

Safe N' Sound Emergency Shelter Feasibility Study

July 3, 2024

Prepared by:



Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Summary of Demand for Emergency Housing.....	3
3.0	Program Design and Services	4
4.0	Location and Planning Policy Considerations	6
5.0	Facility	7
6.0	Construction Costs and Capital Funding Sources.....	9
7.0	Operating Costs and Funding Sources	10
8.0	Community Support and Potential Partnerships	11
9.0	Legal Status	11
10.0	Risks	11
11.0	Conclusion	13

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to confirm the feasibility of Safe N Sound establishing emergency housing in Owen Sound. The report is intended to:

1. Define the need for emergency housing in Owen Sound,
2. Determine the overall feasibility and likelihood of success in Safe N' Sound establishing emergency housing, and
3. Develop a business plan for achieving the desired project, if determined to be feasible.

Purpose and Target Group

Safe N Sound is interested in providing emergency housing for individuals experiencing homelessness in Grey County to meet their immediate, short-term accommodation needs. The shelter would offer a safe and secure environment, provide essential services such as food, clothing, hygiene facilities and a place to sleep, provide assistance to help transition individuals to more stable, long-term housing options, and offer support and connections to other services to help stabilize their housing.

2.0 Summary of Demand for Emergency Housing

Based on the needs assessment, it is estimated that approximately 55 people require emergency housing per night in Grey County, with adults being the largest group of individuals requiring emergency housing. The County has the capacity to provide emergency housing for approximately 35 people per night. As such, it currently relies on Safe N Sound to provide an overnight warming program from November 1 to March 31 to help meet the needs of those not accessing emergency housing. While the warming program protects individuals from immediate harm due to extreme weather, it is not a substitute for the year-round comprehensive support provided in emergency housing which aims to address both immediate and longer-term needs. As such there remains a need for emergency shelter for approximately 20 people per night.

When stakeholders were engaged in the summer of 2023, they consistently indicated while the County's motel program is an asset in the community, the motel program is not able to meet the current need in the community, both in terms of number rooms/beds, as well as support services for individuals with higher/more complex needs. People noted that there is no place for individuals without shelter to go past 3pm and no food security services on Sundays. Most stakeholders and almost all individuals with lived experience consulted believe that a formal shelter facility is needed to meet the need for emergency accommodation in Owen Sound.

The profile of people experiencing homelessness points to the need to consider the following when planning to address emergency shelter needs:

- There is a need for emergency shelter among youth, single adults, and families, but adults likely make up the largest group needing emergency shelter
- Low barrier shelter options are needed for individuals with mental health and substance use issues and others who currently face service restrictions and are without any shelter options



- Accessible shelter options are needed for people with physical limitations
- Considerations are required to support cultural safety among Indigenous people in need of shelter
- Specific considerations should be given support a safe, accessible and inclusive shelter environments for individuals who are not cis-gendered.

3.0 Program Design and Services

Operating Model

Based on engagement with stakeholders and best practices it is recommended that if a shelter were established, that it be a low-barrier housing focused shelter. This means that the shelter would minimize entry requirements, have minimal rules and regulations and be open to individuals with substance use issues, individuals with pets or partners, and focus on quickly moving individuals into permanent housing.

Service Model

Based on engagement with stakeholders and best practices, the following is recommended as a service model if Safe N Sound were to pursue an adult emergency shelter.

Access

- The potential shelter should be able to adequately serve people with high needs, without barriers.
- The potential shelter should use service restrictions sparingly, with as short a timeline as possible, with a focus on being rehabilitative and still assisting people in the process of being housed.

Intake and Assessment

- The potential shelter should be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide safe accommodation at any time.
- Safe N Sound should provide a non-judgmental, welcoming atmosphere where individuals feel respected and valued.
- The potential shelter should have structured practices to divert people away from shelter when it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- The intake procedures should seek to understand immediate needs and put the importance of achieving housing quickly front and centre.

Basic Needs Provision

- The potential shelter should provide clean, safe sleeping areas with adequate privacy. There should be separate areas for men, women, and non-binary individuals to ensure comfort and safety.
- The potential shelter should offer nutritious meals and snacks.
- The potential shelter should provide access to showers, toilets, laundry facilities, and personal hygiene supplies.

Health and Wellness Services

- The potential shelter should facilitate access to medical professionals to address immediate health concerns and longer-term conditions and facilitate access to mental health supports.
- The potential shelter should provide harm reduction services, including needle exchange programs, overdose prevention, and referrals to detox programs.

Case Management and Support Services

- A case manager should be assigned to each resident to develop a personalized plan addressing housing, employment, and other needs.
- The potential shelter should facilitate access to assistance with legal issues such as identification recovery, eviction prevention, and accessing benefits.
- Only programming that supports being housing-focused should be delivered within the shelter.

Housing Support and Transition Planning

- The shelter should take a housing-focused approach by prioritizing moving individuals into stable housing as quickly as possible.
- On every shift frontline shelter staff should engage shelter guests in moving closer to housing acquisition
- Individualized plans should be co-developed with longer-term shelter guests for how they will exit the shelter for housing

Safety and Security

- Staff should be trained in de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed care, and cultural competency as well as housing-focused services, harm reduction, motivational interviewing, and assertive engagement.
- The potential shelter should have security protocols to ensure the safety of both residents and staff, including controlled entry.



Data Collection and Evaluation

- The potential shelter should maintain detailed records of services provided and outcomes for residents.
- Safe N Sound should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the shelter's services through feedback from residents and staff and adjust programs as necessary.

Collaboration and Partnerships

- Safe N Sound should collaborate with local non-profit service providers and government programs to provide comprehensive services.

4.0 Location and Planning Policy Considerations

Through discussions with stakeholders, there was a general sense that the location of an emergency shelter should be in a central location where there is greater access to services such as meal programs, health supports, housing support, employment etc. For people currently experiencing homelessness, most felt that downtown was the best location.

Based on a review of Owen Sound's Zoning By-Law, a shelter may fall under the description of a Group Residence or a Crisis Residence, although it would not clearly fit into the latter category if the average length of stay is more than one month.

A Group Residence is defined as a group home in which greater than ten people are living under supervision. For reference, a group home is defined as:

'Group Home' means a single housekeeping unit in which three to ten people (excluding supervisory staff or the receiving family) live under supervision and who by reasons of their emotional, mental, social, or physical condition or legal status, require a group living arrangement for their well-being. The group home must be licensed or approved under an Act of the Parliament of Canada or the Province of Ontario.

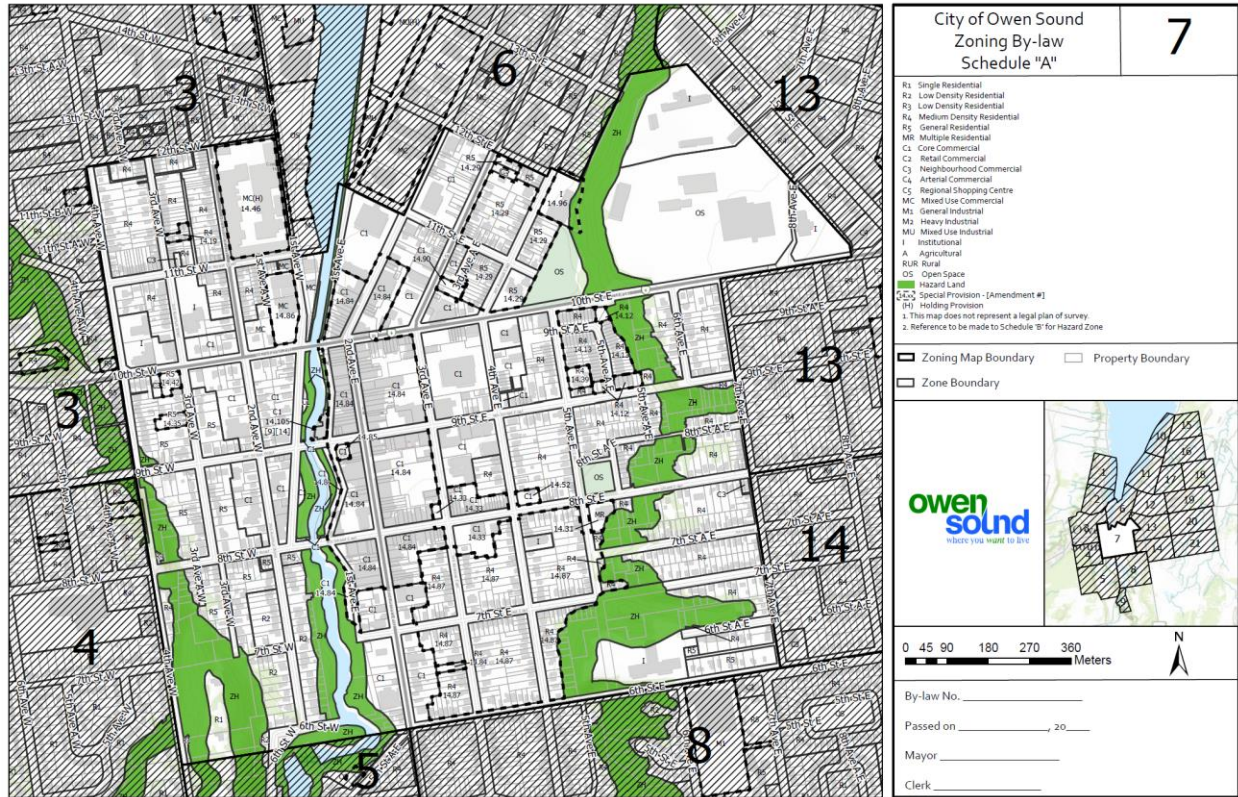
The potential emergency shelter would not be licensed as a group home by the federal or provincial government.

A 'Crisis Residence' means a lot and / or building or part thereof established as a single housekeeping unit used for the short term accommodation of three or more persons exclusive of staff living under supervision, who normally would have a permanent residence elsewhere, who by reasons of their emotional, mental, social, or physical condition or legal status require a temporary living arrangement for their well being. For purposes of this definition, short term shall mean averaging one month or less in time.

The Zoning By-law includes a land use category for Sensitive Land Use which means a lot is zoned for uses within the Residential, Institutional, or Open Space categories. A sensitive land use receptor is a building or structure that is being used for a dwelling, school, long-term care facility, hospital, day nursery, crisis residence, group home or group residence.



Group Homes are permitted as-of-right in any residential zone, but Crisis Residences are not. Both Group Homes and Crisis Residences are permitted for the most part in all commercial & mixed zones (C1, C2, C3, C4, MC), and in institutional zones (I). This generally includes the Downtown area, as well as some surrounding areas.



5.0 Facility

Number of Beds

Based on the consultants' experience analyzing daily shelter data, aiming for a 70% average occupancy rate provides sufficient capacity to meet the total need most nights considering fluctuations in demand. As such, based on an average need of approximately 20 beds, a potential shelter in Owen Sound should ideally have approximately 28 beds.

Space Requirements

Based on typical space standards and best practices for shelter design, a 28-bed shelter should be approximately 7,000 square feet. The following provides a breakdown of the estimated space required for each function within a potential emergency shelter. The space requirements account for the potential for the shelter to also accommodate a drop in program during the day.

Entry and Reception Area

- Vestibule: 100 sq. ft.
- Client Intake Area: 150 sq. ft.
- Seating Area: 200 sq. ft.
- Reception Office: 120 sq. ft.

Living and Activity Spaces

- Gathering Place/Day Activity Room: 400 sq. ft. (co-located with dining area)
- Dining Area: 400 sq. ft. (co-located with gathering place)
- Activity Space/Temporary Beds Spaces: 500 sq. ft. (includes computer area, multi-purpose room)

Professional and Administrative Spaces

- Space for Visiting Professionals: 120 sq. ft.
- Case Worker Offices (3): 3 x 120 sq. ft. = 360 sq. ft.
- Administrative Support Spaces (3): 3 x 100 sq. ft. = 300 sq. ft.
- Staff Washroom: 80 sq. ft.

Facilities and Utilities

- Commercial Kitchen: 400 sq. ft.
- Common Washrooms for Newly Arrived Clients: 200 sq. ft.
- Laundry Facilities: 150 sq. ft.
- Indoor Storage: 200 sq. ft.
- Janitorial Room: 100 sq. ft.
- Heat Treatment Room: 150 sq. ft.

Sleeping Accommodations

- Quadruple Sleeping Accommodation Rooms (6 rooms, 4 beds each): 6 x 250 sq. ft. = 1500 sq. ft. (including washrooms and showers)
- Single Rooms (2): 2 x 120 sq. ft. = 240 sq. ft.
- Additional Washrooms/Shower: 200 sq. ft.

Common Space

- Circulation, mechanical/electrical (20% of the above) = 1,200 sq. ft.



6.0 Construction Costs and Capital Funding Sources

Construction Costs

A preliminary estimate of the cost to construct a new purpose-built emergency shelter is outlined below. Costs may be lower if Safe N Sound were to purchase an existing building and re-purpose and renovate it into an emergency shelter.

Soft costs	\$500,000
Hard costs and land	\$2,350,000
Non-rebatable HST	<u>\$112,290</u>
Total costs	\$2,962,290

Potential Capital Funding Sources

Funding the construction of emergency housing typically requires a combination of funding sources. Some potential funding sources include:

- Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy – Construction, renovation, and purchase of shelter facilities are eligible for funding. Competition for the funding is high, and typically applicants are only able to secure small amounts of capital through this program.
- National Housing Co-Investment Fund – Offers financial contributions and low-cost loans for the development of affordable housing and emergency shelters, although the challenges associated with accessing this fund can be significant. The application process is complex and time-consuming. Organizations often need to secure outside expertise to assist with the application process. The fund has specific requirements related to affordability, energy efficiency, and accessibility which can be difficult to meet for emergency shelter projects. Competition for the fund is high and projects need to demonstrate significant community impact and alignment with the program’s strategic objectives. Applicants must secure other sources of funding to match the investment from the fund, and these funds need to be secured before receiving Co-Investment funding.
- Homelessness Prevention Program – Costs to construct, convert an existing property, or acquire a building to be converted for emergency shelter can be funded through this program. This is a provincial program which is delivered through municipal Service Managers, in this case County of Grey. The amount of funding available through this program is limited. Funding is often largely committed year-over-year for homelessness services, leaving limited funding available for capital costs.
- Foundations and Charitable organizations – Some foundations provide grants for capital projects such as Ontario Trillium Foundation and United Way.
- Fundraising – Shelters generally need to raise a portion of the funds for major capital projects through fundraising.



7.0 Operating Costs and Funding Sources

Operating Costs

The annual costs to operate a 28-bed shelter on a 24/7 basis are estimated to be approximately \$840,000 per year.

Potential Operating Funding Sources

For the 2023/2024 fiscal year, Safe N Sound had income of \$521,000, including \$150,000 from the County of Grey for the winter overnight program, \$100,000 from the County of Grey through the Homelessness Prevention Program and \$24,000 from the County of Grey Social Services to help cover the costs of mortgage payments.

Most of the expenses currently born by the drop-in centre could be shared with the emergency shelter if drop-in services were delivered in a shared space. This includes:

- Legal and Professional Fees – \$5,000
- Facilities and equipment expenses – \$73,000
- Programs expenses – including food – \$17,000
- Administration costs – \$33,000
- Salary and wages – \$434,000.

The organization would need to raise approximately \$319,000 more a year to cover the costs of operating a shelter, assuming the shelter and drop-in centre are co-located.

Potential sources of funds include:

- Homelessness Prevention Program and Municipal Funding – There may be potential for Safe N Sound to access additional Homelessness Prevention Program funding or municipal social services funding through the County of Grey. However, at this time there is no indication that the County would be willing to provide additional funding to Safe N Sound to operate a shelter.
- Reaching Home – Essential services related to the provision of emergency shelter beds are eligible for funding. However, services that prevent or reduce homelessness are typically prioritized for funding and projects selected for funding must not create a dependence on, or expectation for ongoing funding.
- United Way – Local United Way chapters often fund emergency shelter operations as part of their community impact programs.
- Ontario Trillium Foundation – OTF provides grants to support community-based non-profits, including those aimed at addressing homelessness. These grants are initiative based, rather than ongoing funding.
- Other grants and foundations – Other foundations often have grants that can be accessed to support shelter services.

- Fundraising – Most emergency shelters rely on fundraising for a portion of their revenues.

8.0 Community Support and Potential Partnerships

Overall, local community organizations were supportive of a shelter in Owen Sound. Several stakeholders identified opportunities to support emergency accommodation services:

- The SOS team: medical care, peer support, mental health and addiction support, harm reduction education, housing system navigation
- Paramedic Services, Grey County: outreach at shelter
- CMHA: peer support program
- Salvation Army: clothing, food, spiritual support.

Other opportunities which could be pursued, might include:

- United Way: potential funding, communications
- Grey Bruce Public Health (Harm Reduction, Sexual Health Program): safe opioid supply, health service navigation
- OSHaRE: meals
- M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre: cultural supports.

9.0 Legal Status

Safe N Sound is a registered non profit, with charitable status, and its letters patent permit the organization to operate as an emergency shelter.

10.0 Risks

Establishing and operating an emergency shelter involves several risks, with financial risks being the most significant for Safe N Sound:

- Insufficient Financial Resources for Capital Costs – Establishing an emergency shelter requires significant upfront capital for acquiring or leasing space, possibly renovations, and purchasing necessary equipment and furnishings. There might be inadequate funding from government, other grants, and donations to cover these initial costs, which could hinder the feasibility of the establishment of an emergency shelter or compromise the quality of the facility if one were established.
- Ongoing Expenses – Emergency shelters incur significant operational costs, particularly in staff wages and salaries due to the 24 hour nature of the service. Sustaining these expenses requires reliable and consistent funding streams. However, Safe N Sound would likely need to have significant reliance on uncertain funding sources, such as donations or short-term grants, which

can lead to financial instability. Any shortfall in expected funds could jeopardize the shelter's operations. At this time there is no indication that the County would be willing to increase the funding it provides to Safe N Sound to operate a shelter or act as a financial backstop so that a shelter could maintain its operations even during periods of funding shortfall. It should also be noted that not co-locating the drop-in services and emergency shelter would be a significant risk in ensuring sufficient operating revenues.

Other operational risks include:

- Staffing – An emergency shelter may face challenges recruiting and retaining qualified staff. However, Safe N Sound has experience providing overnight services, which lends capacity to delivering emergency shelter services.
- Safety and security – Ensuring the safety of both service users and staff can be challenging. Balancing these needs requires staff well-trained in de-escalation techniques, trauma-informed care, and cultural competency, clear and consistent policies and communication, and thoughtful use of surveillance cameras. Safety measures and policies should be regularly reviewed and adapted based on feedback from staff and service users, as well as incident reviews.
- Accessibility issues due to service restriction policies – If service restriction policies limit access to an emergency shelter, it would be unable to fulfill its objectives and would necessitate additional redundant services.
- Approach does not meet the needs of diverse subpopulations – A generalized approach may not meet the specific needs of diverse subpopulations, such as youth, women, Indigenous peoples or some individuals with mental health or substance use challenges. Consideration of the needs of diverse subpopulations that are part of the target population for an emergency shelter would be required.
- Dependence and prolonged experience of homelessness – If the emergency shelter does not remain steadfast in its housing focus there is a risk service users could become dependent on the shelter and a risk that an emergency shelter would not contribute to reducing the length of time someone spends experiencing homelessness. An emergency shelter is not a solution to homelessness in and of itself, it is a means of providing access to services and supports to meet immediate basic needs and assist with re-housing.

Community-related risks include:

- Community resistance – Local residents and business may oppose the establishment of an emergency shelter in their area. If there is a negative perception of the shelter it can affect the shelter's reputation and reduce community support and donations.
- Lack of support from County for establishment of shelter – If Safe N Sound does not have the support of the County, which is designated by the province of Ontario as the service manager responsible for homelessness system planning, it would face several significant risks in operating an emergency shelter, including financial risks, and potential challenges coordinating with other services. Safe N Sound may also reduce its ability to influence policy and design-making related to homelessness if it is seen as engaging in activities which do not align with the County's strategies for addressing homelessness. At this time, Safe N Sound has not received indication from the County that it would be supportive of it establishing an emergency shelter.

11.0 Conclusion

The feasibility study confirms that there is a need for emergency housing in Owen Sound, with approximately 20 individuals left without adequate shelter each night. The current measures, including the winter warming program and motel accommodations, are insufficient to meet this demand, especially for individuals with complex needs.

Despite this need, significant financial risks and the lack of support/endorsement from the County present substantial challenges for Safe N Sound. While potential funding sources for both capital and operating costs have been identified, obtaining sufficient financial resources remains highly challenging. There is a high risk that the available capital funding from government grants, foundations, and donations will be inadequate. Likewise, covering the operating costs of an emergency shelter requires reliable and consistent funding streams. However, current available funding sources are uncertain and inconsistent, which may lead to financial instability. The ability to secure sufficient and consistent funding for both capital and operational expenses is critical and will likely determine the overall success and sustainability of the shelter.

