



July 4, 2024

Mayor and Members of Leduc City Council  
City of Leduc  
1 Alexandra Park  
Leduc, AB T9E 4C4

RE: City Council's response to homelessness

Dear Mayor and Councillors;

The Hub board recognizes that emergency shelters alone cannot solve homelessness. We also recognize this service protects life and preserves dignity. Shelters alleviate the inhumane circumstances that erode people's ability to be lifted from poverty, access critical social services, and transition into supportive housing.

Our civic leaders cannot ignore these humanitarian values of shelters. The Hub is grateful that council has taken a step towards preserving this service in Leduc with its June 24th decision to develop an extreme cold weather emergency shelter. This action serves council's February 5th commitment to maintain uninterrupted shelter services in Leduc. It shows that the council continues to be guided by the values of equity, human rights, [and social justice and is working to serve Leduc's strategic vision for a caring community](#). On behalf of the Leduc Hub Association—and the charitable members of our community who volunteer more than 8,000 hours each year to meet the shelter needs in our city, thank you.

The closeness of this vote highlights the critical importance of all council members being aware of and understanding the complexities surrounding this issue. Council members will be challenged to set differences aside to achieve a unified objective. Three ways to meet this challenge are a more transparent discussion of the City's Housing Needs Assessment Report, a better understanding of the causes of homelessness, and an ongoing commitment to respectful, solutions-focused discourse. I am writing to offer context to each and three associated recommendations on behalf of the Hub's Board of Directors.

### **Housing Needs Assessment Report**

The [City's Housing Needs Assessment Report \(p.33\)](#) was received only as a consent agenda item on May 27. Given the considerable public resources, research and consultation that informed its development, this report's findings warrant a robust public discussion between council and the administration. The report echoes the findings of its [Homelessness Task Force Final Report](#) and:

- identifies *"a shortage of affordable housing, supportive or transitional housing units, as well as emergency shelter spaces;"*

- emphasizes community demand to address awareness and the need for “*accessible or supportive housing options, especially for seniors, with strong support for emergency housing/homeless shelters;*”
- lists emergency and homeless shelters that offer temporary shelter and other support services among the top three housing options missing in our city, next to housing for seniors and those requiring assisted living supports;
- lists homelessness among the top five concerns renters face in Leduc; and most critically
- **states in several instances that homelessness is attributed to a lack of affordable housing options.**

**RECOMMENDATION 1: The Hub strongly encourages council members to question city administration about this report, its alignment with council’s strategic objectives, and how its findings are reflected in the City’s housing strategy and to continue to show leadership to address the gaps and needs the report identifies.**

### **Causes of Homelessness**

Comments offered during the June 24th council discussion suggest more can be done to improve understanding of the causes of homelessness. Assertions that homelessness has a causal relation to the provision of shelter services are not supported by fact.

According to the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#), the leading national, nonpartisan research and policy partnership based at York University and funded in part by the Government of Canada, homelessness is the result of the cumulative impact of several factors, including lack of adequate income, lack of access to affordable housing and health supports, and experiences of discrimination. The following are all established contributors to homelessness:

- Poverty can mean a person is one illness, accident or paycheque away from living on the streets.
- A critical shortage of housing that is affordable, safe and stable.
- Discrimination impedes access to employment, housing, justice and helpful services; racial and sexual minorities are at greater risk of such discrimination.
- System failures such as [difficult transitions from child welfare](#), [inadequate discharge planning for people leaving hospitals](#), [corrections and mental health and addictions facilities](#).
- [Traumatic events](#), personal crises, violence, [mental health](#) and addiction challenges, brain injury and physical health problems or disabilities.
- [Domestic and family violence](#) can force individuals and families to leave home suddenly without proper support in place. This is particularly an issue for youth and [women](#), especially those with children. Young people who are victims of sexual, physical or psychological abuse [often end up experiencing homelessness](#). As well, [seniors](#) who are experiencing abuse and neglect are increasingly at risk of homelessness.

It is important for those who have never experienced homelessness before to understand that every homeless individual faces a different and complex set of circumstances. The facts below can support the development of sensitive and compassionate public policy:

**Myth: People choose to be homeless.**

**Fact:** A [variety of different factors](#) contribute to homelessness. Often, people experience homelessness when all other options have been exhausted, and/or they are dealing with circumstances that make it difficult to maintain housing. [Some of the obstacles](#) include eviction, the [affordable housing](#) crisis, coping with [mental illnesses](#) or addictions, which makes it difficult to maintain independent housing.

**Myth: People experiencing homelessness are lazy.**

**Fact:** To survive, many people who experience homelessness are constantly in search for the necessities of life, such as food, shelter and a source of income. Due to the barriers that they face, many people experiencing homelessness do not have the option of being stagnant or lazy. For example, searching for a job becomes even more challenging without [access to a phone, computer, or fixed address regularly](#).

**Myth: All people who experience homelessness are addicts.**

**Fact:** Many people who experience homelessness do not struggle with substance abuse problems or addictions. Just like in the general population, [only a percentage of those who are experiencing homelessness](#) deal with addictions. People experiencing homelessness may deal with other issues related to their experiences of homelessness, including [trauma and mental illness](#).

**Myth: People experiencing homelessness should just find a job.**

**Fact:** There are already people experiencing homelessness who are employed; however, it is much more difficult to find a job while experiencing homelessness. A number of different challenges, such as: [lacking a permanent address, not having regular access to showers, barriers to transportation, and other difficulties like mental illness](#). Even when individuals experiencing homelessness find jobs, they are often part-time or minimum-wage positions. This work fails to adequately meet their needs, due to [expensive housing costs](#).

**Myth: There are plenty of adequate services and supports to help those experiencing homelessness.**

**Fact:** Many of the solutions and supports for homelessness have [focused on emergency services](#), such as shelters and food banks. For individuals who are trying to escape a cycle of poverty and homelessness, emergency services alone are not adequate. There is a need to focus on the larger systemic factors, including [the lack of affordable housing](#) and the [criminalization of homelessness](#) that prevent people from obtaining permanent and suitable shelter.

**Myth: Property values will go down if we let homeless shelters into our neighbourhoods.**

**Fact:** Downtown Toronto, Canada is a concentrated area with supports and services for people experiencing homelessness. Despite the large numbers of people who go into the downtown core to access these services, [housing prices remain high and there is no evidence to support this myth](#). This common misperception and attitude is referred to as [“Not in My Backyard” \(NIMBY\)](#) and can have detrimental effects for people who need to access services in different neighbourhoods.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: The Hub strongly encourages council members to learn, share, and consider published facts and research about homelessness as council pursues solutions to address this challenge in our community, and to support the development of local solutions.**

### **Respectful, solutions-focused discourse**

The citizens of Leduc are committed volunteers whose contributions are invaluable and essential contributors to our city's quality of life and reputation in the region. According to [provincial data](#), more than 50% of adult Albertans volunteer; among those, approximately 30% dedicate their time to serving non-profit associations in the human services sector.

As an active and long-standing member of Leduc's community of voluntary organizations, it is incumbent on our board to object when commentary at the council table is aimed at individuals rather than policy positions.

Leduc's volunteer community, and in the nonprofit industry that partner with the City of Leduc - expect council to participate in these debates with civility, decorum and respect for one another for stakeholders. Anything less diminishes the relationship between Leduc's volunteer and social services communities and civic leadership and is at cross-purposes with [Volunteer Leduc's 5-year strategy](#) to recruit volunteers.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: The Hub urges all council members to maintain collaborative, respectful, solutions-focused discourse on the issue of homelessness.**

Our board makes these recommendations in the spirit of transparency and collaboration. We look forward to your ongoing leadership on this issue and to continuing to develop supportive systems in our community for vulnerable members in need of shelter services. In the weeks to come, the Hub will actively monitor developments from the city administration for the winter emergency shelter initiative.

Sincerely,

Shannon Dalke, Board Chair Leduc HUB Association  
Melody Miners, Vice Chair Leduc HUB Association  
Lisa Gatzek, Treasurer Leduc HUB Association  
Lindsay Sellinger, Secretary Leduc HUB Association  
Sandrea Kerkhoff, Board Member Leduc HUB Association  
Joanne Koopmans, Board Member Leduc HUB Association  
Shauna Smith, Board Member Leduc HUB Association  
Nicole Weir, Board Member Leduc HUB Association

Cc:

Brandon Luntz, MLA Leduc-BeaumontBGC Leduc  
Derek Prohar, City Manager  
Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations  
Girl Guides Leduc  
Leduc Alliance Church  
Leduc Arts Foundry  
Leduc and District Food Bank  
Leduc HUB Association Board of Directors and Volunteers  
Leduc Masonic Lodge

Leduc Kinsmen Club  
Leduc Lions Club  
Leduc Regional Housing Foundation  
Nisku-Leduc Rotary