



Corporation of the City of
NEW WESTMINSTER

**Joint Meeting of the:
COVID-19: AT-RISK &
VULNERABLE POPULATIONS TASK FORCE
&
COVID-19: SENIORS & PERSONS LIVING
WITH DISABILITIES TASK FORCE
Minutes**

**October 20, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.
Meeting Held Electronically**

PRESENT

Staff:

John Stark, Co-Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning
Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst
Jay Young, Co-Chair/Manager, Recreation Services
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk

Organizational Representatives:

Rick Bloudell, School District 40
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Rishi Chattarjee, Lookout Housing and Health Society
Erin Daly, Fraser Health Authority
Laura Dunne, Westminster House Society
Fay Duxbury, New Westminster Family Place
Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor
Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience
Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society
Natalie Johnston, Fraser Health Authority
Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society
Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society

The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m. and John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, assumed the Chair.

1. Welcome, Land Acknowledgment and Roll Call

Mr. Stark welcomed everyone to the meeting and recognized that New Westminster is on the unceded and unsurrendered land of the Halkomelem speaking peoples and acknowledged that colonialism has made invisible their histories and connections to the land. He recognized that, as a city, we are learning and building relationships with the people whose lands we are on.

Introductions and a roll call took place.

2. Joint Meeting Minutes

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded members that the minutes are not verbatim and capture key discussion points shared during the meetings.

Joint Task Force Items

3. Update on Standing Items

Task Force Web Portal and Weekly Newsletter Email

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, shared that the Task Force Web Portal contains information such as Key Information and Tenant Resources, the List of Financial Supports, the Survival Resource Guide, the Food Resource Calendar, information on the Friendly Support Caller Program, and the COVID-19 Trusted Links and Resources List. He noted that these resources are updated on a bi-weekly or monthly basis.

Mr. Mehdic advised that the weekly newsletter email also provides access to the resource information listed above as well as upfront updates which include time sensitive information and highlighted updates from the web resources. Other information shared in the email includes:

- Be Heard New West updates;
- COVID-19 Mental Health resources;
- Relevant Council reports, including the following reports that went to Council on September 13, 2021:
 - Homelessness Action Strategy;
 - Crises Response Bylaw Amendments; and
 - Broken Drug Policies.
- Major funding opportunities and their due dates, including the Youth Neighbourhood Small Grants Program and Child Care BC New Spaces Fund; and,
- Requests for Proposals/Expressions of Interest including the upcoming one for the Personal Identification Bank.

Task Force members were asked to send updates to the Food Resource Calendar to Lisa Wambaa, Public Engagement Planning Assistant, as Nazanin Esmaeili, Planning Assistant, is away.

Financial Resources and COVID-19 Updates

With respect to Financial Resources, Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, noted the following:

- The Financial Resources List was last updated on October 13, 2021 and;
- New grant opportunity from the Provincial Government for grants from civil forfeiture proceedings, which will address crime prevention and remediation programs with the call for applications open from October 13, 2021 to November 14, 2021.

Mr. Johnson shared the following COVID-19 updates:

- New Westminster's case rate for the week of October 12th to 18th shows that the city has the 47th highest number of cases out of 87 municipalities;
- The city has a higher than average vaccination rate at 92% overall of the eligible population aged 12 and older;
- There is concern for those aged 50 years and older who have not received vaccinations as the risk of hospitalization and death is higher for that age group; and,
- Deaths have risen greatly recently with 2,086 deaths overall in BC due to COVID-19.

Tenant Resources Update

Mr. Johnson noted that the Tenant Resources Guide was updated on October 14, 2021 and now includes a link to the government guide to dispute resolution.

4. Homelessness Action Week Recap

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, advised that during Homelessness Action Week, which was held from October 10th to 16th, they concentrated on food programming, providing health services, and launching the engagement aspect of the City's Homelessness Action Strategy. It was noted that Mayor Cote provided proclamations for both Homelessness Action Week and World Food Day (October 16th) at the October 4, 2021 Council meeting.

Highlights of the week included:

- Monday – Union Gospel Mission provided 191 full Thanksgiving Day meals;
- Tuesday – Launched the engagement process of the Homelessness Action Strategy with 37 surveys completed, despite the rain keeping many people away. The event was very successful in engaging people and meal vouchers, snack packs, etc., were provided to those who completed the survey;

- Wednesday – Flu vaccination clinics were held at various locations with 32 vaccinations being done. A dental clinic was also held;
- Thursday – A coat drive was held; however, more coats are needed so another coat drive may be held in November at the Honeymoon Suite which is at the lower floor of the Russell Housing Centre. Coats would be distributed at the Sunday meal offerings. It was concerning to see many in flip flops and socks, in the rain, with nowhere to go;
- Friday – Regular Friday meals were given out at the Honeymoon Suite and a shipment from the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC) that included cell phones, 7/11 gift certificates, etc., was handed out related to the Digital Inclusion Initiative;
- Saturday – It was World Food Day and the event wrapped up with soup from Greens and Beans given out at St. Aidan’s Presbyterian Church and Knox Presbyterian Church.

Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, reported that they gave away 85 hot meals and 100 bag lunches which included socks, donated shoes, and clothing items. She advised that the remaining food went to the Health Contact Centre.

5. Food Security Planning Update

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, provided the following updates on food security planning and related programs:

- St. Barnabas Anglican Church has moved their Grab and Go Hamper Program, which regularly serves 50-60 people, from Friday to Wednesday afternoons;
- Recently, 179 hampers went out which is the largest number since the beginning of the pandemic and which could be related to the end and transfer of certain government benefits;
- Less food is being received from gardens and farms at this time which highlights the necessity to diversify food resources so that we are not reliant on limited resources; and,
- The Century House Food Program was successfully moved to the Legion Manor with 30 meals handed out on Tuesday and 40 on Thursday. Meals are also being dropped off at the Ross Tower and Dunwood Place with 12 clients from Century House also receiving meals.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that the City provided \$90,000 to the Lookout Housing and Health Society for two outreach workers, the second of which has now been hired. He acknowledged that it will be good to get the outreach workers out into the community to connect with people and share resource information and resource access assistance.

In response to a suggestion from a Task Force member that the Survival Resource Guide be posted on bulletin boards at community centres, etc., Mr. Stark shared that the Guide is being updated to be pocket-sized and water resistant. It was

noted that the New Westminster Police Department and the City's Bylaws Department share this resource with vulnerable populations.

6. Free Standing Toilet Pilot Project: Upcoming Engagement

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised of the recent Council report titled, "Downtown Livability Initiatives" regarding immediate and short term actions that would address a variety of issues that are faced in the Downtown core, including human waste which has become a significant issue. He noted that additional work to tackle these challenges include:

- An Expression of Interest to secure a company to provide specialized waste management services in the Downtown;
- Working with the 'I's on the Street,' a micro street cleaning program that provides employment for those with lived experience;
- Addition of a portable toilet at Hyack Square;
- A work plan to provide 24 hour access to various civic facility washrooms;
- Ensure that TransLink washrooms are more readily available; and,
- Request that faith-based and non-profit organizations, and possibly other businesses, etc., provide access to their washrooms.

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, announced that there would be upcoming public engagement regarding the possibility of the City acquiring a free-standing toilet, noting that access to washroom facilities is a human rights matter and that this is an immediate need as, currently, there is limited or no access to washroom facilities at all during the later hours of the day. The engagement will also address what will take place over the next little while with respect to these challenges and a possible location for a free-standing washroom, with preliminary engagement having taken place during Homelessness Action Week. Input from various focus groups, including these Task Forces, the business community, and residents will be sought out.

A Task Force member shared that everyone they had spoken with were very appreciative of the portable toilets that the City provided near the start of the pandemic and were disappointed when they had to be removed.

7. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, provided the following updates:

Extreme Weather Response Program Shelter

Mr. Stark noted that the Extreme Weather Response Program operates yearly from November 1st to March 31st; however, the City does not currently have a Program shelter, although a possible shelter site has been identified. The shelter under consideration could accommodate up to 50 individuals and is fully accessible. The City is currently in discussion with BC Housing about the site to provide funding for the shelter, as well as for masks, bedding, and other supplies required at the site. A

report will be going to Council on November 1, 2021 with the hope that the shelter will be open shortly afterwards.

Mr. Stark shared that Mayor Cote recently met with the Honorable David Eby, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing, and informed him, based on the case supported by staff, the Extreme Weather Response Program shelter was not ideal and that a 24 hour, 7 day a week shelter is really what the City requires to provide accommodation for people year round and which would also help to address other issues such as human waste, etc. Mr. Eby agreed to follow up with Mayor Cote on this issue.

In response to the suggestion that tents with heat, etc., be set up in parking lots to keep people warm and dry as we wait for the extreme weather shelter location to be finalized, Mr. Stark advised that people with experience to work with those with mental health issues, addictions, etc., would still be required to be on site at any interim extreme weather facility, need funding and oversight from BC Housing, and be large enough to provide adequate social distancing and other COVID-19 protocols. He acknowledged that this could be a consideration moving forward if needed.

Proposed Supportive Housing Projects at 60 to 68 Sixth Street and 350 to 366 Fenton Street

Mr. Stark noted that 60 to 68 Sixth Street will provide 52 supportive housing units and that the second of four public engagement events took place last night. While there is some opposition to it, there are people in support of the housing. This project will be going to Council in December for their consideration and, if approved, it is anticipated that the supportive housing units would be in place within 14-18 months.

Mr. Stark announced that will be public information sessions being held this evening and on Thursday, October 21, 2021, regarding 350 to 366 Fenton Street which would provide 58 supportive non-market housing units.

Further information on these sites can be found at beheardnewwest.ca.

At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force Items

8. Health Contact Centre (Overdose Prevention Site) Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that the Health Contact Centre (HCC) has had close to 800 visits with no overdose deaths. The HCC operates from 3:00 up to 11:00 p.m.; however, it is known that many people use drugs early in the morning and, since the HCC is not open early in the day, public use is being seen more with overdoses during the day. The gap in the morning and early afternoon time needs to be dealt with and will include a funding implication. Currently, the HCC is only being used eight hours a day and being open longer hours would see the facility being more effectively used.

9. Enhanced Personal Identification Services (ID Bank) Expressions of Interest

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised that the ID Bank Initiative came out of this Task Force and that the City has prepared an Expression of Interest (EOI) that is now public and has allocated up to \$20,00 to get the Initiative up and running as a pilot program. The link to the EOI will be included in the weekly newsletter email so that Task Force members can share it within their networks.

10. Identification of Other Issues, and Suggestions to Assist At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations

In response to a suggestion by a Task Force member, staff will contact the City of Burnaby to learn more about their mobile shower trailer to find out about the costs, etc., associated with such a facility.

11. Member Updates

Member updates were received during Agenda Item 16.

Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

Procedural Note: Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, assumed the Chair.

12. Seniors Integrated Support Pilot Project at Ross Tower: Kick Off Event Recap

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Childcare Planning Analyst, advised that:

- Evidence has shown that seniors' independent living residences are often poorly prepared for emergency situations like COVID-19 and extreme heat events, as they are generally less staffed than assisted living facilities, with occupants who have not developed personal emergency plans and procedures;
- The Seniors Services Society is facilitating a project funded by the United Way to deliver a suite of integrated services at Ross Towers, including meal delivery and shuttle services. The City will be part of this project particularly as it relates to emergency preparedness and digital inclusion;
- The City partnered with the Hey Neighbour Collective in February 2020 to help meet this challenge, using Ross Tower as a pilot site; and,
- A kick-off event will be held at Ross Towers on October 7, 2021 from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. which will highlight the work that the Seniors Services Society is doing.

13. Extreme Heat Plan and Debrief

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reported that 34 deaths were associated with the three extreme heat events experienced this summer, with the most deaths being linked to the first event which happened in June. It is noted that

the majority of those deaths occurred to seniors who lived alone in three-story walk up buildings that did not have air conditioning.

Mr. Stark advised that, in order to prepare for future events, New Westminster Fire and Rescue Services have reached out to staff for a complete debrief of the extreme heat events so that a plan can be developed moving forward, including reaching out to the community via Facebook and non-profit organizations that may be able to accommodate cooling centres. He noted that part of the plan will include how to work with residents in three-story walk ups to disseminate information regarding cooling centres and other resources, how to recognize and treat heat stroke, etc.

Mr. Stark shared that during the third extreme heat event, Royal City Taxi was employed to transport people to the cooling centres, and advised that once the draft response plan is complete, it will come to the Task Forces for feedback.

In response to a suggestion from a Task Force member, Mr. Stark shared that a staff member from the Building Division would be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss what is required in new builds and what is required to retrofit HVAC systems in older buildings.

Discussion ensued and a Task Force member suggested that for future extreme heat events, a shuttle service could be provided to transport people from three-storey walk ups, at certain times during the day, to cooling centres.

14. Friendly Support Caller Program

Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society, reported that the last Friendly Support Caller Program volunteer meeting was held on October 7, 2021 during which discussion took place regarding the possible increase in clients that may come about due to the onset of the rainy season. Current volunteers were surveyed and some agreed to taking on one of two extra clients if needed but it was noted that if there is more of a demand, that will have to be addressed.

Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, advised that the number of calls required since the beginning of the pandemic has significantly decreased, which could be a positive sign as it may indicate that people are no longer feeling as isolated as they were at the start of the pandemic.

Mr. San Ramon noted that their clients were grateful for the transportation provided to the cooling centres during the extreme heat events that occurred over the summer.

15. Identification of Other Issues, and Suggestions to Assist Seniors and Persons Living With Disabilities

Discussion ensued regarding dental services access for seniors and Task Force member provided the following comments:

- Affordable dental services for seniors on a limited income is a huge issue as is having to travel far out of the community to utilize available services;
- The University of British Columbia Dental Program that was attached to the Union Gospel Mission is now closed; however, they are looking at other ways to get out to the community;
- Dr. Donnelly has a dental line for free or low-cost dental services;
- Dental colleges may offer discounted or free cleaning and other services; and,
- BC Dental assists families in the School District.

Rick Bloudell, SD 40 Representative, commented that previously seniors from Century House were invited to read to kindergarten students and support with education and development. He noted that the School District is open to connecting with those who work with seniors to restart the program and Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, confirmed that there is interest in doing so.

16. Member Updates

External Member Updates

- Rick Bloudell, SD 40 Representative, announced that the Welcome Centre located at New Westminster Secondary School is now open and welcomes newcomers to the city and shares information about the resources available to them; and,
- Mr. Bloudell shared that the Wellness Centre, also to be located at New Westminster Secondary School, will offer counselling and other self care resources and information to everyone in the community once it opens.

Next Steps & Meeting Schedule

17. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

The next meeting is November 10, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

John Stark, Co-Chair

Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk