

# MEMORANDUM

**To:** Mayor Kogon and Amherst Town Council

**From:** Bill Schurman, Director of Recreation

**Date:** January 21, 2019

**Subject:** **Poverty Reduction**

---

Amherst Town Council identified Poverty Reduction as a Strategic Priority. One of the first steps in the process was staging its first municipal forum on poverty which was held in March of 2018. The goal of the forum was to provide greater awareness of the significant level of poverty in our community. Post survey results following the forum indicated increased awareness of the existence of poverty in Amherst, a greater understanding about the effect of poverty on the entire community and the responsibility for the reduction of poverty lies with many.

Municipal responses to poverty reduction involve a combined effort of municipal driven programs and initiatives and a collaboration of efforts with community stakeholders. Municipal poverty reduction strategies in particular those within communities with populations comparable to Amherst are just emerging. A number of roundtables have been established however not a great deal of evaluation has been done. These initiatives bring together municipal representatives with local stakeholders to develop responses to reducing poverty.

The recommended next step to Council in the process to reduce poverty is the creation of a Poverty Reduction Advisory Circle.

The Town of Amherst Poverty Reduction Advisory Circle will provide advice and assistance to Mayor & Council towards the development of a collaborative poverty reduction strategy for Amherst.

Development of the strategy will be led by the Department of Recreation but will include active participation from all town departments, all levels of governments, community and service organizations, non-government organizations, the business community and interested Amherst citizens.

The Poverty Reduction Advisory Circle will advise and assist Town Council through the development of a poverty reduction strategy. Poverty Reduction Advisory Circle members, many of whom assisted with organizing the first municipal form on poverty in 2018 will bring diverse views and experiences for consideration of the multiple factors that contribute to poverty in Amherst.

In addition the Circle will focus on and identify opportunities for short term action. The development of the strategy will recognize and build on the considerable knowledge, capacity and compassion of the Amherst community and the many not-for-profit, non-governmental and service organizations that play a considerable role in supporting individuals and families on a regular basis. Through an engagement process, the strategy will be developed collaboratively with these groups and individuals.

The Poverty Reduction Advisory Circle will have a minimum of eight members who bring a broad range of perspectives and experiences related to poverty, representing one or more of the following diverse perspectives:

Lived experience of low income/social exclusion  
Disability  
Business / employer  
Service provider to persons experiencing low income/social isolation  
Academic  
Newcomer

---

### **Definitions**

Poverty Reduction Circle Members see poverty as more than having a lack of income; they see reducing poverty as building people and community up so that they can live in a healthy, considerate, and growing environment.

### **Prosperity**

Emphasis is on quality of life for all  
It's not monetary; it is more about respect and dignity  
It is about enhancing people's lives to lift them up  
Prosperity the ultimate goal

### **Poverty**

Lack of fundamental resources which includes lack of self-esteem and self-confidence  
Lack of capability however it does not mean that people who live in poverty are not capable  
It is about barriers and not about people; barriers to developing strengths and assets  
Poverty is systemic

**Goals – Identify long lasting solutions to reducing poverty; Tell the truth about poverty using real facts; Help others understand how important it is to reduce poverty; Shift the general public's perception of people living in poverty; Engage people from multiple sectors to address poverty; Improve collaboration and actions in poverty reduction efforts by all stakeholders**

The following have agreed to participate on the poverty reduction circle.

Deputy Mayor Sheila Christie	Town of Amherst
Bill Schurman	Town of Amherst
Sarah MacMaster	Executive Director Maggie's Place
HeeYeon Son	Volunteer, Newcomer
Colleen Dowe b	Community Health Board Coordinator, NSHA
Veronica Richards	Volunteer, St. Vincent de Paul, Empowering Beyond Barriers
Connie Fisher	Academic Chair, Health & Human Services, NSCC
Dawn Ripley	Health Equity Consultant, NSHA
Allison Lair	Community Support Coordinator, YMCA
Janine DeWitt	Health Promoter, Public Health, NSHA

Given the complexity of the challenge of the issue of reducing poverty and out of respect for those who have agreed to volunteer to participate the Poverty Reduction Circle will need to confirm their terms of reference. As a starting point the following provided general terms of reference for the circle to consider. It is anticipated that the circle will come back to council by March 31, 2019.

- Provide advice and assistance to council in understanding and addressing poverty in Amherst
- Engage a broad range of stakeholders and government departments at all levels on the issues related to poverty in Amherst.
- Through engagement, develop a better understanding of the capacity and roles of stakeholders to address poverty in the community.
- Identify opportunities for short term actions
- Development of a poverty reduction action plan.