



LAWSON

Ottawa deserves better.

ALEX LAWSON FOR MAYOR

One standard for every bed.

The Lawson plan for Ottawa's shelters: one written standard for every bed the city pays for, checked four times a year without warning, with the results online for everyone to see.

01 / OVERVIEW

A bandage has to be clean.

Emergency shelters are not the answer to homelessness, and this plan does not pretend they are. A shelter is a bandage. But a bandage has to be clean.

Ottawa's budget for housing and homelessness services is \$222 million this year. In 2025 alone, the city spent \$29.3 million putting homeless families in hotel and motel rooms. For that kind of money, the city should be able to tell you that every bed it pays for is safe, clean and free of pests. Today it can't.

Hotels and motels aren't covered by the city's shelter standards at all. The shelters that are covered get a full inspection once every 30 months. And nobody outside City Hall ever sees the results.

When a shelter feels less safe than a park, people choose the park. The tents go up down the street, the neighbourhood pays for it, and the family that is one missed paycheck away from needing a bed of its own starts to wonder where they would end up.

This plan puts one written standard on every bed the city pays for, checks it four times a year without warning, puts the results online, and takes the contract away from operators who keep failing. It also measures every shelter on the two things that matter most outside its walls: how many people it moves into a home, and what the street around it has to live with.

If taxpayers are paying for the bed, it meets the bar.

HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

\$29.3 million

Spent placing homeless families in hotels and motels in 2025

City of Ottawa, April 2026.

CHILDREN IN HOTEL ROOMS

1,200+

Living in hotel rooms with their families, March 2026

CBC News, May 2026.

BETWEEN FULL INSPECTIONS

30 months

How often a shelter gets a full compliance review

City of Ottawa, 2021 shelter standards report.

HOTELS UNDER THE STANDARDS

Zero

Hotels, motels and college residences are exempt

City of Ottawa, 2021 shelter standards report.

02 / THE PROBLEM

Tents are going up because shelters are failing people.

City staff responded to 65 encampments in 2020. By 2023 it was 375, and the year wasn't even over. In 2024 it was 458. City staff estimated 2025 would top 500.

Ask someone in a tent why they left the shelter. People have told Alex directly: violence, sexual assaults, theft, abuse, bed bugs and lice. They tell reporters the same thing. One man who moved from a downtown shelter to a tent told CBC, "There's nobody here to sell you drugs." The city's own manager of homelessness programs said it comes down to "where they feel safe."

The drug crisis did not stay on the street. It moved indoors, into the beds the city pays for. As soon as the weather allows, too many people decide they are better off in a tent than in a shelter taxpayers are funding.

That is not compassion, and it is not order. It is a management failure. The people in the tents pay for it, and so do the neighbourhoods around the parks.

03 / FAMILIES IN MOTELS

The least-watched beds hold the most vulnerable people.

When the family shelters are full, the city sends families to hotels, motels and college residences. That was supposed to be the overflow. It has become the system.

In February 2024, about 300 families were living in those rooms. By December 2025 it was about 500. In June 2026, the city's family emergency shelter system held 711 families, 2,574 people, the most since the city started keeping monthly records in 2014. Three out of four families in the system are now placed in hotels and motels, and they stay an average of 11 months.

More than 1,200 of the people in those rooms are children.

These are parents with kids. Many of them were a job loss or a rent increase away from where they started. They are the most vulnerable people the city is responsible for, and they are living in the least regulated beds it pays for. Families in Ottawa's motel placements have told reporters about cockroaches and bed bugs.

Kids should not be the ones paying for the gap.

04 / WHAT THE RULES SAY

Rules on paper, not in practice.

Ottawa has written shelter standards. The problem is how rarely anyone checks them, who is left out, and what nobody gets to see.

Hotels and motels are exempt. The city's own 2021 report on its shelter standards is blunt about the rooms where most homeless families now live: "As private businesses, these facilities are not required to adhere to the Standards." Whatever rules apply to them sit in the city's private agreements with each business, not in the published standards.

A full check every 30 months. The standards call for a full compliance review of each shelter every 30 months, with a lighter site review in the years between. Conditions inside a shelter can change in weeks. A full check every two and a half years is not oversight. It's paperwork.

Nobody sees the results. We could not find a single shelter compliance review published by the city. Residents, families and taxpayers can't see which shelters pass and which fail, and the standards don't spell out what happens to a shelter that fails.

Only the worst incidents get reported. Shelters must report "serious occurrences" to the city: deaths, fires, critical injuries and incidents covered by the media. Assaults, thefts and police calls that don't make the news aren't on the list.

Nobody independent has looked in years. The last time the Auditor General examined how the city manages its emergency shelters was a 2017 review. It found the standards hadn't been updated since 2005, and it did not examine the hotel and motel overflow where most families now live.

05 / THE PLAN

Nine moves.

Every move below applies to every bed the city pays for, whoever owns the building.

MOVE 01

Start with an independent audit.

In his first year, Alex will ask the Auditor General for a full audit of the shelter system, hotels and motels included. It runs alongside the 90-day shelter safety review this campaign has already committed to. The review fixes what is dangerous now. The audit tells council where the money is going and what it is buying. The last independent look was in 2017, and a lot has changed since then.

MOVE 02

One standard for every bed the city pays for.

Shelters, hotels, motels, college and university residences, and city-owned buildings will all meet the same written standard. If taxpayers are paying for the bed, it meets the bar. The standard goes into every hotel and motel agreement when it is signed or renewed, and an operator that won't agree to it doesn't get the city's business. No more exceptions for private operators and slum lords.

MOVE 03**Unannounced inspections, four times a year.**

Every shelter, hotel, motel and other site the city places people in will be inspected at least four times a year, without notice, replacing the 30-month cycle. Inspectors will check for pests, cleanliness, safety, food, staffing and repairs. They will also talk to residents away from staff.

MOVE 04**A public scorecard for every site.**

Every shelter and hotel the city uses will have a page online showing its inspection results, pest reports and the fixes it was ordered to make. Families deserve to know where they are being sent, and taxpayers deserve to know what they are paying for. These are city contracts, so they fall under this campaign's Your money, in plain sight commitment to put city contracts online. Sites whose locations are kept confidential for residents' safety will be reported without an address.

MOVE 05**Report every assault, theft and police call.**

Shelters will report every assault, theft and police call to the city, not just deaths, fires and whatever makes the news. As mayor, Alex will also ask the Police Services Board to report calls for service to shelter and hotel addresses on their own, so problems are dealt with where they happen and the rest of the neighbourhood isn't painted with the same brush.

MOVE 06**Fail repeatedly, lose the contract.**

Funding will be tied to results. A tenant doesn't pay full rent for a unit that isn't up to standard, and the city shouldn't pay full price for a bed that isn't either. A site that fails an inspection gets a written deadline to fix the problem. A site that fails again stops getting paid for the beds that don't meet the standard until they do. A site that keeps failing loses the contract, and the people living there are moved somewhere that meets the standard.

MOVE 07**An independent place to complain.**

Residents and their families need somewhere to go when staff aren't listening. A complaint that has to go up to the province has to wait to come back down, so Ottawa will have its own. An independent shelter ombudsman, separate from the department that manages the contracts, will take complaints from residents, families and staff, investigate them, and report publicly to council. Complaints can be made anonymously, so staff who see a problem can speak up without putting their jobs at risk.

MOVE 08**A way out, not a place to stay.**

A shelter bed is meant to be a short stop, so every site the city pays for will be measured on how many people leave it for a home. Every resident gets a written move-out plan and a named caseworker within 30 days of arriving. For people who can work, that plan runs through the Lawson jobs and growth plan: the city's employment caseworkers are connected to employers who are hiring, and Career Pathways Ottawa shows people which jobs match the skills they already have and which programs will pay for retraining. For people who can't live on their own yet because of addiction or mental illness, the plan is a supportive housing placement with treatment, not another year in a motel. Every site's scorecard will report how many residents moved into housing, how long it took, and how many came back. Operators that get people out will be first in line when contracts are renewed.

Measure the impact on the neighbourhood.

A shelter doesn't only affect the people inside it. Every site's scorecard will also report what the street around it lives with: police calls, needles picked up, 311 complaints and bylaw calls within a set distance of the building, tracked over time. Neighbours will have a named contact at every site and a person responsible for dealing with what they report. When the numbers around a site get worse, the operator answers for it at the next inspection, the same as it would for a dirty room. Well-run sites will be able to show it, and the neighbourhood will be able to see it.

06 / WHAT IT COSTS

Paid for by getting families out of motels.

The city bought the former hotel at 377 O'Connor Street this year for \$45 million, with 95 percent of the cost covered by the federal government, to house families in transitional housing instead of rented hotel rooms. It opens this fall. City staff estimate it will save up to \$2.5 million a year in overflow hotel costs compared with renting the same number of rooms.

That saving pays for this plan. Quarterly inspections, the public scorecard and the ombudsman's office are funded from the O'Connor savings, not from new taxes. Every family that moves out of a motel and into a building the city owns frees up money to make sure every other bed is safe.

07 / WHY IT MATTERS

Fixing shelters is how you clear the tents.

A city can't clear encampments when it has nowhere safe to send people, and Ontario courts have said so. In Waterloo Region in 2023 and again in May 2026, and in Kingston in 2023, judges blocked or limited encampment removals because the shelter space on offer wasn't enough, or wasn't accessible to the people it was meant for. A shelter people are afraid of doesn't count for much in court. It doesn't count for much in the park either.

Better shelters give the city the legal and practical footing to bring people indoors and give the parks back to the neighbourhood.

Call it the broken windows principle. Small things matter. When a city lets a dirty room, a bed bug report or an unanswered complaint slide, it tells the people in the system that nobody cares about them. It tells them that we don't care how they live. That message doesn't stay inside the shelter. It spreads to the park, then to the street around it. Fixing the small things, and being seen to fix them, is how a city shows it is paying attention.

Emergency shelters were meant to be a short stop: a safe bed while someone gets back on their feet. For families in motels, the average stay is now 11 months. A short stop has become the place kids are growing up.

08 / WHY ALEX

Checking the work is part of the work.

I'm a carpenter. Nothing my crew frames gets covered up until it has been inspected. That isn't because builders are crooks. It's because checking is how you know the work was done right, and the time to find a problem is before somebody moves in.

The city pays for thousands of beds a night and checks them once every two and a half years. Some of them it doesn't check at all. No builder could run a job site that way, and no family should have to live in one.

This isn't about spending more. It's about knowing what we are already paying for.

We've got a lot of work to do.

Ottawa deserves better.

09 / SOURCES & VERIFICATION

Every figure here is sourced.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS BUDGET

Housing and Homelessness Services operating expense of \$221.9 million in the City of Ottawa's 2026 budget (\$144.7 million net of provincial and federal revenue). Rounded to \$222 million in the text.

<https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/default/files/2026%20Adopted%20Budget%20Book%20English%20Condensed.pdf>

HOTEL AND MOTEL SPENDING, 2025

The City spent \$29.3 million in 2025 on hotel and motel placements for families experiencing homelessness, per the City of Ottawa's April 2026 announcement of its family homelessness strategy and the accompanying staff report.

<https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/city-news/newsroom/new-strategy-helps-families-experiencing-homelessness-move-more-quickly-stable-housing>

ENCAMPMENTS, 2020 TO 2025

City staff responded to 65 encampments in 2020, 248 in 2021 and 343 in 2022, and had responded to 375 in 2023 at the time of reporting, an all-time high. Resident quote ("There's nobody here to sell you drugs") and city homelessness programs manager Kale Brown quote ("where they feel safe") from the same article.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/housing-homelessness-city-ottawa-encampment-tent-1.6970573>

ENCAMPMENTS, 2024 AND 2025

458 encampment responses in 2024, and a city staff estimate of more than 500 for 2025. CBC News Ottawa, Arthur White-Crummey, "City facing delays clearing homeless encampments due to police staffing crunch." See also Community Services Committee Motion CSC2025-18-01, Response to Encampments.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/city-facing-delays-clearing-homeless-encampments-due-to-police-staffing-crunch-1.7641645>

FAMILIES IN HOTELS, MOTELS AND RESIDENCES, FEBRUARY 2024

About 300 families, 1,039 people, staying in hotels, motels and post-secondary residences because emergency shelters were over capacity. CTV News Ottawa, February 7, 2024.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/ottawa/article/hundreds-of-families-live-in-hotels-and-motels-waiting-for-permanent-housing-in-ottawa/>

FAMILIES IN OVERFLOW, DECEMBER 2025, AND 377 O'CONNOR STREET

Approximately 500 families in overflow placements in December 2025. Purchase of 377 O'Connor Street for \$45 million, 128 suites, 95 percent covered by the federal Interim Housing Assistance Program; staff estimate it will "avoid up to \$2.5 million annually in overflow-hotel costs when compared to renting an equivalent number of private hotel rooms." CP24, February 23, 2026. Opening in fall 2026: CTV News Ottawa, August 20, 2026.

<https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2026/02/23/city-of-ottawa-to-buy-downtown-hotel-for-45-million/>

FAMILIES IN THE SHELTER SYSTEM, JUNE 2026

711 family units comprising 2,574 people in temporary emergency accommodation in June 2026, the highest in a monthly series beginning January 2014. City of Ottawa Housing Services, families dashboard.

<https://ottawa.ca/en/family-and-social-services/housing-and-homelessness/plans-facts-and-data/shelter-system-use-and-trends-dashboard/families-dashboard>

CHILDREN IN HOTEL ROOMS, OVERFLOW SHARE AND LENGTH OF STAY

More than 660 families with 1,220 children living in hotel rooms as of March 2026; 76 percent of families in the shelter system in overflow locations; average stay 11 months. CBC News Ottawa, May 11, 2026.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/this-single-mom-and-her-family-have-been-living-in-ottawa-hotels-for-over-a-year-9.7194786>

CONDITIONS IN MOTEL PLACEMENTS

Families in Ottawa's hotel and motel placements described cockroaches and bed bugs as common. CBC News, "Living in limbo."

<https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/living-in-limbo>

SHELTER STANDARDS, INSPECTION CYCLE AND THE HOTEL EXEMPTION

"Compliance Reviews every 30 months to ensure that providers are complying with all aspects of the Standards" and "Site Reviews annually, on years when a Compliance Review is not conducted." On overflow: "The City also has agreements with hotels/motels/post-secondary institutions to provide temporary overflow accommodations when the family shelter is at capacity. As private businesses, these facilities are not required to adhere to the Standards." City of Ottawa, 2021 Ottawa Emergency Shelter Standards report to Community and Protective Services Committee, February 18, 2021.

https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/default/files/report_aoda.pdf

SERIOUS OCCURRENCE REPORTING

The Ottawa Emergency Shelter Standards define serious occurrences as "Incidents such as death, fire, and/or critical injury, as well as incidents covered by the media that must be reported to the City."

https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/default/files/oess_en_aoda.pdf

AUDITOR GENERAL, 2017

Review of the Management of Emergency Shelter Providers, Contract Management, tabled at Audit Committee November 30, 2017. Scope was the City's management of third-party emergency shelter



providers; found "The City's Emergency Shelter Standards have not been reviewed or updated since 2005." No later Auditor General audit of emergency shelters appears in the Office's published audit reports.

https://www.oagottawa.ca/media/4hbfvgxc/emgshltr_fnl_en.pdf

ONTARIO ENCAMPMENT RULINGS

Regional Municipality of Waterloo v. Persons Unknown, Ontario Superior Court of Justice, January 2023; City of Kingston v. Doe, Ontario Superior Court of Justice, November 2023; Waterloo Region, Ontario Superior Court of Justice, May 21, 2026, finding the region "has not provided sufficient alternative shelter."

<https://www.jurist.org/news/2026/05/ontario-court-bars-waterloo-region-from-removing-encampment-residents/>

Authorized by the official agent of the Alex Lawson campaign.