

# Emergency Shelter Shortage

## A Liberal Government Failure

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

The deplorable lack of shelter space for the homeless in Edmonton, in spite of large amounts of Federal & Provincial funds spent over the past 4 years, is shocking. Industrial trailer camps in downtown Edmonton! The following is an article written by Peter Goldring.

Under budget 2003, the Liberals spent another \$504 million on the homeless to fix problems they couldn't fix with the \$753 million they spent over the previous three years. In Edmonton, well over \$20 million of federal funding has been spent.

As the current Liberal homeless funding vehicle, Serving Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) program, winds up, homeless people are sleeping in Edmonton's subway terminal, a fire hall,

churches, or worse, yet the Federal Minister of the Homeless Claudette Bradshaw unconscionably boasts that SCPI funding has served the homeless well.

It's time for the Liberals to end this sham: the ever escalating expenditure for a shelter in-

dustry that adds practically no new basic floor space is an affront to the homeless and everyone at risk of becoming homeless as well as to every taxpayer who expects their tax dollars to be spent wisely and with compassion for those truly in emergency need.

Replacing modest shelter rental buildings with brand new, architecturally resplendent shelters; corporately-owned buildings of little additional capacity, if any, does little

more than waste taxpayers' hard earned money and does nothing at all to address the real need of so many desperate homeless people. Building \$200,000 smoking balconies on an already extravagant homeless highrise shelter in Cal-

gary is just plain unconscionable.

It's time to acknowledge that the greatest need of the sheltered homeless is affordable independent living private housing... and that the greatest single group of the homeless population is adult singles.



March 2003, Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament, Julius Yankowsky, MLA and Gordon Stamp wrap up their midnight tour of Edmonton's Emergency Shelter System at the Churchill LRT Subway Station opened at a cost of \$4,000 per night.



If the Liberals had spent half of the previous \$753 million homeless funding on helping to create 10,000 units of Single Room Homes for singles, Canada would not be facing the growing problem we have today. The shelters would have a reserve capacity and many more people would be moving on with their lives. But the Liberals cannot get past their shelter-centric socialist Minister who is biased against private property owner operators.

During the late evening of March 6, 2003, I accompanied Alberta MLA Julius Yankowsky on a surprise visit of Edmonton's emergency shelter system, to see first-hand the plight of Edmonton's most needy. Our review culminated in observing the deplorable, third world conditions of a Red Cross blanket on a concrete floor in the Sir Winston Churchill LRT station at

a cost to the taxpayer of \$4000 per night for 40 people. Strangely, while other shelters were overflowing, the new \$4 million Urban Manor had a large empty common room that would have held emergency floor mats for 100 people. 4 million dollars to add twelve additional new beds! Wow!

Now, once again, in January 2004, shelters are full and the city has opened a firehall as a homeless shelter at a cost of \$2000 per night for approximately 25 persons. Holiday Inn

prices for a Red Cross blanket on a bare concrete floor. Third world conditions on a gold-plated budget. What is wrong with this picture? Where has all the money gone? Well over \$20 million spent in Edmonton and no emergency shelter space added and no independent living singles housing built.

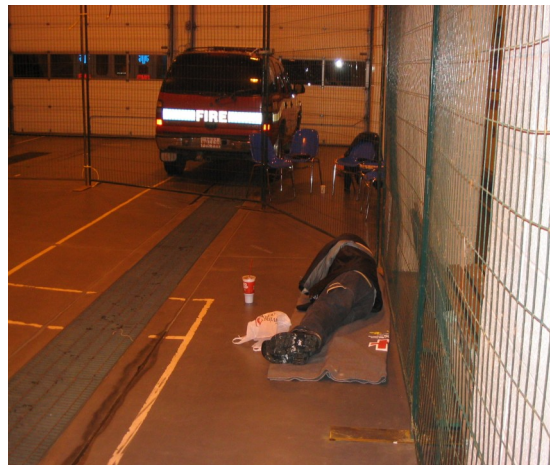
Edmontonians must know that using the LRT station in 2003 as a temporary homeless shelter was not necessary.

The private sector had offered many solutions, but the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund did not want to listen. The consequences of an anti-private sector mindset are now evident.

For example, the long empty government immigration building, next to the Spady Centre, has been proposed for redevelopment into

singles housing by several different private sector groups. Each proposal was rejected by the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, and the building is still empty.

This facility would have provided much-needed accommodation for those of modest means, long before this winter's cold had set in. There could have been 100 affordable units for singles housing, plus emergency floor mat space for another 50 persons.



Jan 2004—Firehall serving as an Emergency Shelter at a Cost of \$2000/ night due to the lack of Basic Emergency shelter floor space in Edmonton.



Another rejected project was an offer to use the then recently vacated Urban Manor as an emergency shelter for 150 persons, at a total cost of less than \$20,000 for the entire winter of 2002/2003, as opposed to \$20,000 for five days for 40 persons on the floor of the LRT or 10 days for 25 people on the floor of the firehall. This very viable building was offered again during the winter of 2003/2004 at \$3000 a month, again turned down in favour of fire halls and churches.

Other private sector projects that could have provided hundreds of housing units for singles and families have also been turned down by a selection process within the EHTF that shamefully favours grand social ownership consolidation plans promoted by a select social shelter sector over private sector, affordable independent living solutions.

The fact is that across Canada, 14,150 homeless singles are warehoused in \$1500 per month, taxpayer-paid emergency shelter beds even though more than 50% have some income and really want independent living that they could pay for themselves if affordable housing was available. They want out of shelters! They want independent living, not more social welfare transitional shelters. They want a hand up, not a hand out. They want dignity. There is an effective alternative: first allow,

then encourage the private sector to re-enter the marketplace and make proposals on a level playing field with non-profit money grants to construct housing for singles. Facilitate this process by reviewing discriminatory rental taxation. Level the playing field of the private sector with the high cost so-called non-profit shelter industry.

With significantly less funding than contributed to the emergency and transitional shelter industry, many more single room homes could be built to meet the core housing needs of adult singles. These homes would be safe, suitable for single occupancy, and affordable. Typically, government preferred recipients of affordable housing for singles have been non-profit and have received \$60,000-80,000 per unit from various taxpayer paid granting sources. Private busi-



Jan 2004—Church Gymnasium in Edmonton opened as Emergency Shelter due to lack of space at a cost of \$1200 / night.

nesses have offered to build the same units and offer them for the same rent but for 1/3 of the taxpayers' paid grants, and, private taxpaying enterprises will repay the grant costs through taxes, which non-profits will not.

Imagine emptying half of Canada's emergency and transitional social singles shelters, while creating an environment that returns the dignity of independence and hopefulness of personal growth through affordable, long-term independent living private sector housing. Unfortunately, it won't happen as long as the government emergency and transitional shel-

ter-centric socialism forever philosophy runs counter to this effort.

Unfortunately, by refusing to allow private housing providers to compete for funding, our Liberal Government reinforces the dependency of low income singles on the taxpayer paid, expensive, emergency and transitional shelter industry. In a free market economy, this is both irrational, wasteful, and irresponsible.

For the Minister of the Homeless to so badly judge the needs of the very people she is supposed to help is unconscionable. While her Liberal Government has been squeezing the taxpayers of more and more money,

Bradshaw is lost in a shelter centric money pit that has not reduced homeless numbers, has not increased shelter spaces, and has not increased independent living housing units for the homeless in need. How many ways can you define 'failure'?

The Liberal Empress has no clothes. Ask any homeless person why 20 million dollars in Edmonton did not even purchase a few square feet of warm floor space let alone one decent independent-living home.

**UPDATE:** A Primary role of the Federal Government is to provide leadership and guidance for both provinces and municipalities with the development of comprehensive national Emergency Shelter, and Affordable Housing standards complete with economic data, analysis that highlights effecting trends.

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment and fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

Do you agree that Canada's major cities should have sufficient basic emergency shelter floor mat space?

Yes       No

Should we have a national housing and emergency shelter policy?

Yes       No

Do you believe that private industry can provide independent living affordable singles housing?

Yes       No

Would you agree that the federal Liberals have failed the homeless?

Yes       No

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