

Comfort Centres and Emergency Shelters Policy	
Effective Date 2023-02-22	Approved by Council 2023-02-21

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this Policy is to provide guidance and information to Annapolis Regional Emergency Management personnel with regard to establishment and control of Comfort Centres and Emergency Shelters.
- 1.2. During an emergency situation there may be the need for citizens to find respite from adverse weather conditions or in severe cases temporary shelter. It is the direction of this policy to ensure that there are facilities throughout Annapolis County that are equipped for this purpose. For example, as a result of extreme weather events members of the public may find themselves without power, sometimes for extended periods, or otherwise affected by climate. While these events do not warrant the activation of a Reception Centre or Emergency Shelter, there may be a need to open a Comfort Centre whereby services provided may include shelter from the weather, nourishment, companionship, or information. Major disaster situations, such as widespread floods, fires or large evacuation may require the opening of a Reception Centre or Shelter to provide a level of service above that offered at a Comfort Centre.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This Policy is applicable to all facilities within Annapolis County that are recognized or considering to be recognized as a Comfort Centre/Emergency Shelter. The Regional Emergency Management Coordinator (REMC) will maintain and update the database of Comfort Centres/Emergency Shelters in Annapolis County.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. “Annapolis REMO” means the municipal emergency management organization for the participating municipal units of Municipality of the County of Annapolis, Town of Annapolis Royal and Town of Middleton, created pursuant to s. 60 of the Municipal Government Act (Nova Scotia) and a Municipal Services Agreement dated April 13, 2022.
- 3.2. “Comfort Centre” means a building owned and operated by a community group or fire department with the appropriate infrastructure to provide local residents a short stay during a power outage to provide warmth, a warm drink, light refreshments, access to washrooms, ability to recharge small electronic devices, receive information respecting the emergency and similar services. These facilities are not overnight facilities with operation typically between the hours of 8:00 am and 8:00 pm subject to the availability of volunteers.

- 3.3. “Emergency” means a present or imminent event in respect of which Annapolis REMO believes prompt coordination of action or regulation of persons or property must be undertaken to protect property or the health, safety or welfare of the people of Annapolis County.
- 3.4. “Emergency Shelter” means a facility capable of providing the needs for emergency accommodation, food, clothing, personal needs, reunification as well as a registration and information dissemination area. An Emergency Shelter is operated by the Canadian Red Cross (“CRC”), under the direction Nova Scotia Department of Community Services.
- 3.5. “Reception Centre” (also evacuation centre) is designed to receive evacuees who have been forced from their homes as the result of an emergency or disaster. Evacuees are registered by the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) and overnight accommodations and other supports are arranged through Provincial Emergency Social Services and the CRC.

4. Policy

- 4.1 During differing types and phases of an emergency incident in Annapolis County there may be both Comfort Centres and Emergency Shelters.

- 4.2 **Becoming a Recognized Comfort Centre**

In order for a facility to become a recognized Comfort Centre in Annapolis County the following process must take place:

- a. a facility or group can express their interest to Annapolis REMO;
- b. Annapolis REMO, Regional Emergency Management Coordinator or designate will visit the facility to complete a facility profile (reviewed annually) identifying the following requirements are met:
 - i. building and grounds are barrier-free and wheelchair accessible;
 - ii. safe drinking water;
 - iii. heating/cooling sources;
 - iv. washrooms;
 - v. kitchen and food safety considerations;
 - vi. first aid kit(s);
 - vii. tables, chairs and power outlets for visitors, staff/volunteers; and
 - viii. there is a Generator on site and / or approved connection for a portable generator for alternate power.
- c. facility/group must provide at least three contacts and have a group of volunteers ready to operate the Comfort Centre;
- d. staffing/volunteer, resources, and liabilities will be the responsibility of the Comfort Centre;

- e. facility/group must provide proof of insurance satisfactory to Annapolis REMO. Proof of insurance shall be given by providing a Certificate of Insurance evidencing commercial general liability insurance in an amount not less than \$2,000,000, and confirmation that such insurance applies to the use of the facility as a Comfort Centre;
- f. if all requirements have been met, including showing proof that the group completing & signing the Comfort Centre agreement is in fact the facility owner of the Comfort Centre, a Comfort Centre agreement will be signed by the Facility Owner and Annapolis REMO; and
- g. the Comfort Centre will be entered into a database and shared on the REMO website for residents to learn where their nearest facility is located. Residents can then add the locations into their personal preparedness plan;

4.3 **Becoming a Recognized Comfort Centre**

4.3.1 A Comfort Centre may be opened by a community group on its own OR may be activated at the request of Annapolis REMO. Community members take the lead on organizing and operating the Comfort Centre - neighbors helping neighbors. It is intended to provide a location where community members can gather for a period of time during the day-time hours. A Comfort Centre is not opened with the intention of providing meals or as an overnight shelter.

4.3.2 Comfort Centres may provide different services depending on resources available. However, comfort centres are intended to provide:

- a place to get warm;
- electronic device charging capabilities;
- washroom facilities;
- check on each other, and share information; and
- updates on weather and power resumption.

Some Comfort Centres may provide:

- light refreshments and / or
- a space for community members to prepare their own food.

Note: Organizations offering food shall follow food handling practices or only offer pre-packaged food.

4.3.3 Comfort Centres are not overnight emergency shelters. If, during the daytime operations, the Comfort Centre volunteers identify a requirement for overnight emergency shelter, request shall be made to Annapolis REMO, at which time arrangements will be made to provide overnight emergency shelter if requirements are met.

- 4.3.4 Comfort Centres should not open before or during a storm, especially if agencies such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or the local transportation authority is requesting residents stay off the roads.
- 4.3.5 Following the international standard for emergency preparedness, it is recommended residents prepare personal preparedness kits for their family and pets and be prepared for up to 72 hours. It is further recommended that Comfort Centres open after 72 hours have passed. In extenuating circumstances, there may be a need to open a Comfort Centre prior to 72 hours.
- 4.3.6 During a pandemic, facility will adhere to all public health guidance to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

4.4 **Comfort Centre Activation by Community Group**

- 4.4.1 Comfort Centres are staffed with volunteers from within the community as prearranged by the facility owner responsible for the Comfort Centre.
- 4.4.2 When a Comfort Centre is opened voluntarily by a community group, any costs and liability associated with opening the Comfort Centre will be the responsibility of the group responsible for making the decision to open it.
- 4.4.3 Community groups should evaluate if it will be safe for residents to get to the Comfort Centre. Community groups should only open if there is a defined community need for the services and resources the Comfort Centre can provide.
- 4.4.4 In circumstances that a community group voluntarily opens a Comfort Centre, the decision to open or close a Comfort Centre will be made by the community group responsible for the Comfort Centre.
- 4.4.5 Once a decision has been made to activate or deactivate a Comfort Centre, the Comfort Centre shall contact the Annapolis REMO Regional Emergency Management Coordinator. REMO will provide information to Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office (NSEMO) and will advise the public on the County's website, social media and to media sources.

4.5 **Comfort Centre Activation by Annapolis REMO**

- 4.5.1 In situations of widespread/long-term community events or declared emergencies, an authorized representative of Annapolis REMO may contact the Comfort Centre contact person to request the activation of a Comfort Centre. During an activation the facility will be staffed and operated by community volunteers.

- 4.5.2 If Annapolis REMO requests that a community group activate its Comfort Centre, reimbursement will be provided to the community group by Annapolis REMO for reasonable expenses incurred during the period that the Comfort Centre is activated. These would include, but not necessarily be limited to:
- food, beverage and related supplies;
 - generator fuel; and
 - hygienic / cleaning supplies
- 4.5.3 When Annapolis REMO activates a Comfort Centre, the decision to open or close a Comfort Centre will be made by Annapolis REMO and will be provided to Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office and will advise the public on the County's website, social media and to media sources.

5. Emergency Shelters ("Shelters")

- 5.1. In large-scale emergencies where there is a need to evacuate a community, a decision to open, and location for, an Emergency Shelter and/or Reception Centre is made by Annapolis REMO in consultation with emergency service partners and first responders. Typically, these centres/shelters are activated when an emergency event exceeds the 10 / 25 rule (10 houses, apartment units or 25 people affected). Emergency Shelters are used as a last resort in an evacuation situation. Initially, residents are encouraged to seek shelter with friends, family, hotels or other alternate accommodations.
- 5.1.1 Once the decision to open is made the Nova Scotia Dept. of Community Services and CRC will be contacted by the Regional Emergency Management Coordinator or designate, to initiate their response protocols.
- 5.1.2 The setup and operation of the Reception Centre/Emergency Shelter will be the responsibility of the CRC. Facility space for the Emergency Shelter is designated and activated by the Annapolis REMO.
- 5.1.3 A Shelter may be set up to provide any combination of the following services:
- emergency food;
 - emergency lodging;
 - emergency clothing;
 - personal services;
 - family reunification; and
 - reception / registration & information.
- 5.1.4 Shelters shall follow all provincial public health guidelines, and the CRC trains volunteers that support emergency shelters.

- 5.1.5 The decision to de-activate a Reception Centre/Emergency Shelter will be made by Annapolis REMO in consultation with the Red Cross and other emergency service partners and first responders.

5.2. Emergency Shelter Inventory Guidelines

- 5.2.1 The Annapolis REMO shall identify and maintain an Emergency Shelter inventory of potential facilities for use in an evacuation.
- 5.2.2 Annapolis REMO staff will identify facilities which meet the guidelines for a Shelter (as per Section 5.2.4 below) and develop signed Facility Use Agreements with the facilities.
- 5.2.3 Facilities shall have access to working services such as electricity, telecommunications, potable water and sewage in order to be considered for inclusion in the Shelter inventory.
- 5.2.4 As well, the following guidelines must be met for Annapolis REMO, CRC and Dept. of Community Services to recognize a facility as a Shelter in an emergency:
- be structurally sound and have sufficient fire safety alarms / systems and emergency exits in accordance with building codes;
 - backup power supply which is maintained and tested regularly;
 - adequate power backup system capacity to provide lighting, heat, and AC if in the summertime;
 - full kitchen for preparing and storing food (fridges, freezers, stoves, etc.)
 - washroom facilities with multiple toilets, sinks and showers;
 - sufficient space to provide multiple sleeping space to position cots;
 - sufficient space for reception and registration;
 - if on a private well system, must meet facility requirements for well testing with Dept. of Environment and Dept. of Public Health (records kept);
 - if the facility has a septic system, it must be serviced regularly (records kept);
 - staff (liaison, cleaning staff and security) available to assist in operating the facility for an extended period (more than 24 hours);
 - advanced first aid equipment and supplies
 - availability in shoulder seasons for hurricanes and winter storms by having supplies on hand (fuel for generator, important information, etc.);
 - building and grounds accessible for all persons (wheelchair ramp, elevator if it has multiple floors);
 - snow removal plan in place to ensure access to the comfort centre.
 - sufficient parking readily available.

6. **Communications**

6.1. Annapolis REMO will track community Comfort Centre facilities as part of situational awareness during emergency events in order to notify residents and Councilors of the situation. The Regional Emergency Management Coordinator (REMC) will maintain lists of recognized facilities for reporting purposes to NS EMO. The opening of a Comfort Centre will be disseminated by the REMC, or designee, through:

- press releases
- local news, media, commercial TV and radio
- public television/radio
- local municipal & REMO websites
- NS EMO
- NS 211
- social media (Facebook/Twitter)
- email lists

6.2. Comfort Centres are required to report their opening and closing times and services to Annapolis REMO by contacting the REMO Coordinator.

7. **Funding for Facilities**

7.1. Federal and provincial government programs (such as NS Community Facilities Improvement Program) may provide opportunities for community organizations to obtain funding for facility renovations or upgrades necessary to meet the guidelines for inclusion on the Comfort Centre / Emergency Shelters inventory. Annapolis REMO shall endeavor to stay informed of such opportunities and circulate information as it becomes available.

8. **Certification**

I, **Susan Purcell, Town Clerk of the Town of Middleton**, do hereby certify that the Policy, of which the foregoing is a true copy, was duly passed at a duly called meeting of the Town Council of the Town of Middleton held on the 21st day of February 2023.

//original signed by Susan Purcell,
Town Clerk 21-February-23//

Susan Purcell
Town Clerk



Policy Adoption	
Date of 7-day notification to Council	February 6, 2023
Date of Approval	February 21, 2023