

Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: May 13, 2025

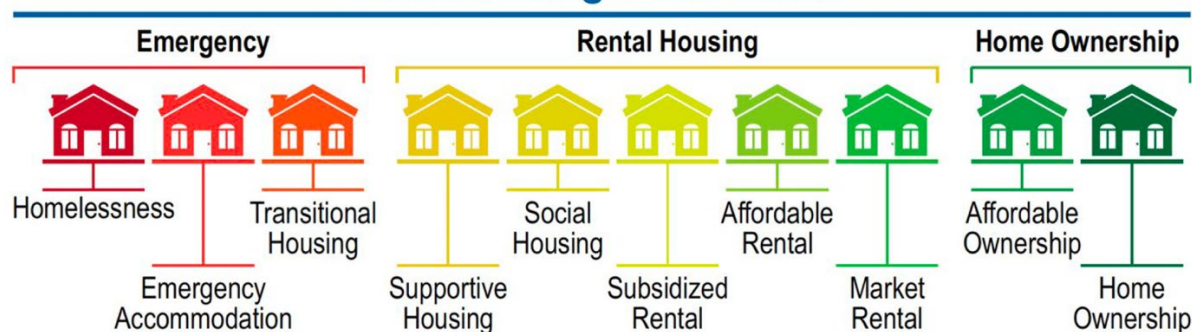
Submitted by: Cindy Howard, General Manager Finance, Durk Vanderwerff, Interim CAO & Director of Planning and Development

Subject: Establishing a Housing Advocate Role

BACKGROUND:

Many people in Middlesex County, like in other communities, are facing significant housing challenges across the entire housing continuum and as one of the faster-growing regions in the province, this issue has become increasingly acute. Ontario's housing system is complex, involving all four levels of government, along with the non-profit and private sectors. The Federal and Provincial governments, the City of London (as Service System Manager), municipalities, community housing providers, and private developers all play key roles.

The Housing Continuum



To gain an understanding of the existing supply and demand of housing and to develop strategies to address the full spectrum of residents' needs, the County embarked on an [Attainable Housing Review](#). Following Council consideration of the Attainable Housing Review, an Attainable Housing Review – Implementation Report was presented to Council.

On [July 16, 2024](#), Council passed the following resolution:

THAT the Attainable Housing Review —Implementation Report be received for information:

THAT Council selects the strategic role of Housing Advocate for Middlesex County;

THAT Council directs staff to prepare a detailed Attainable Housing Implementation Plan Report with the strategic role of Housing Advocate for consideration as part of the 2025 Draft Budget.

Subsequently, the draft 2025 Middlesex County Budget was referred from Budget Committee to County Council; however, the Business Case for a Housing Advocate service was excluded from the draft budget.

On February 18, 2025, Council passed the following resolution:

THAT \$160,000 be added to the draft 2025 Budget for a staff member for the Housing Advocate to be funded through the Tax Rate Stabilization Fund.

On March 25, 2025, Council approved the 2025 Middlesex County Budget.

The purpose of this report is to present a proposed portfolio for the Housing Advocate service role, developed without the program and funding resources originally contemplated in the 2025 Budget Business Case. This is intended to confirm alignment with Council's expectations prior to proceeding with targeted consultation and the hiring process.

ANALYSIS:

For Council consideration, the Housing Advocate role represents a new and unlegislated service delivery area for Middlesex County. It would not duplicate the responsibilities of the City of London as the provincially designated Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), nor would it perform traditional social services functions already fulfilled by County staff, such as Community Navigators or Social Services programming.

Instead, the Housing Advocate role would intentionally be designed to position the County as a facilitator across the full housing continuum, with a particular emphasis on enabling the private sector, non-profits, and municipalities to integrate attainable and affordable housing into existing and planned development.

The role would help address a gap in the current system to stimulate housing development through education, relationship-building, data support, and strategy alignment across public and private sectors. Key responsibilities would include:

Strategic Leadership and Advocacy

- Act as a central liaison between the County, local municipalities, the City of London (as CMSM), CMHC, housing providers, and developers to build relationships, identify opportunities, and align priorities.

- Support the implementation of select Recommended Actions from the Attainable Housing Review.
- Advocate for the unique housing needs of Middlesex County residents in regional and provincial forums and funding applications.
- Promote consistent use of a housing-first lens in County and municipal policy development and decision-making.
- Support and promote municipal efforts under the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) by communicating progress, supporting local initiatives with HAF best practices, and helping to integrate tools developed through the HAF process - such as zoning reforms or community engagement strategies - into broader County efforts.

Program and Policy Development

- Coordinate the development of an Attainable Housing Implementation Plan, including a roadmap for action aligned with the County's Strategic Plan and the Attainable Housing Review.
- Collaborate on Requests for Expressions of Interest (REOI) and applications for federal and provincial funding to support housing initiatives led by local municipalities, private developers, and non-profits.
- Support integration of housing-related objectives into municipal Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) and Official Plan updates.

Education, Capacity Building, and Community Engagement

- Design and implement an Education Strategy to increase housing literacy and awareness among municipal staff, councils, developers, and the public.
- Plan and deliver a Housing Summit and/or targeted workshops to equip interested parties with practical tools to advance housing projects.
- Develop and execute an Engagement Plan to ensure inclusive community participation in housing policy and initiative development.
- Assist local municipalities in interpreting and applying lessons learned through the HAF process, promoting consistency and replicability across the County.

Data, Metrics, and Performance

- Lead housing-related data collection and analysis to inform strategy, identify gaps, and support evidence-based decision-making.
- Establish and monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) measuring impact across strategic and operational areas.

Relationship Management and Communication

- Establish and maintain strong working relationships with key partners, including:
 - The City of London as CMSM, to coordinate roles and ensure County-specific needs are reflected in service system planning;
 - CMHC and other funders, to support grant applications and elevate local housing priorities;
 - Developers and non-profits, to facilitate partnerships and identify project opportunities.
- Provide internal support to other County departments and local municipalities to incorporate housing considerations into planning and service delivery.
- Act as a point of contact for sharing information, tools, and resources developed through the County's housing initiatives to encourage consistent implementation and innovation across jurisdictions.

In addition, the Housing Advocate would be responsible for establishing the framework required to support potential program-based initiatives originally contemplated in the 2025 Business Case – for consideration as part of the 2026 budget process.

To be effective, the Housing Advocate would require a unique skill set that blends policy insight, interested parties' engagement, and applied housing knowledge. This includes:

- An understanding of housing policy frameworks and development practices, including funding programs, land use planning, and zoning tools;
- Strong facilitation and engagement skills to build consensus and shared purpose among diverse partners;
- The ability to interpret and communicate housing data and research to guide decision-making;
- Strategic thinking to align County goals with opportunities presented by provincial and federal programs;
- Strong project management capabilities to implement and monitor housing initiatives in collaboration with internal departments and local municipalities;
- Advocacy and communication abilities to represent the County's interests effectively at the regional and provincial levels.

It is important to note that the Housing Advocate will not be responsible for administering rent supplements, portable housing benefits, or homelessness supports funded through the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), nor will the role oversee the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), Ontario Renovates Program, or Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) housing. These functions remain within the purview of the

CMSM and County Social Services. In 2025, the County's contribution to the City of London for legislated housing services totals \$7,430,946.

The role will also have no involvement in the operations or service delivery of Strathmere Lodge, which provides long-term care in accordance with Ministry of Long-Term Care requirements and standards.

By design, the Housing Advocate would be a forward-looking, systems-oriented role aimed at enabling broader participation in the development of housing and acting as a convenor and facilitator of initiatives that require strategic collaboration, not direct service delivery.

To ensure the Housing Advocate role is clearly defined and aligned with both internal and external expectations, a focused consultation process will be undertaken prior to finalizing the job description and proceeding with recruitment. The assessment will include a targeted engagement process including with local Chief Administrative Officers to gather input on how the role can best support municipal priorities and planning objectives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Middlesex County Council approved \$160,000 to support the creation of a Housing Advocate position. This funding is to be sourced from the Tax Rate Stabilization Fund and will support salary, benefits, and limited operating costs associated with the initial implementation of the role. It is anticipated that the position will be filled mid-year and extended into mid-year 2026.

At present, funding is approved for a single year only. However, in recognition of the time required to build effective relationships, demonstrate value, and support complex, multi-party housing initiatives, the continuation of the position will be included in the proposed 2026 budget.




Additionally, the Housing Advocate will play a key role in identifying and pursuing external funding opportunities from other levels of government and agencies such as:

- The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) through programs like the Housing Accelerator Fund or Co-Investment Fund;
- The Province of Ontario, including opportunities aligned with the More Homes, Built Faster Act or related planning and housing initiatives;
- Foundations, research institutes, and other organizations offering capacity-building or innovation-focused grants.

While these sources cannot be guaranteed, the Housing Advocate will be positioned to monitor, evaluate, and support timely applications for relevant funding streams that align with County priorities.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
Cultivating Community Vitality 	Advance a diverse, healthy, and engaged community across Middlesex County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote and support community wellness• Innovate social and community services• Attract, retain, and engage youth in our community
Strengthening Our Economy 	Encourage a diverse and robust economic base throughout the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create an environment that enables the attraction and retention of businesses, talent, and investments
Promoting Service Excellence 	Innovate and transform municipal service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations• Strengthen our advocacy and lobbying efforts with other government bodies• Collaborate with strategic partners to leverage available resources and opportunities

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Housing Advocate – Role Portfolio Report be received for information;

THAT the scope of the Housing Advocate role portfolio, as outlined in this report, be approved;

THAT staff be directed to proceed with consultation and recruitment activities necessary to establish the position.

AND THAT staff be directed to include the continuation of the Housing Advocate role in the proposed 2026 budget.