



COMMUNITY SAFETY & SOCIAL SERVICES – AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: 8 October 2024

Subject: New findings on Airdrie's Housing Challenges: 2024 Houselessness Highlights Report

Directorate: Community Safety and Social Services

Issue:

The Community Safety and Social Services (CSSS) Standing Committee is being presented with *Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report* and next steps, for information.

Policy / Council Direction:

Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report aligns with Council's Social Policy (COM-63-C), Council's 2023-26 Caring Community Focus Area, as well as informs and complements the ongoing work related to Airdrie's *2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Action Plan*.

Background:

Airdrie residents are experiencing a housing and affordability crisis, alongside the rest of Canada. As housing is a human right and foundational to a complete, caring, and sustainable community, Airdrie residents have the right to safe, stable, affordable, accessible and permanent housing. Without it, residents face negative impacts in all aspects of their lives, such as mental and physical health, child development, and job and income stability – and the overall health of a community is undermined.

While the City of Airdrie has done extensive research into the housing supply and need in our community and is actively working on affordable housing solutions identified in its **2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Housing Action Plan**, the extent of "hidden homelessness/houselessness"¹ in Airdrie has not been previously investigated.

¹ Housing advocates in Canada and other countries are using new terms to describe "homeless" individuals and "homelessness". This new terminology seeks to offer greater dignity to people without stable or appropriate housing. New terms for homelessness include: "housing insecure", "houseless" or people experiencing "housing insecurity" or "houselessness". The City uses the terms "homelessness", "houselessness" and "housing insecurity" interchangeably throughout this report.

“Hidden houselessness” refers to houselessness that is not necessarily visible in our communities or reflected in typical household-based research. It includes those individuals who are at risk of losing their housing; who are couch surfing or staying with someone temporarily; or who are living in crowded or unsuitable accommodations, including living in their vehicles. Due to its hidden nature, the extent of the issue within communities often goes undocumented and unaddressed.

On December 18, 2023, Airdrie City Council directed Administration to commission a Houselessness Estimation Study to help identify gaps, options, and recommendations for preventing and responding to this growing issue. In early 2024, Administration contracted the Rural Development Network (RDN), an expert consultant, to guide the City through this work.

Houselessness Estimation Study Findings

Airdrie’s 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report, attached here, provides critical and in-depth findings from Airdrie’s first ever Houselessness Estimation Study.²

The study conducted a survey completed by 166 adult respondents. These respondents identified that they also had 191 dependent household members and 173 dependent children, for a total of 530 residents experiencing housing insecurity.

Further, **92%** of the 166 respondents were from Airdrie, with the majority of these residents calling Airdrie home for three or more years, suggesting that housing insecurity in Airdrie is mainly experienced by longer-term residents.

The **top three reasons for housing insecurity** as reported by survey respondents were:

1. **High housing costs** (my rent/mortgage is too high for my income).
2. **Health challenges** (illness or medical condition, mental health concern and/or physical disability).
3. **Low vacancy rates** (there are approximately 1% of rental units available within Airdrie).

It is important to note that not all residents who were experiencing houselessness chose to participate in the survey due to a variety of factors, including stigma associated with “homelessness”, the overwhelming nature of the questions in the survey, and simply not knowing about the survey. As a result, the Highlights Report presents a conservative estimate of houselessness in Airdrie.

Reported living situation

² The Houselessness Estimation Study employed the federal definition of homelessness: The situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It includes four types of living situations: 1. Unsheltered or living on the street, parks, alleyways or abandoned buildings. 2. Emergency Sheltered or staying in overnight emergency shelters. 3. Provisionally Accommodated such as living in transitional housing, in an RV or trailer, couch surfing, or living in a situation where there is domestic violence. 4. At Risk of Homelessness such as being one missed rent payment away from eviction, living in a housing that is on the verge of being condemned, etc.

Respondents were asked to outline their current housing situation by choosing which of a variety of provided statements best applied to them. Statements included, but were not limited to, “I slept in a vehicle”, “I slept in a hotel overnight because I had nowhere to go”, “I live in a house that needs major repairs”. Respondents were able to select more than one statement. These responses were tabulated and organized into the four living situation categories of houselessness. Table 1 presents the “incidence” of houselessness or housing insecurity by living situation category.

Table 1. Incidence of Housing Insecurity by Living Situation Category

Living situation category	% of incidence in each category
Unsheltered	5%
Emergency Sheltered	1%
Provisionally Accommodated	25%
At Risk of Houselessness	69%

The table above indicates that the majority of survey respondents were experiencing the living situations of being “Provisionally Accommodated” and/or “At Risk of Houselessness”.

For further findings on the nature of housing insecurity, and characteristics of the population experiencing housing insecurity, in Airdrie, see the attached *Highlights Report*.

Opportunities Identified by the Study

Addressing houselessness involves a multi-pronged approach in the areas of both prevention and intervention. Based on the findings outlined in the *Highlights Report*, RDN has identified four opportunities to address housing insecurity in Airdrie moving forward.³

As a City, we have already begun to make progress on some of these identified opportunities, such as advancing the targets and actions in the *2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Action Plan*, and building community awareness and understanding of houselessness in Airdrie. However, both of these must be further informed, and updated where necessary, by the houselessness research findings. In addition, in order to prevent residents from moving into houselessness, the findings above underscore the importance and urgency of fully implementing the *2024-2030 Affordable Housing Principled Action Plan*.

Other identified opportunities require further research and exploration with our community.

Next Steps

Airdrie City Council has a vision of a complete, caring, community where residents can access appropriate housing now and in the future. The houselessness *Highlights Report* provides extremely valuable information to better understand the current housing and service needs of Airdrie’s most vulnerable residents so that we can begin to address these needs now and plan for the future.

The next steps following this report will involve (in 2025) exploring a partnership opportunity with a local community organization to pilot a systems navigation approach within Airdrie. This systems

³ See the attached *Highlights Report* for a detailed presentation of the consultant’s identified opportunities.

navigation approach will involve providing timely and appropriate supports to Airdrie's most vulnerable residents (i.e., those who are unhoused or who are at risk of becoming unhoused). These intervention-based supports may include, referrals, housing and income supports information, crisis intervention, etc. Exploring a systems navigation approach in Airdrie will also help us understand what we need to further build within our community's social serving system and infrastructure.

Additionally, Administration is now equipped with the data required for advocacy to higher orders of government to fund solutions at the lower end of the housing continuum. Exploring funding and advocacy opportunities for the City of Airdrie will be a key priority for Administration. As houselessness is a complex issue that requires coordinated efforts and resources from all levels of government, building solutions to houselessness will require the City to play a strong role as Collaborator.

Finally, with growth pressures already being felt, and with Airdrie's population projected to reach 100,000+ over the next two years, the City's sustained commitment, investment, and effort in housing for all residents, over the long term, is imperative.

Administration Recommendation:

That the CSSS Standing Committee recommends that Council accepts *Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report* and next steps, for information.

Alternatives/Implications:

Not applicable as the report is being presented for information only.

Budget Implications:

There is an allocation of funds to support this future work pending budget 2025 deliberations.

Communications and Engagement:

Administration will work with Communications to integrate key messaging from *Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report* with the Affordable Housing Public Education Campaign launched in November 2023.

Recommendation:

That the Community Safety and Social Services Standing Committee recommends that Council accepts Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report and next steps, for information.

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Attachments:	#1: Airdrie's 2024 Houselessness Estimation Study Highlights Report