



Community Services

Service Delivery Promise

The Community Services Division includes the delivery of the Residential Services Homes Program and the oversight of County Homelessness Programs.

The Residential Services Homes Program provides financial assistance to County residents who require residential care and assistance with daily living activities. This Program is supported by the Province through the Human and Health Services Department of the City of Windsor, the provincially designated Regional Service Manager for the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP). This Program is a discretionary service for the County.

Effective April 1, 2024, the County gained oversight of the County Homelessness Programs which include the Essex County Homelessness Hub, the County Emergency Shelter Program, and the County Outreach Worker. The County Homelessness Programs are funded through the HPP funding provided by the Province to support the entire Essex/Windsor Region.

Level of Service Statement

The Residential Services Homes Program is provided through purchase of service agreements with nine (9) rest and retirement homes throughout the County to subsidize 226 beds.

Quality is measured through the completion of yearly inspections by County staff who assess the homes' compliance with the Residential Services Homes Standards. Staff visit the homes regularly on a scheduled and unscheduled basis to monitor compliance and quality of care.

Opportunities, Challenges and Risks for 2026

Inflation rates and cost of living increases have had an ongoing and significant impact on Residential Services Homes Providers. In addition, providers have indicated that the minimum wage increases, as well as pay increases necessary to remain competitive and retain healthcare staff have resulted in significant financial pressures.

Further, some Residential Services Homes Providers have indicated having great difficulty maintaining their financial viability in the absence of a funding increase. Other providers, those who are designated Registered Retirement Homes, have decreased the number of subsidized beds in their homes to be able to increase their private pay beds in order to be financially viable.

The majority of the Residential Services Homes Providers are at full capacity and unable to absorb additional subsidies. This poses a significant risk: if any of the homes need to cease their operations, there are few options to relocate subsidized residents. County Administration continues to proactively seek new opportunities with existing providers and new potential partners and will report back to Council with any related developments.

As outlined above, effective April 1, 2024, the County began administering the County Homelessness Programs - more specifically, the County Emergency Shelter Program, the County Outreach Worker, and the Essex County Homelessness Hub. These County Homelessness Programs are delivered by Family Services Windsor-Essex through a funding agreement with the County, but with the County continuing to provide oversight.

There continues to be an increase in visits to the Essex County Homelessness Hub (ECH2) and it is estimated that the total number of visits to ECH2 for 2025 will see an almost 60% increase. In addition, the County is now experiencing several homeless encampments across the region and, through the County's Outreach Team, is working diligently to engage with individuals living in encampments and provide them with multiple services to assist them in obtaining safe and affordable housing. Further, due to the lack of emergency housing options regionally, the ECH2 expanded its hours to include an Overnight Program to provide a safe environment for unhoused individuals in the County. Although only operational since July 21st, 2025, the Overnight Program is receiving an average of eighteen (18) visits per night, an increase of 45% from when ECH2 operated an overnight warming center during the winter months for the past two years.

With homelessness needs rising regionally, there is insufficient funding available to deliver these programs and meet service demands. County Administration continues to advocate for the City of Windsor, as the Regional Consolidated Service Manager, to provide more of the provincial and federal funding in its

control to the County, while also advocating to upper levels of government to provide additional funding to meet the needs of the residents of the County.

In 2025, the County continued to be a partner in the design and development of the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy. The consultants completed a presentation to County Council in September 2025 outlining the strategy and providing recommended actions to begin the implementation. Administration intends to report to Council during 2026 on recommended action items to advance the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

The Bridge (Bridges of Erie Shores) has begun the expansion of their tiny house community which includes 38 homes over the next year. During the 2024 budget deliberations, County Council approved a \$2 million capital investment to be drawn from the Social Housing Capital Renewal reserve. This funding was instrumental in The Bridge receiving additional funding from upper levels of government. This previously approved recommendation allowed County Council to make a capital investment to support a much-needed housing project and unlocked further funding to support the project.

Proposed 2026 Budget Plan

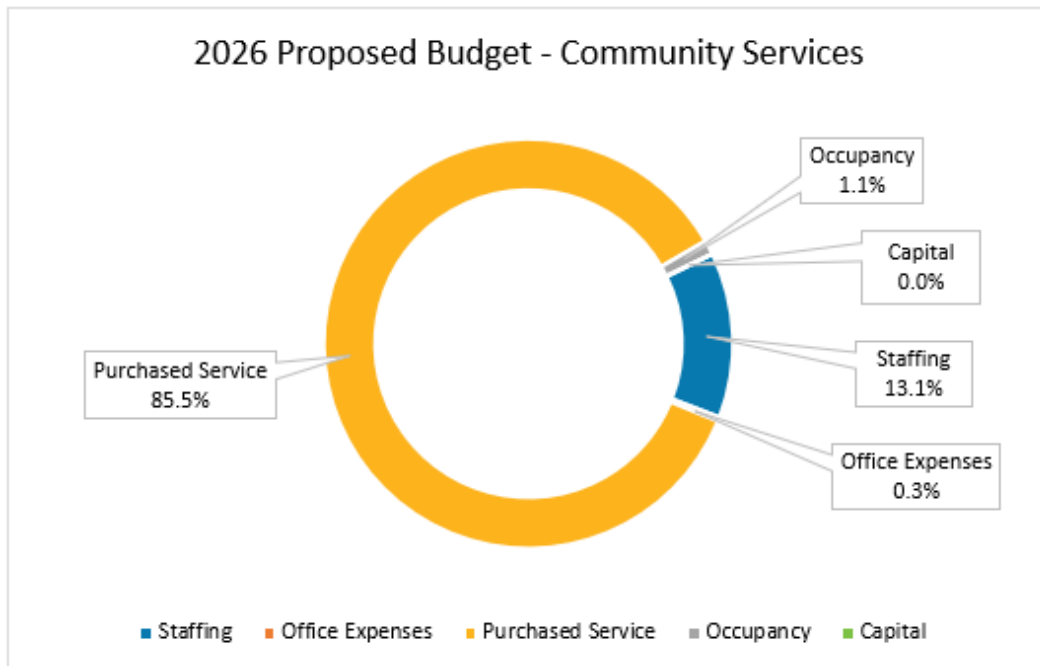
The proposed 2026 Budget recognizes significant growth experienced by the Community Services division, which will continue with the delivery of the County Homelessness Programs and making recommendations with respect to the implementation of the Regional Affordable Housing Strategy.

In addition, the proposed 2026 Budget reflects the 20-year operational funding commitment that was previously approved by County Council to support The Bridge's 12 supportive housing units. The commitment includes a \$48,000 annual contribution to this project which started in 2022.

The proposed 2026 Budget also includes funding to continue the operation of the ECH2 Overnight Program until December 31, 2026. The Overnight Program will be partially funded by provincial HPP funding, federal Reaching Home funding, and a municipal contribution from the County of \$114,600 to maintain the current service level.

Furthermore, the proposed 2026 Budget includes a \$5.00 per diem increase to the service providers of the Residential Services Homes Program. This additional funding aims to address the significant financial challenges that providers are experiencing and aims to ensure the long-term viability of the program. Both City and County Administrations are requesting that their respective Councils support the per diem increase. The per diem increase will have to be addressed with municipal funding, unless the City of Windsor is able to secure additional funding from upper levels of government.

The graph below illustrates the key areas of proposed 2026 Budget spending in Community Services.



Overall, the proposed 2026 Budget for Community Services, net of recoveries, totals \$1,200,730 (an increase of \$438,550 (57.5%) over the restated 2025 Budget of \$762,180).

Alignment with Strategic Plan Initiatives

Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share

County Administration's efforts to secure its own funding to deliver homelessness programs in the county was a result of the County "Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share". In addition, County Administration continues to seek dedicated funding from upper levels of government to address the unique housing and homelessness needs of the rural communities in the County.

A Government Working for the People

With the continuation of the Overnight Program at ECH2 and the investments in increasing the per diem rate for the providers of the Residential Services Homes Program, the County is ensuring that the basic needs of its most vulnerable residents are addressed and that housing support for 226 vulnerable individuals is maintained through the Residential Services Homes Program.