

Solution: Tri-City Nanohood

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PROBLEM

The Region of Waterloo has a housing shortage, particularly with regards to transitional housing for homeless persons. In November of 2021, the Region undertook a "point in time" count of the homeless. The total number was 1085, of those:

- 38% were Living Rough (To be homeless and thus be forced to **live** and sleep outside)
- 31% were Hidden Homeless-are people who access accommodation but have no immediate prospect of permanent or stable housing
- 17% Living in shelters
- 8% transitional housing

There are currently limited options for homeless persons to rebuild by being able to have safe, sustainable and affordable housing

Problem Drivers

The lack of housing options for homeless persons is driven by:

- The high cost of rentals
 - Low-income persons spend a greater proportion of their income on housing. Therefore, any unexpected costs can result in missing rent payments and being evicted
- Rental units being sold by landlords to capitalize on the real estate market. This in turn decreases the number of available rental units and allows landlords to increase rents
- Low-interest rates
- Political environment
 - There is a lot of support and focus for addressing the hot housing market, but addressing homelessness does not garner political support or votes
- NIMBYISM (Not in My Backyard - a characterization of opposition by residents to proposed developments in their local area, as well as support for strict land use regulation
- The position that homelessness should be solved, but not if the solution requires it to be in my neighbourhood.

Actors

There are many people involved in the homeless problem who could have an influence and make changes:

- Landlords -they could make their units more affordable
- Region of Waterloo Representatives -they determine zoning by-laws and also the availability of land for projects for transitional housing
- Developers -the lack of commitment to affordable units in new subdivisions. They could also donate land for an affordable housing project
- Corporate involvement. Local businesses may wish to get involved but lack the education and knowledge of available options, such as corporate sponsorship of housing
- Private involvement. Citizens may be seeking a means of helping, but do not know how they can make an impact

- Neighbours -The stigma and NIMBYISM attached to homelessness make it difficult to find a location where this vulnerable population can be housed

Barriers to Solving the Problem

1. Scarcity of Land for Housing projects
 - a. The cost of land is high, and competition is fierce
 - b. Many areas are restricted by long-established zoning rules
 - c. Available land is often not central or accessible by public transit (a necessity for many homeless)
2. Those in need are characterized by society:
 - a. They are negatively judged
 - b. People either feel pity on them or consider them weak and incapable of changing
 - c. There is a preconceived notion that everyone in this population is criminal, an addict or has a mental illness
 - d. This population does not get equal opportunity to prove their self-worth
3. NIMBYISM
 - a. The preconceived notion that transitional housing for homeless will drive down neighbourhood housing values
 - b. Concerns over safety, perceived criminal activity and general disruptiveness to the neighbourhood
4. Lack of a central organizer
 - a. In other locales, tiny home communities have had a defined sponsor/organization championing the cause(e.g Homes for Heroes). No such equivalent exists in Waterloo Region

Places to Intervene

The complexity of homelessness means that there are many opportunities to provide solutions, many of them upstream. These include, but are not limited to:

- Rent subsidies for low-income earners
- By-law changes to ensure tiny homes are included in development projects
- Legal requirements for developers to include affordable housing in new subdivisions
- Mental health supports for children
- Provide a resource for those who are about to lose their residence (e.g. help with budgeting, tenant advocacy)
- Financial incentives for landlords to provide affordable units
- Build another A Better Tent City
- Provide a Liveable Income to all people who can work
- Tax incentives for corporate involvement
- Increase Ontario Disability Support Payments (ODSP) to allow for appropriate accommodation

THE SOLUTION

We propose building a tiny home/shipping container community, a nanhood, that provides transitional housing and complete support (e.g. health/mental health supports, education and employment upgrade/supports) for those suffering from homelessness in Waterloo Region. Our nanhood will help people like Les Home.

Persona - Meet Les Home

Les lost his job when COVID struck. Due to his behaviour and onset of depression, he could not cope and his wife left him. She took their kids with her. Without a job, he could not afford rent so he entered the ranks of the hidden homeless- camping on friends' couches until he was no longer welcome. He spent the winter living rough throughout the Region, making regular employment nearly impossible. He is currently living in an unsanctioned encampment. He has no home, he has no job prospects, and he has no hope. Unfortunately, there are many individuals like Les in the Region. We need to find solutions for citizens like Les.

Solution Details

We propose to build a TriCity Nanohood of 20-30 tiny homes/shipping container residences. To create the TriCity Nanohood, we will need:

1. Land -it can be sourced from Community partners, repurpose Region lands and/or receive a philanthropic donation
 - The ideal location for our nanohood would be in a location where public transit is easily accessible, and where it becomes part of a thriving neighbourhood, not just an outlier
2. To model it on the success of Homes for Heroes:
 - An intake process to ensure commitment to the values of the community and to develop the support plan for a successful transition out
 - Residents pay rent and this money supports the maintenance of the community
 - Full-time support staff to provide mental health, educational upgrading and employment support, for example, to residents
 - Community buildings could include, for example, a library, sports fields and/or an ice rink. These buildings would be available to be used by everyone in the Region, not just the nanohood residents
3. Financial support -through funding from all 3 levels of government, non-profit/charitable organizations, corporate, and private donations.

In addition, we propose a change to include affordable housing solutions and the Nanohood model in school curriculums, to motivate students to volunteer by helping in the Nanohood, thereby reducing stigma and NIMBYISM upstream.

Intended Outcomes

- Successful reintegration of homeless persons into society, including paid employment and appropriate health supports
- A more efficient, cost-effective solution for providing wrap-around services to those in need due to the community nature of the project (e.g. everyone is together and not scattered throughout a large geographic area)
- Reducing the number of homeless persons in Waterloo Region
- A process for early intervention to decrease the instances of chronic homelessness in the Region
- A model that can be recreated and scaled to other parts of the region, and/or across the province/country

Potential Unintended Consequences

1. The failure of the TriCity Nanhood to transition people back into society could reinforce social stigmas and NIMBYISM, therefore impacting other projects to support homelessness/affordable housing.
2. The TriCity Nanhood model could be altered to become a permanent model of affordable housing, either for the general public, and/or focusing on disadvantaged groups like indigenous persons, those with disabilities and women escaping abuse,
3. By-law changes could make individual tiny homes on personal properties more viable, freeing up affordable housing elsewhere
4. Nanhoods could provide additional affordable housing solutions, easing the demand for housing, lowering the market values
5. Nanhoods focusing on other communities (those with physical disabilities), could gain traction

Financial Implications

The cost of a homeless person in the region is estimated at \$55,000 per year. Included in this cost are emergency hospital stays, legal services, emergency shelters and meal supports. This amount does not include longer-term addiction and mental health services.

A Tiny Home/Shipping Container Residence costs approximately \$190 CAD/square foot. Therefore, the 295 square foot model used by Homes for Heroes would cost approximately \$56,000 to build. Therefore, the initial cost to build 20 tiny homes would be approximately \$1.28 million. 20 people could be provided with a home for the cost of 1 single family home in today's market.

This is a one-time investment, with ongoing maintenance and upkeep costs supported by residents paying rent and other funding sources. At \$700 rent per month, the TriCity Nanhood would have \$168,000 in stable income.

The on-site, full-time support worker wages([Social Worker in Ontario | Wages - Job Bank](#)) would range between \$27.74 - \$47.80/hour (\$57,800 - \$99,400 per annum).

Who We Spoke To

A Better Tent City

- Nadine Green, Founder and onsite support
- Jeff Willmer, Financial and Logistics

Indwell

- Mark Wilcock, Community Engagement Coordinator, Waterloo Region

Homes for Heroes

- David Howard, President & CEO Homes For Heroes Foundation

Waterloo Region Police Services

- Wesley Errey, Constable, Community Engagement and Wellbeing Branch
- J.P. MacSween, Sergeant, Community Engagement Unit

Leslie Crompton, Social Development, Region of Waterloo

Suggested Partners

- Homes for Heroes
 - They offered to be a contact and share their expertise. If we could leverage their knowledge and proven success, it would help the project
- Major local private employer for corporate sponsorship
- Every person who can help, either by money, effort, or acceptance (not being opposed to having the Nanohood in their neighbourhood).

Lessons Learned

1. Homelessness is a complex problem and requires solutions that meet the various needs of that population.
2. There is a wealth of knowledge and examples of successful projects that can be used in Waterloo Region (e.g. A Better Tent City, Homes for Heroes).

Other Resources

- [How Much Does It Cost To Build A Tiny House? – Forbes Advisor](#)
- [Homes For Heroes | \(homesforheroesfoundation.ca\)](http://homesforheroesfoundation.ca)
- <https://indwell.ca/>
- Region of Waterloo completes engagement process to identify and support those experiencing homelessness - [Region of Waterloo](#)