is largely a transfer of resources from one program to another.

While the provincial funding was heralded as being a record investment in addressing homelessness, the stark contrast between what is needed and what is being provided also reveals significant downloading of costs from the province to municipalities. In the same report, AMO noted that the provincial investment of \$50 Million is 3% of what municipalities spend on affordable housing in Ontario, while the additional \$20 Million for shelters amounts to 2% of total shelter spending.⁵ Municipalities are not in a position to fund the remainder, and both the province and municipalities pay the social cost of homelessness in other ways.

The social cost of homelessness is a calculation of the total cost to the social safety net related to homelessness. This includes the cost of by-law enforcement and policing (paid for by lower-tier municipalities), paramedics and social services (including shelters, supportive housing, addiction supports, etc, all through the county budget), and hospital visits, courts, and prisons (all provincial expenditures). A 2017 study found that, even excluding the costs of medications, the

³ *Municipalities Under Pressure: The Growing Human and Financial Cost of Ontario's Homelessness Crisis*. AMO, January 2025.

<https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-AMOHomelessnessReportSummaryFinal.pdf>, accessed November 16 2025.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* Doing the math, that equates to almost \$1B in municipal shelter spending and roughly \$1.6B in municipal spending on affordable housing. Both of these services fall under the provincial mandate, and are supposed to be paid for through provincial transfers to Service Managers (in our case, Northumberland County).

total social cost of homelessness in Toronto averaged almost \$60,000 per person per year.⁶ While costs *may* be lower in Northumberland, the cost of everything has increased significantly since 2017, and the number of people experiencing homelessness has doubled in that time. To be clear, that \$60k/year is the cost of *not* housing someone experiencing homelessness.⁷ The cost of supportive housing is less than half that. This math drives the argument for “housing first”, a principle which recognizes that the stability that affordable or supportive housing provides can improve people’s lives *and* save money.

Because the social cost of homelessness is spread out over three different jurisdictions, recognizing the social cost of homelessness would require a provincial level plan that works across jurisdictions to address these issues together; a 2021 report of the Auditor General of Ontario “concluded that the Ministry does not have an overarching strategy that effectively co-ordinates actions for the reduction of homelessness with other provincial ministries, municipalities, and other third-party service providers.”⁸ This lack of a coordinated strategy was pointed out before the Ministry’s introduction of HART Hubs and other funding, but as we’ve seen, that funding amounts to a drop in the bucket and leaves out many communities, including our own. Federal leadership has also been lacking: a 2024 analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office noted that while the federal budget included \$561 Million in annual funding for homelessness, “achieving a 50% reduction in chronic homelessness would require an additional \$3.5 billion per year given current program designs.”⁹ This level of under-funding does not save money, it only hides where those costs are being incurred.

The Economics of Nonprofits

None of these cost estimates or funding programs include the indirect and volunteer services of the sort represented on the Brighton Homelessness Task Force. Such unofficial agencies occasionally receive grants, but also operate through donations and volunteers, and yield a high value for their work. For example, a 2024 study from the Calgary Food Bank found a social value of \$9.84 for every \$1 donated.¹⁰ A 2020 study of religious institutions such as churches, mosques, and synagogues estimated a Canada-wide Social Return on Investment (SROI) of almost \$15.5 Billion,¹¹ and while that amount is not directly contributed to people experiencing poverty and homelessness, it certainly includes “benevolent fund” expenditures for such purposes. A 2019 study

⁶ “Costs of services for homeless people with mental illness in 5 Canadian cities: a large prospective follow-up study”

<https://www.cmajopen.ca/content/5/3/E576?sid=9c8e03c6-9175-4985-85e6-ac34a83ac1e5>, accessed November 16 2025.

⁷ At ~\$60,000 per year each, the ~85 Northumberland residents on the By Name List should be expected to use ~\$5.1M in services they would not need to use if they were adequately housed.

⁸ “Value-for-Money Audit: Homelessness”, page 5.

https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/AR_Homelessness_en21.pdf, accessed November 16 2025.

⁹ “Federal Spending to Address Homelessness.” <https://www.pbo-dpb.ca/en/publications/RP-2425-005-S--federal-spending-address-homelessness--depenses-federales-matiere-itinerance>, accessed November 16 2025.

¹⁰ <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/food-bank-analysis-shows-high-return-on-donations>, accessed November 16 2025.

¹¹ “Dollars and \$ense: Uncovering the Socio-Economic Benefit of Religious Congregations in Canada.” Wood Daly, Mike, 2020.

http://www.halocanadaproject.com/uploads/1/3/0/6/130643503/dollars_and_ense_nationa_estimate_website.pdf, accessed November 16 2025.

by Northern Ontario Libraries indicated an SROI for public libraries between \$12-\$56 return for every dollar spent, with the social benefits including social inclusion, health & wellness, and engaged citizens & safer communities, among other things profoundly useful to people experiencing homelessness.¹² These examples of the outsized contributions of the unofficial social safety net serves to contrast with the tremendous inefficiency of under-invested federal and provincial dollars, and highlights the value we find in our local volunteers and nonprofits.

Emergency and Social Services in Northumberland and Brighton

Social Services in Ontario, including emergency shelters, rent subsidies, warming and cooling centres, and addiction and mental health supports, are managed through Northumberland County, our Service Manager. For a variety of reasons, Northumberland County Social Services are predominantly located in Cobourg: it is the county seat and the location of virtually every other centralized service and agency in Northumberland; it is geographically central to Northumberland; and it is the location with the highest population density and therefore the highest demand for such services in the county.

Given the small and dispersed population of most of the towns and townships of Northumberland, not least Brighton, locating significant services such as emergency shelters in other towns would be a highly inefficient use of the limited provincial funds allocated to Northumberland. We are grateful for provincial funds that helped purchase a former seniors' facility at 310 Division Street in Cobourg to house our emergency shelter, Transition House, but no such funding is forthcoming for a new shelter in Brighton to serve the 3-5 visibly homeless residents here even if they would consent to those services. Transition House has sufficient capacity to help our residents, but understandably some of them decline to move to another community for the sake of temporary shelter. The result is that while there are services like emergency shelter beds available to residents of Brighton, those services themselves are not located in Brighton.

Similarly, Social Services outreach workers make regular trips to Brighton and other Northumberland communities, and hold office hours at a municipally-owned building one day per week, but those outreach services are otherwise offered on an on-demand basis rather than an ongoing presence in our community.

Cobourg, Campbellford, Belleville, and Kingston; we have no addiction support facilities or programs other than those offered on demand through Social Services; and we have no street-level outreach charities such as Transition House or Green Wood Coalition, which operate in Cobourg and Port Hope.

Official services *located in Brighton* to support homeless residents include:

- County Social Services outreach workers and case managers available on demand, with office hours one day per week;
- Emergency warming & cooling at municipal facilities (during extreme weather events only)
- Emergency services (MHEART, Paramedics, Brighton Fire & Rescue, OPP)
- Subsidized rental units (with a 6 year wait list)
- Disbursement of OW and ODSP payments to Brighton residents

So while Brighton residents officially have access to all of the services provided through Northumberland County, the economics and geography involved require our residents to drive to access many types of care and support, while truly local services are largely on-demand and emergency only. This creates more need for a coherent and coordinated strategy for the second-level safety net provided by local nonprofits and volunteers.

¹² <https://fopl.ca/news/valuing-northern-libraries-summary-report/>, accessed November 16 2025.

The Role of Nonprofits & Volunteers

Like most communities, Brighton has a wealth of services provided by volunteer groups, nonprofits, and religious institutions, including but not limited to:

- Brighton Public Library
- Brighton Fare Share Food Bank
- Brighton Fire & Rescue
- Community Care Northumberland
- Churches & Church Ministries
 - Brighton Evangel Pentecostal Church
 - Christmas Hampers program
 - Brighton Fellowship Christian Reformed Church
 - Holy Angels Catholic Church
 - St. Vincent de Paul Society
 - Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, Smithfield
 - Salvation Army, via support at The Beacon
 - Smithfield-Carman United Church
 - St. Paul's Anglican Church
 - Trinity-St. Andrew's United Church
- Gift From The Heart dental services
- Quinte Transit, for on-demand transportation in the Quinte region
- Royal Canadian Legion
- Service Clubs
 - Lions Club
 - Rotary Club
- Stockings & Santa Sacks for Seniors
- Supper's Ready
- Sutherhart Community Christmas
- Thrift stores
 - Brighton Clothing & Treasures
 - Twice As Nice Thrift Shop
 - Third Time's a Charm
 - Trinity-St. Andrew's United Church Clothing Depot
- YMCA, for free showers
- Youth drop-in
 - The Beacon
 - Home Rainbow Youth Centre

These organizations provide essential supports to Brighton residents who are precariously housed or in various states of need. Some of them provide free or low-cost "third spaces", a place in the community where anyone is welcome (and able to stay safe and warm). Others provide important services at low or no charge. Brighton Fire & Rescue and the Brighton Public Library are included here; while they are supported financially by the municipality and therefore often seen as municipal services, Brighton Fire & Rescue is staffed by volunteer firefighters and the Brighton Public Library provides an essential third space that is often used by institutions, nonprofits, and volunteers as a venue for their services. In that sense both of these institutions serve as models for how the municipality can leverage and support volunteers and nonprofits effectively. Quinte Transit is included as a nonprofit corporation funded in part by local governments in order to offer subsidized transportation.

These groups have a variety of capacity levels, even when they have similar services. For example, most churches have a “benevolent fund”, donations that have been set aside for helping people in need; but the amount each church has in such a fund will vary, while some churches have a dedicated organization (e.g., St Vincent de Paul) for serving those in need. Almost all of these organizations depend on both volunteers and donations to operate, and for several of these groups an annual grant from the Municipality of Brighton provides a significant source of revenue. Some of these groups are partnered with larger nonprofits and charities, such as the Home Rainbow Youth Centre’s partnership with the Peterborough AIDS Research Network (PARN) and the Beacon’s relationship with Youth For Christ (YFC); those larger, external groups also depend on donations, grants, and often volunteers to operate, and often do not provide significant outside revenues for the programs they support in Brighton.

While these institutions, nonprofits, and volunteer groups provide a level of stability for residents of Brighton, particularly those who are experiencing poverty and homelessness, these groups themselves are somewhat precarious because of their dependence on donations and volunteers. According to Statistics Canada’s 2023 Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GVP), the number of Canadians donating to charitable organizations has declined over the past decade from 82% to 54%, with total donations declining from \$16.4B in 2013 to \$13.4B in 2023. Similarly, the number of Canadians who volunteer has dropped from 44% in 2013 to 32% in 2023, with total volunteering hours dropping from 2 billion in 2013 to 1.2 billion hours in 2023, a drop equivalent to 451,000 full time jobs.¹³ While the youngest volunteers are more plentiful (likely due to volunteering requirements in high school), the volunteers who give the most hours tend to be the oldest cohort.

While we do not have concrete numbers for Brighton’s volunteers, on the face of it this seems to be true for our community. Our churches are mostly attended by retirees, and churches in North America have been subject to a narrative of decline for decades, with hard generational distinctions in adherence: “Statistics Canada data confirms the generational gap, finding that religious affiliation was at 85 per cent among older Canadians born between 1940 and 1959, compared with 32 per cent for those born between 1980 and 1999.”¹⁴ Service clubs reflect similar demographics, and sometimes are affiliated with churches themselves. As these institutions decline, we should prepare for the benefits they provide to decline as well.

It is worth noting, and has been discussed at council, that the social safety net we all enjoy as Canadians was once largely the domain of these religious communities and service clubs. The rise of the welfare state as a centralized supportive institution has undermined the social functions of these hyper-local organizations, in some cases reducing their practices to religious ritual without a robust embodied social ethic or praxis. One might hypothesize that membership in such groups has suffered because of this, and so we should be very careful not to further centralize the social functions of our community members, knowing that no public program can adequately replace the social benefits of true community. Given the tremendous efficiency and SROI of nonprofits, it is in the interests of local governments to encourage a culture of voluntarism, rather than take over their mandates.

The Role of the Municipality of Brighton

Social Services are a County responsibility, and we have no need or desire to duplicate services at the lower tier. Nor do we have any desire to undermine the voluntary sector by taking over the social role that local volunteers and nonprofits play in creating the supportive community

¹³ <https://imaginecanada.ca/en/360/new-results-statistics-canadas-survey-giving-volunteering-and-participating>, accessed November 21 2025.

¹⁴ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8471086/religion-decline-canada/>, accessed November 23, 2025.

Brighton enjoys. But the Municipality of Brighton does play important roles in addressing homelessness, and by explicitly delineating them we can see where there may be gaps in services that are appropriately filled by a lower-tier municipal government. And by identifying which services are funded by the municipality, we can begin the process of noticing where municipal resources might be used more effectively or efficiently.

Brighton's Existing Resources & Services

Public Washrooms

An often overlooked support service that is essential for residents experiencing homelessness is the public washroom. Brighton operates two public washrooms at Memorial Park, one more in the lobby of the municipal offices, two at The Shed at King Ed, two at the arena, and two more in the Community Centre there. The Brighton Public Library also offers two washrooms for public use.

While public washrooms are a convenience for most residents, for those who are experiencing homelessness they are a necessity. Public provision of washroom facilities not only supports residents experiencing homelessness, it also supports local businesses, whose washrooms would otherwise be the only ones available for residents without access to washrooms of their own. It is common to see businesses apply barriers to their washroom facilities, whether through policies and signs reserving washroom use to paying customers only, or through requiring keyed access for all washroom use, or even through removing access to washrooms altogether in cases where it is not required by law. By maintaining public washrooms, the municipality does not shift the burden of providing these essential services to small businesses, and supports a better experience for all.

Washrooms provide essential relief for residents, but also a place of privacy and warmth. When that privacy and warmth becomes their primary purpose, they cease to be public washrooms and instead become temporary housing. The municipality has the right to remove residents experiencing homelessness from those facilities under the *Trespass to Property Act*, and should do so to ensure that public washrooms continue to be available to all.

Emergency Services

Emergency services are funded and administered by a variety of institutions. Brighton Fire and Rescue provides first-responder services for not only fires and traffic collisions, but also emergency first aid; it is staffed by a mix of volunteers from the community and municipal employees, and those services are funded by the Municipality of Brighton.

Policing in Brighton is funded by the Municipality of Brighton, through a contract with the Ontario Provincial Police. Services provided by the OPP are not directed by the municipality, they are governed by provincial statutes and regulations. The Brighton detachment includes an MHEART team that consists of one constable and one social worker, both of whom have special training and experience with mental health and addictions; they operate during office hours, and are not case workers, though they do make referrals to Northumberland County Social Services.

We recommend that municipal staff continue to maintain open and proactive communication and information sharing with emergency services, social services, and Lower Trent Conservation Authority, in order to facilitate ongoing supports and fast response times for unhoused residents who may move around within the municipality.

By-Law Enforcement

By-law enforcement is where many municipalities primarily engage with unhoused residents. Depending on the by-laws in place, enforcement can be the most expensive, challenging, and controversial role for lower-tier governments.

It is common for municipal by-laws to prohibit loitering, camping, and blocking sidewalks, all of which are legitimate concerns but nonetheless ultimately target people with nowhere else to go. Enforcement of such by-laws against unhoused residents is expensive because it is ineffective: evicting someone from a public space without somewhere else to go is a never-ending task, as they continually move to other public spaces from which they must then also be evicted. The work of doing so is very hard on staff: some of Brighton's By-Law Enforcement team have experience doing this type of enforcement in other municipalities, and found it to be soul-sucking and depressing work with no chance of long-term success. And perhaps most importantly, by-laws that target unhoused residents have been ruled to violate their human rights.

A fresh report outlines recent case law and applications of international law, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and other federal and provincial laws to matters of municipal by-law enforcement against homeless encampments. They explore cases where Section 7 of the Charter has been invoked successfully to rule that evicting homeless encampments in cases where there are not accessible shelter alternatives violates an unhoused person's right to life, liberty, and security of the person,¹⁵ and warn against framing homeless encampments as trespass.¹⁶ Brighton's own by-law enforcement staff similarly warn against the application of parks by-laws against unhoused residents: parks by-laws that prohibit camping in public parks are designed to prohibit recreational camping and cooking, not to prohibit unhoused people from surviving.

Brighton's parks by-law does prohibit camping, without caveat. But the by-law is also 25 years old and in need of review. **We recommend** that a revised parks by-law include clearly identifying prohibitions against camping as referring to recreational camping, and identifying unhoused residents attempting to shelter in peace as a distinct situation with special rules. As an example, the City of Vancouver's parks by-law grants senior parks staff the power to determine an appropriate place for unhoused residents to camp.¹⁷ When utilizing such judgment staff should consider, as much as possible, that residents will seek to camp in places that best meet their needs; directing them to places that are inaccessible, or require them to walk too far to access resources, will likely be ineffective. In choosing to camp on the stage in Memorial Park, for instance, an unhoused resident is balancing a lack of privacy with the security of being seen and easy access to a restroom, electricity, wifi, and the amenities of downtown. As such we also recommend that the Parks & Recreation department consider locations in public parks where unhoused residents might be directed, considering that balance between privacy for the resident and comfort of the public on one hand, and access to amenities and security on the other.

¹⁵ Alexandra Flynn and Estair Van Wagner, "The Governance of Homeless Encampments in Canada," *IMFG Papers on Municipal Finance and Governance* No. 73, 2025, pp. 4-6. The case law includes the cases commonly known as "the Waterloo decision" and "the Kingston decision," both of which are relied on by advocates to call on local governments to suspend by-law enforcement that results in evicting encampments and confiscating the belongings of unhoused residents. Premier Ford has threatened, or promised, to invoke the Notwithstanding Clause to suspend the Charter rights of unhoused residents in support of municipalities who seek to continue evicting homeless encampments; this seems so far to have chilled advocacy efforts in this regard.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 6-7.

¹⁷ See 11F in Vancouver Board of Parks & Recreation Park By-Laws, <https://parkboardmeetings.vancouver.ca/files/BYLAW-ALLParkBylaws-2024.pdf>, accessed November 29 2025.

Brighton's staff continue to undergo a council-directed project to review all by-laws to ensure that they do not infringe on the rights of residents; **we recommend** a continued commitment to govern in ways that uphold the rights of all residents without discrimination, by way of a motion formally recognizing unhoused residents as rights holders and committing to upholding those rights according to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and international law. Such a motion should provide guidance to staff as they review by-laws and operating procedures regarding interactions with unhoused residents. **We also recommend** that council pass a motion requesting more adequate funding from provincial and federal governments for homelessness services, in recognition of the deficiency of funds noted in this report (and many others) and the significant costs that deficiency incurs for municipal governments dealing with the fallout of systemic inadequacy.

Finally, **we recommend** that all Brighton staff, but particularly by-law enforcement staff, be provided with training to equip them for trauma-informed service; and with political support from council to prevent the politicization of their work and to support them as they serve unhoused residents.

Housing and Transit Initiatives

Brighton's Land Banking Initiative has made significant progress in this term of council, with the purchase of lands and the beginning of a procurement process for community design, financing, and servicing plans for what will ultimately be a mixed-use, mixed-income neighbourhood of transit-level density that incorporates market, subsidized, and workforce housing units in a variety of styles. While this is a medium- to long-term initiative, the immediate crisis of increasing homelessness cannot be permanently solved without the provision of affordable housing. As such, **we recommend** that council continue to invest in this initiative moving forward, and take steps to protect the initiative from any politicization that might derail the project before those affordable housing units can come to fruition.

Brighton has similarly already begun to implement the findings of the Northumberland Inter-Municipal Housing Solutions report from earlier this year, and will continue to do so through the Official Plan renewal process. We recognize this good work, and recommend that it continue in order to facilitate the development of more, and more affordable, housing in Brighton.

Brighton already supports Quinte Transit, which currently provides on-demand service between Brighton, Quinte West, Belleville, and Picton, and is hoping to expand services to include regular routes in Brighton. **We recommend** that Brighton and Quinte Transit provide for free transportation services for those in need, with coupons that can be distributed by municipal staff and volunteer organizations such as the food bank and drop-in centres.

Other Municipal Roles

Information Sharing, Convening and Facilitation

This Task Force was initiated in response to the need to facilitate collaboration between the many groups who engage with unhoused residents, and a recurring theme of our meetings has been about how difficult it can be to share information. County Social Services staff are prohibited by regulation from sharing information about identifiable individuals, but we have spent most of our meeting time learning about the regular services and protocols of Social Services staff, MHEART, and Lower Trent Conservation Authority with regard to unhoused residents. We have similarly learned more about the services and supports that each of our institutions and groups offer. This knowledge sharing has been invaluable in terms of empowering one another toward more effective supports for our unhoused neighbours, increasing our comfort navigating existing services, and knowing how to direct residents to access supports. But this Task Force has a limited life span, and this information sharing should continue and expand. As such, the Task Force has endeavoured to:

- Create an organization-facing resource list that identifies which services are available and where, with contacts for information and resource sharing;
- Create a public-facing resource list that can be posted in public places and distributed in pocket-sized editions for unhoused residents, to ease access to services and supports;
- Recommend to council that the Municipality install a public notice board where information can be posted;
- Request training from Northumberland County Social Services for both municipal staff and the general public, to spread knowledge and awareness of existing services and practices carried out by County staff as well as to answer questions from the public about how to supportively engage with unhoused residents and the social services system.

These initiatives are already underway: the resource lists are in development, and council has directed staff to install the notice board and authorize the staff training. The public training will be on December 11th, 2:30-4:00pm at Trinity-St. Andrew's United Church, it has been publicized by municipal staff and shared by Task Force members with their networks, and residents from across Northumberland will be attending, showing there is appetite for this information.

We are cognizant of the issue mentioned above: the municipality should not take ownership of the aims or outcomes of the voluntary sector. We are also cognizant of the central role of the Service Manager in providing supports to unhoused residents, and want to avoid duplicating or taking responsibility for any County-led programs. For those reasons **we recommend** that the Municipality of Brighton's role moving forward be one of bridging the gap between the official, County-level services delivered through government agencies, and the unofficial, hyper-local nonprofits, religious institutions, and volunteers here in Brighton. The recommended mechanism for this is through the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (CSWBP).

The CSWBP is required by provincial legislation, and Northumberland County's Plan is past due for renewal; County staff are beginning that process now. The philosophy behind the CSWBP is that community safety and well-being are emergent properties of a healthy community. In other words, when our residents look out for one another, when we have a thriving business community downtown, and when we have functional support systems both official and unofficial, crime decreases and public trust increases and we all have a higher quality of life. While this philosophy aligns well with Asset-Based Community Development principles and should empower our local grassroots, the location of the CSWBP at the County level prevents it from being effectively implemented locally. **We recommend** a local implementation plan for the revised CSWBP. While this is potentially the most expensive recommendation in this report, we know that grant funding

for CSWBP development is available and local expertise exists to contribute to it. Some of the foreseeable outcomes of such a plan are already recommended in this report, but the implications of developing a local implementation plan need to be considered carefully alongside the forthcoming development of the new CSWBP. As such, **we also recommend** that council advocate that the renewal of the CSWBP include design that anticipates more local implementation.¹⁸

Even in the absence of a new CSWBP and implementation plan, **we recommend** that the municipality assume a facilitation role for connecting the official initiatives of the upper tier municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and agencies such as Lower Trent Conservation Authority and the OPP, to Brighton's hyper-local organizations and general public, by maintaining an ongoing point of communication for the purpose of collaboration on initiatives to support unhoused or precariously housed residents. The Task Force itself currently serves this function as a connecting point for member organizations; once the Task Force dissolves, **we recommend** a more permanent connecting point be established, either through a committee or a staff person to facilitate ongoing collaboration.

Resource Supports for Community-Driven Initiatives

As already mentioned, the voluntary sector in Brighton relies on volunteers and donations, both of which have been in sharp decline over the past decade. Over this term of council alone we have noticed the increase in asks for the Grants in Aid program, both in the number of requests and, especially, the size of requests, with many requests maxing out at the \$20,000 limit. Council has been discussing reviewing the Grants in Aid policy, with a potential partnership with the Brian Todd Memorial Community Fund, which also gives out a significant number of grants each year to local nonprofits. **We recommend** that the review of this program consider the nature of Brighton's unofficial local safety net, and prioritize projects and organizations that grow the social fabric of our community and provide services that support community safety and well-being.

We also recommend that the municipality provide free space for local nonprofits to meet. While the Library and Owen Gibb Hall have excellent spaces, they are also well-used. A publicly available space specialized to business meetings could support nonprofits and volunteer organizations that would otherwise compete for space with sports and leisure clubs, etc. Similarly, a virtual space for collaboration between groups, allowing them to share information and coordinate services, would be highly beneficial.

Training Opportunities

At the invitation of this Task Force, Northumberland County is already scheduled to provide training to both municipal staff and the public for how to engage with unhoused residents and the homelessness system. **We recommend** other training that would be of benefit to residents, volunteers, and staff alike, including:

- How to use Naloxone to save a life
- First Aid, and Mental Health First Aid
- Landlord and Tenant training, to improve landlord/tenant relations and prevent evictions

¹⁸ Similar to the way in which the County's environmental sustainability plans are being developed in ways that allow them to empower lower-tier governments to develop and implement their own plans in concert with County-level actions and approaches.

- Communications and governance training for local nonprofits, to increase their effectiveness and help them recruit the next generation of volunteers

Summary of Recommendations:

- A motion from council recognizing unhoused residents as rights holders and committing to governing with respect for the rights of all residents without discrimination;
- A motion from council advocating for federal and provincial funding at the levels needed to achieve the end of homelessness;
- A motion from council advocating for a revised Community Safety and Well-Being Plan at the County level that specifically leaves room for lower-tier implementation plans;
- A lower-tier implementation plan for the revised Community Safety and Well-Being Plan that engages the residents of Brighton, local business community, nonprofits, faith institutions, and volunteer groups to take collective responsibility for one another in a distributed and decentralized way according to the principles of Asset Based Community Development;
- Provision of space, both physical and virtual, for the coordination of services among nonprofits, faith institutions, and volunteer groups whose collective efforts reinforce the social fabric of our community;
- Provision of training opportunities for members of the public, particularly from the voluntary sector, to enhance their capacity and effectiveness in serving their neighbours, and to equip landlords and tenants to proactively address housing insecurity and reduce evictions;
- Provision of staff time to help convene and facilitate that community-based collaboration, and ideally, to seek funding sources for a staff position to facilitate the CSWBP local implementation plan;
- Ongoing commitment to the Grants In Aid budget, with special attention to programs and services that fill gaps in government services;
- Ongoing commitment to the Land Banking Initiative, the recommendations of the Housing Solutions Report, and other initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing in Brighton;
- A commitment from council to support staff through providing adequate training and resources; and through political support for staff making judgment calls regarding by-law and code enforcement matters, so that no staff member is afraid to engage with and support residents who are precariously housed and for whom by-law enforcement might result in eviction and homelessness;
- A revised Parks By-Law that distinguishes between recreational camping and unhoused residents sheltering in peace;
- A review of existing public open spaces to identify locations that might be good candidates for designating as places to shelter in peace;
- Attention to the needs of unhoused residents as the municipality expands our portfolio of public open spaces;
- A commitment to ensuring that public washrooms remain open as much as possible, to ensure that unhoused residents have access to the dignity of privacy for

their bodily functions, that all residents have the convenience of access to washrooms downtown, and that downtown businesses do not become public washrooms by proxy;

- Continued partnership with transit operators to ensure that all residents have access to safe and affordable transportation;
- Ongoing proactive collaboration between by-law enforcement, County Social Services, OPP, Northumberland County Community Paramedicine, and Lower Trent Conservation staff as unhoused residents move around the municipality;
- A commitment to print and periodically update the list of support services and nonprofits for distribution in the community, so that when a Brighton resident needs support we know who to call.

Summary

Homelessness in Brighton cannot be solved by the lower-tier municipal government, and there is no apparent benefit to duplicating County services; and government services at any level cannot replicate, let alone replace, the supportive environment of a connected community. Our recommendations therefore focus on ways that local government can empower and facilitate the work of local nonprofits, institutions, and volunteer organizations to reinforce the social fabric of our community, including through providing connection and information sharing with the services provided through the County. Our recommendations also include several specific policies and operational commitments that would ensure that the Municipality of Brighton retains a compassionate and Charter-compliant approach to homelessness in our community.