

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
October 8, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Community Investment Fund – Activity Update and 2021 Funding Recommendations

1. Recommendations

1. Council approve the projects and initiatives listed in Attachment 1 for funding from the Community Investment Fund in 2021, subject to approval of the 2021 budget.
2. In 2021, Council authorize Commissioner of Community and Health Services to:
 - a) Adjust project-level funding, as required, pending budget approval and finalization of service agreements with community agencies.
 - b) Direct external funding, where provided and appropriate, through the Community Investment Fund to support initiatives that address social services needs, including to respond to COVID-19.
 - c) Adjust, re-allocate, cancel, or provide new Community Investment Funding towards projects and initiatives to maximize funding for priority social service initiatives, as required.
 - d) Negotiate, enter into and execute service agreements with community agencies to deliver projects and initiatives under the Community Investment Fund.

2. Summary

This report seeks Council approval for the projects and initiatives listed in Attachment 1 to be funded in 2021 from the Community Investment Fund. Recommendations regarding Community Investment funding are brought forward in the fall to give agencies certainty and sufficient time needed to facilitate project and program planning and avoid service interruption. All recommendations are subject to budget approval. This report also provides an update on programs and initiatives achieved in 2019 and status of initiatives funded in 2020, including the program's role in the Region's COVID-19 social services response. It also updates Council on the comprehensive review of the Community Investment Fund program.

Key Points:

- The Community Investment Fund is an important component of York Region’s human services delivery system and continues to play a critical role in the Region’s social services response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Through the program, the Region targets gaps in community needs and invests in preventative, early-intervention initiatives that improve the overall health of residents living with low to moderate income, and divert vulnerable populations from needing to access more costly services like social assistance and homelessness programs
- For 2021, there are 42 community projects and related initiatives, and funding of up to \$5,784,074 recommended for approval
- While new temporary federal and provincial support programs are helping communities and households address needs as a result of COVID-19, recommended Community Investment funding in 2021 will help stabilize the not-for-profit sector and ensure continued support for local initiatives that vulnerable residents rely on, particularly during the pandemic and as temporary supports end
- Recommended projects and initiatives complement Regional services in key priority areas, including housing and homelessness, food security, and mental health
- Projects recommended for funding in 2021 were previously approved by Council in [October 2019](#)
- A review of the Community Investment Fund is underway to identify opportunities to strengthen the program to achieve the Region’s human services priorities, including those emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Proposed changes will be brought forward to Council in 2021, for implementation starting in 2022

3. Background

Community Investment Fund leverages local initiatives to address service gaps, complement Regional services, and advance Council priorities

The Region has many mandates and programs for the delivery of human services, but is only one player in a broader system. Given the complexity of social services issues, partnerships with other human services providers are critical for the Region to achieve its strategic priority of community health, safety and well-being.

The Community Investment Fund invests in local initiatives delivered by not-for-profit community agencies. These initiatives target gaps in social services, address needs specific to York Region residents living with low and moderate income, complement or enhance other Regional programs, and deliver on policy priorities set by Regional Council.

Through partnership with the local not-for-profit sector, the Region benefits from community agencies' familiarity with local needs, expertise supporting specific populations, and existing service infrastructure.

Funded projects support achievement in the following priority areas (called Community Result Areas):

- Community Health: residents are healthier and able to make healthy choices
- Economic Independence: residents have and keep jobs matching their skills and have financial stability
- Housing Stability: residents can live in affordable, adequate and suitable housing
- Social Inclusion: residents are connected and able to engage in their communities

Tens of thousands of residents living with low to moderate income receive services through Community Investment Funded projects every year

The goals of the Community Investment Fund align with the Region's strategic priority of supporting community health, safety and well-being. By supporting residents to be healthier, more economically stable, housing secure, and more connected to their communities, funded projects help the Region move towards its Vision 2051 goal of being a place that fosters healthy living and is safe, accessible, inclusive and supportive.

In 2019, over 66,000 residents (representing approximately 15% of York Region's total population of residents living with low and moderate income) received services through Community Investment funded projects, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of 2019 Activity by Community Result Area

Community Result	Funding (\$)	Number of Projects	Number of Residents Served
Community Health	543,222	6	51,389
Economic Independence	1,736,761	12	1,584
Housing Stability	1,456,825	7	6,107
Social Inclusion	1,717,096	18	7,059
Total	5,453,904	43	66,139

The Community Investment Fund primarily targets projects that provide preventative and early intervention services. These services help divert vulnerable residents from accessing more costly services such as Ontario Works and Emergency Housing.

Projects funded under the Community Investment Fund are delivered through a variety of models, depending on the target population and program objectives. These differences in service delivery affect the funding required to successfully run projects, as well as the number of residents that initiatives are able to serve. For example, nutrition programs (under Community Health) are able to provide healthy but relatively low-cost breakfasts and snacks to thousands of school-aged children, while intensive, individualized case management services focused on helping clients find and keep employment or housing (programs under Economic Independence or Housing Stability) are more costly and delivered in smaller groups or on one-on-one basis. More information on the activity of projects and initiatives funded in 2019 is included in Attachment 2.

For 2020, Council approved Community Investment funding for 45 projects through 38 local not-for-profit agencies

In [October 2019](#), Council approved funding for 38 not-for-profit agencies to deliver 45 projects under the Community Investment Fund in 2020. As in previous years, the projects and initiatives funded in 2020 are diverse, ranging from mental health and addiction supports for social housing residents delivered by the Canadian Mental Health Association, to collection and distribution of food donations by the Food Bank of York Region, to emergency shelter services delivered by Inn from the Cold and Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold.

The pandemic disrupted projects and initiatives delivered by Community Investment funded agencies. Agencies were unable to deliver services in-person, key project partners (such as school boards and long-term care homes) ceased or scaled-back operations and access, staff had to work from home, and volunteer capacity became increasingly limited. Agencies that delivered initiatives in-person had to modify services and put in place measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. An increase in pre-existing community needs also emerged, particularly in the areas of food security, emergency shelter, mental health, and seniors services that required immediate attention.

Regional staff worked with agencies to adjust projects to safely continue delivery of services and meet emerging needs. Of the 45 projects approved for 2020, 42 remain successfully supported to continue operations, including through virtual and remote delivery. Three projects were cancelled due to challenges with program delivery amid the pandemic, including in-person programming at a long-term care home and in a school. In addition, any available program funding not needed by agencies due to changes in project delivery (such as cost savings resulting from the change from in-person to remote services delivery) was redirected to more critical needs, including distributing food donations to those in need.

More details on how the Region is supporting Community Investment funded agencies adapt and respond to COVID-19 needs can be found in staff updates on the Region's social services response to the pandemic. Staff will continue to monitor pandemic impacts and work with agencies to identify opportunities to further adjust projects.

4. Analysis

To focus on the pandemic response, the Community Investment Fund Call for Proposals process was not held and, instead, staff focused on supporting agencies adjust program delivery and meet community needs

In a typical year, projects for possible funding under the Community Investment Fund are identified through a Call for Proposals process. Proposals from community agencies are assessed based on a number of factors, such as alignment with an identified community result, demonstration of service need, and strength of project plans. These processes, which typically occur in the spring, were interrupted this year by the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, staff focused their efforts on supporting agencies adapt to and respond to the pandemic.

Recommended projects for funding in 2021 continue to support vulnerable residents and respond to COVID-19 social service needs

For 2021, 42 community projects and continued funding estimated at approximately \$5.3 million are recommended for approval (see Attachment 1 for details). These projects were previously approved by Council in [October 2019](#) and, as described above, successfully adjusted program delivery amid the pandemic. These projects are recommended for funding at their 2020 budget amounts plus an inflationary increase of 2.0%, subject to 2021 budget approval and negotiations and execution of service agreements with agencies. As part of contract discussions, additional funding may be allocated to agencies to provide transit fare assistance for eligible clients.

Continued funding for these projects will help stabilize the human services system by maintaining supports for local programs and community initiatives that vulnerable residents in the Region rely on, especially during this pandemic. In [April 2020](#), it was reported to Council that the federal and provincial governments had announced temporary supports to help people during these unprecedented times, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and strengthened protections for tenants. While these supports are helping communities and households address needs as a result of COVID-19, social service needs continue to persist and are expected to intensify, particularly as temporary supports end. The ability of community agencies to respond and remain resilient during the pandemic is also compromised as a result of revenue loss due to diminished donations and significantly constrained fundraising opportunities. These needs are common pressures expressed by social service providers and community agencies, and through collaborative tables such as the [COVID-19 Community Coordination Initiative](#) the Region co-hosts with United Way Greater Toronto .

Regional staff will continue to work with agencies and support them to ensure projects can be safely and effectively delivered in 2021. With Council approval of these projects, service level agreements and funding requirements will be finalized over the coming months.

Recommended funding for 2021 includes supports for the Region's two seasonal shelters to safely and effectively operate during the pandemic

Ensuring that those experiencing homelessness receive critical, wrap-around supports has been highlighted as a crucial need during this pandemic. In spring 2020, operations at the two seasonal shelters funded by the Community Investment Fund, Inn from the Cold and Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold, were temporarily extended as part of a multi-layered COVID-19 homelessness response strategy. The strategy included opening a self-isolation shelter at Leeder Place in East Gwillimbury and a transitional shelter at The Kingbridge Centre (Kingbridge) in King Township.

As winter 2020-21 approaches, Regional staff are working with Inn from the Cold and Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold so they can safely resume provision of cold weather emergency shelter services this fall. Community Investment funding to support seasonal shelter operations has been notionally provisioned, and will be refined when operational plans that incorporate physical distancing and other public health measures, and alignment with the COVID-19 transitional shelter (Kingbridge), are finalized.

The 2021 Community Investment Fund program includes flexibility to direct and flow unallocated internal and external funding through the program, for eligible priority social service projects and initiatives

This approach aligns with and builds on the flexibility Council gave in [April 2020](#) to allow for timely and nimble responses to community needs resulting from COVID-19 in 2020. With this flexibility, the Region has been able to quickly direct funding to where it is needed, for example redirecting unallocated Community Investment funding to The Food Bank of York Region and the York Region Food Network to increase food access for vulnerable residents at the height of the pandemic. This approach also enabled external funding, from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Medical Association, to be flowed to Human Endeavour to implement the Connecting Vulnerable Seniors to Technology Project.

To support this flexibility and responsiveness, unallocated program funding of just over \$510,000 is included in the recommendations for 2021, as outlined in Attachment 1. With Council's approval of the recommendations in this report, the Commissioner of Community and Health Services would be authorized to direct available funding, including those from external sources, towards projects and initiatives that respond to social services needs as they arise. Depending on available funds, Community Investment funding will also be used to support capacity building in the not-for-profit sector. The Region recently supported training for compassion fatigue and grant-writing workshops that agencies found very helpful.

This approach will help the Region continue to nimbly and effectively respond to new and emerging community needs and will be an important mechanism to help navigate the uncertainty associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This flexibility will also help the Region leverage funding opportunities as they emerge and, in a timely way, direct funding to priority needs. Approaches to address needs will be considered in consultation with key stakeholders, including through the COVID-19 Community Coordination Initiative.

Going forward, staff will continue to review and bring forward recommendations to evolve and optimize the Region's approach to community investments

Prior to COVID-19 staff began a review of the Community Investment Fund as the program had not been comprehensively reviewed and updated since 2013. The Review was planned to determine if changes are needed to ensure the program can continue to support achievement of the Region's strategic human service priorities. This includes addressing short-term critical needs (such as those arising throughout this pandemic), as well as delivering on longer-term policy objectives, including those that will be identified through Region's [Community Safety and Well-being Plan](#) in development.

The review was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff have restarted the program review process with a renewed momentum, leveraging learnings from the COVID-19 Community Coordination Initiative and other models put in place to help with the pandemic response. The review of the Community Investment Fund is examining all aspects of the program including:

- Goals, purpose and investment priorities
- How services are procured, delivered and administered
- The Region's role and approach to community development

Key stakeholders and partners, including community agencies and local municipalities, will be engaged as part of the review process.

Specific recommendations will become known through the review process. However, staff are envisioning a future state for the program that:

- Addresses short-term gaps, but also is also aligned to help deliver on longer-term Regional priorities
- Has flexibility and nimbleness to direct investments, where and when they are needed
- Is adaptable to sectoral change and can leverage emerging opportunities
- Streamlines administrative processes for program efficiencies
- Continues program delivery in an accountable, transparent and responsive manner

A report on the results of the review and recommendations will be brought forward for Council consideration in 2021, for implementation starting in 2022.

5. Financial

The Community Investment Fund is managed within the budget of the Community and Health Services Department and is 100% tax levy funded. In 2020 the approved budget for the Community Investment Fund is \$5,784,074. The recommended 2021 projects and initiatives outlined in Attachment 1 total \$5,784,074.

Every year, Community Investment funding recommendations are brought forward to Council for approval in advance of their operational year and before Council approval of that year's Regional budget. This is done to give agencies certainty and sufficient time to facilitate project and program planning and to avoid service interruption. Community agencies understand that funding is subject to Council approval.

In 2021, approval of the Regional budget is scheduled to occur in March 2021. Staff will work with agencies to review spending plans and manage project activities until the Regional budget is passed. To support operations, options include providing interim appropriations to agencies before the 2021 Regional budget is approved by Council.

As the Region continues its social service response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be a need to consider additional measures, including enhancements to the Community Investment Fund to help agencies respond to known and emerging social service needs. Any additional funding needs will be considered as part of the 2021 budget process.

6. Local Impact

Recommended projects under the Community Investment Fund provide services that respond to human services needs for residents living with low and moderate income in all nine local municipalities. Local municipalities, community agencies throughout York Region, and other partners will be engaged through the review of the Community Investment Fund program to provide advice and guidance on local human services needs to inform the program's future state.

7. Conclusion

The Community Investment Fund promotes community health, safety and well-being by supporting local projects and initiatives that respond to community needs and fill service gaps, including those resulting from and exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 42 community projects and funding for initiatives to support York Region's not-for-profit community agency sector in 2021, as detailed in Attachment 1, is recommended for Council approval, subject to approval of the 2021 budget.

Opportunities to refine and strengthen the Region's approach to, and use of, community investments will be identified through program review. A report on the results of the review and any recommendations will be brought forward for Council's consideration and approval.

For more information on this report, please contact Joseph Silva, Director, Strategies and Partnerships Branch at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77201. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Katherine Chislett**
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

September 17, 2020
Attachments (2)
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