

Subject: Rural Homelessness Estimate Report**APPROVALS:****Annette Antoniak**_____
Director_____
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Homelessness Estimation Report be accepted as information;

THAT Administration work with community partners to support solutions that will address inadequate housing in Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's rural communities; and

THAT the Mayor write a letter to the appropriate ministries in the Provincial and Federal governments inviting the responsible Minister to visit and tour Wood Buffalo to see first-hand housing conditions and discuss how the Provincial and Federal governments can address Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo housing challenges.

Summary:

Council directed Administration to undertake a rural homelessness estimate to better understand the homeless and at-risk populations within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB). The estimate included the communities of Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, Anzac and Janvier (a separate estimate was commissioned by a separate organization for Conklin). A survey was developed by the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) and administered by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Data collection for the estimate took place in late 2018 and early 2019, with an analysis of the data developed into an estimation report. Data collection occurred in the municipal jurisdiction of the communities and did not include Reserves.

Background:

In March 2018, Council passed a motion that Administration coordinate a homelessness estimate in Wood Buffalo's rural hamlets. Planning meetings were held between the Neighbourhood & Community Development and the then Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) departments, AARDN and other stakeholders to discuss the project. In May 2018, IRR was identified to lead coordination with rural communities to conduct a homelessness count/estimation.

In October 2018, the IRR group began a work plan following ARDN’s “Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Homelessness” and using the suggested survey as part of this kit. ARDN was also secured to provide data analysis. The ARDN guide employed a model that uses community service providers to collect data. The success of efforts to secure service providers was limited, as many providers in the urban area do not travel to rural communities, or travel is infrequent. To address this, the RMWB secured a community member facilitator from the Fort McKay Métis to visit the communities with the support of municipal staff, to distribute surveys at a community event (e.g. a luncheon) and then return a few weeks later to collect completed surveys. The survey distribution and collection occurred between November 2018 and January 2019.

The survey counted a total of 148 individuals in the four communities mentioned above, many of whom were at-risk of losing their housing or unsure of the stability of their housing.

Aggregated results found:

- More women than men accessing services were employed;
- The unstable housing population was predominantly Métis;
- The unemployed unstable housing population was predominantly Métis men;
- Between the shared-living residents and respondents, there were 148 residents either living in unstable housing or living alongside an individual in unstable housing. 52 were children, and the remaining 96 were adults.

There were varying results for each individual community, and while it would have been preferred to have had a larger sample size of affected population to draw stronger conclusions, primary data indicates issues of housing shortages and the need for increased services in RMWB's rural communities.

There were several challenges with data collection, including individuals at risk opening up to survey administrators and sharing their story, surveys that had incomplete responses, service providers being unable to adequately administer the survey because their priority was their immediate work, and surveys that weren't tailored to the uniqueness of each community.

In late winter ARDN began working on the analysis, which continued through the spring. A draft report was provided in June, with revisions and drafts being exchanged throughout the summer and into the fall.

As noted above, a homelessness estimate for Conklin was commissioned by the Conklin Resource Development Advisory Committee (CRDAC). The Municipality also contributed to the funding of this project.

Alternatives:

As part of the data analysis report, the ARDN has recommended that additional surveying be conducted in the rural communities to better understand the demographics of the population experiencing unstable housing in the RMWB. This would require additional financial and staffing resources. Rather than moving ahead with community partners to develop and implement solutions, this alternative would propose to conduct a more thorough estimation and then undertake action based on a deeper pool of data and information.

Budget/Financial Implications:

The financial specifics related to developing and implementing solutions would be dependent on what is being undertaken by the Municipality and community partners and cannot be determined at this time.

Should the alternative of another estimation be pursued, a realistic budget would need to be explored. It would be a considerably greater expense than what was spent on this initial estimate.

Rationale for Recommendation:

Since the original motion was passed requesting a homelessness estimation in our rural communities, there has been significant focus on the challenge of affordable and suitable housing in the RMWB's rural communities. This has also included other regional organizations focused on housing in the municipality's rural hamlets. Given the momentum and attention that this issue has, it is important to continue the work that has been started and take action to find long lasting solutions that will benefit the rural communities and the RMWB as a whole.

While it may be beneficial to gather additional data about the housing challenges in our hamlets, undertaking an additional estimation count may delay addressing these housing issues.

Strategic Priorities:

Responsible Government
Rural and Indigenous Communities and Partnerships

Attachments:

- 1. RMWB Estimation Report - ARDN**
- 2. Rural Homelessness Estimate Report PowerPoint**