



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**

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

PRESENT:

Staff:

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst
John Stark, Co-Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning
Jay Young, Co-Chair/Manager, Recreation Services
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Camille Oliveira, New Westminister Police Department, Vulnerable Persons Liaison
Lindsay Soo-Chan, New Westminister Police Department, Vulnerable Person Liaison
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk

Organizational Representatives:

Rick Bloudell, School District #40
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Rishi Chattarjee, Lookout Housing and Health Society
Calvin Donnelly, Sapperton Old Age Pensioners' Association
Laura Dunne, Westminister House Society
Fay Duxbury, New Westminister Family Place
Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor
Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society
Carter LaFontaine, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice
Richard Leggett, Holy Trinity Cathedral
Bonnie Moriarty, Elizabeth Fry Society of the Lower Mainland
Travis Walker, Site Coordinator, Health Contact Centre
Betina Wheeler, New Westminister Homelessness Coalition Society

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

1. Land Acknowledgment, Introductions & 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 Email Update

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, provided an update on the community resources web portal and weekly newsletter. He reminded Task Force members that the web portal provides resource information including 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.

Mr. Mehdic reviewed the weekly newsletter email that goes out to Task Force members which includes the information provided on the community resources web portal, and also includes highlights of key Council and other reports, major funding opportunities, standing updates for grants and proposals, upcoming events, surveys and interview requests, mental health resources, vaccination updates, etc. He noted that recently the weekly newsletter included information about Laundry Love, a program to provide laundry services to the unsheltered and vulnerable population, links to Council reports regarding Temporary Use Permit application for an Extreme Weather Response Shelter at the 502 Columbia Street and two Official Community Plan and Rezoning applications for supportive housing projects.

Task Force members were encouraged to forward relevant items of interest to Mr. Mehdic for inclusion in the weekly newsletter.

Financial Resources and COVID-19 Updates

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, advised that:

- The List of Financial Supports has been recently updated and will continue to be updated on a monthly basis;

- COVID-19 infection numbers are dropping in New Westminster with infection numbers and deaths decreasing in British Columbia overall;
- The vaccine is now available for children aged 5 to 11 years old. Parents can register their children for vaccinations on the Provincial Government website; and,
- Vaccines are now available at Century House in New Westminster; however, this is currently not listed on the Fraser Health website but is expected to be soon.

Tenant Resources Update

Mr. Johnson noted that the Tenant Resources Guide was last updated on November 10, 2021 and would be updated again in mid-December.

4. Food Security Plans Update

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

- 930 hampers are going out through the five food security and resource hubs;
- Food supply levels remain stable; however, with recent events resulting in interruptions to the supply chain and panic buying, there may be an impact as there may be nothing left in the stores for donation, in particular, milk, which could be an issue moving forward. This will, however, depend on where the foodbanks source their foods; and,
- Food security will continue to be an important issue moving forward with the increased cost of living which could lead to homelessness for some people.

Shower Initiative

Ms. Wheeler reported that the decommissioning of the Canada Games Pool will not impact the shower initiative which is now run out of Centennial Community Centre on Friday afternoons. She advised that updated posters regarding the shower initiative went out recently and that there has been a decrease by over half in the number of people participating in the initiative with 47 people utilizing the showers in October/November.

Shower Initiative

Ms. Wheeler shared that, Laundry Love, a laundry program which provides free access to services at a laundromat for the unsheltered and vulnerable population will soon be implemented and, as such, a survey was conducted through Facebook to determine where in the city this program would work best with a lot of feedback being received from the Queensborough community. Staff will begin approaching laundromats next week to see if they are interested in participating in the program

and volunteers will also be sought to help run the program which is anticipated to commence in the New Year.

5. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, provided the following updates regarding shelter and temporary housing:

Extreme Weather Response Program Shelter:

Mr. Stark announced that Council has approved the Temporary Use Permit (TUP) to use the lower floor of 502 Columbia Street (former Army and Navy Department Store) for an Extreme Weather Response Centre to house the unsheltered population during extreme winter weather events, providing up to 50 extreme weather mats. He shared that it is hoped that the facility will eventually transition to a 24 hour, seven days a week shelter.

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

Mr. Stark shared that on Monday, December 6th, a Public Hearing will be held regarding the proposed supportive housing projects at 60 to 68 Sixth Street and 350 to 366 Fenton Street. He noted that the Sixth Street project would help to meet needs of homeless people and, if approved, would take 14 to 18 months to complete for occupancy. Task Force members were advised that they could sign up to speak at the Public Hearing via the City's website.

Mr. Stark noted that, moving forward, the Crises Response Amendment Bylaw, which is also being addressed at Monday's Public Hearing, would make rezoning much easier and facilitate the City's ability to respond to emergencies, provided it is City or Provincial land. He stated that the Bylaw may be expanded to look at non-profit organizations owning land and what uses would be permitted on said land, and that the senior levels of government are uncertain about providing funding if development approvals are not in place.

At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force Items

6. Health Contact Centre (Overdose Prevention Site) Update

Travis Walker, Site Coordinator, Health Contact Centre (HCC), reported that the Health Contact Centre, located at 40 Begbie Street and run by the Lower Mainland Purpose Society, is open from 3:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. He noted that the HCC is an overdose prevention site that offers services related to harm reduction such as naloxone kits and training, referrals and information on available resources, and drug testing. Mr. Walker stated that visits have been down slightly and it was noted by outreach workers that less people are being seen on the street as well, possibly due to inclement weather. In addition, Mr. Walker shared the following information:

- Clients of the HCC are now utilizing the service of a Fluorescence Detected Magnetic Resonance (FDMR) spectrometer drug testing unit which can tell in detail what is in a client's drug supply; and,
- Outreach workers go around the city from 6:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. to provide supplies and resources to those on the street and make them aware of the services available to them at the HCC.

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, shared video which demonstrated how the HCC impacts the lives of its clients and the essential supports it provides to this vulnerable population. He advised that a second video would be shared with Task Force members in the next weekly email newsletter.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised Task Force members that they could attend a Council meeting as a delegation to share the video with Council and make the community better aware of the Health Contact Centre.

7. Enhanced Personal Identification Services Update

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised that the Expression of Interest (EOP) for the Enhanced Personal Identification Services Pilot is now complete and that while a proponent has been selected, they cannot yet be identified.

Mr. Mehdic reminded Task Force members that they had previously raised the importance of personal identification services for vulnerable populations in order to assist them in securing government benefits and/or other financial assistance, housing, etc., and that access to identification became even more necessary since the start of the pandemic. He noted that Council approved the allocation of \$10,000 from the Task Force to be provided for this pilot along with \$10,000 from a Federal Grant for broad community outreach for identification services such as Birth Certificates, Health Care Cards, etc. The pilot will also include the ability to save and store identification information, referrals, advocacy, and other assistance as approved by the City. The potential start date for the pilot is December 6, 2021 and ending on May 31, 2022, for review.

Task Force members were encourage to provide any feedback they had on the pilot project to Mr. Mehdic.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that the need for the program will be evaluated and access to sustainable funding such as grants, etc. will be sought out, with the outcomes being monitored.

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

- Mental health outreach for those who require help in the middle of the night, instead of calling the Police, is needed;

- Fraser Health is working on creating a Mental Health Integrated Response Team and, while it is recognized that it is not ideal, the team would not be active in the middle of the night; however, it is on the staff's radar to advocate for this resource;
- New Westminster Police Department has two Mental Health Liaison Officers who work Monday to Friday. Unfortunately, there is no liaison during the night as the Department is not large enough to provide that support. This can be identified as a gap in the Homelessness Action Strategy;
- In general more outreach workers are needed to, in particular, reach those new to the street, specifically women, to assist them in getting off the street; and,
- The Elizabeth Fry Society sees many women and children that need supportive housing so that they do not stay in unsafe situations. Further information will be provided to John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, so that this can be included in the City's Homelessness Action Strategy.

9. Member Updates

- In Uptown, the 'I's on the Street' (IOTS) program, which is a street cleaning initiative, is working well with five, three hours shifts being run each week. Work is being done with the Elizabeth Fry Society to get the program running in Sapperton and expanding the program with the Lookout Housing and Health Society to six days a week with shifts in both the morning and afternoon;
- IOTS, which has been around for at least 10 years, provides living wage employment for those with lived experience and is a way to provide stability to achieve goals such as employment training, other volunteer work, etc., to those who are vulnerable; and,
- The City awarded a \$90,000 contract for enhanced outreach to the Lookout Housing and Health Society and staff has requested that the contract be extended to the end of 2022. This request will be going to Council as a budget request.

Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

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

10. Friendly Support Caller Program

The Seniors Services Society, reported that the Friendly Support Caller program currently has 20 registered seniors participating, and nine volunteers. The average participant is 78 years of age and that recently there has been a total of 28 calls, totaling 544 minutes, with the average length of a call being 19 minutes.

11. Ross Tower Pilot Project: Emergency Preparedness Component Discussion

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, shared that people are increasingly susceptible to crises situations such as the pandemic and recent extreme weather events which saw many seniors passing away due to the heat, highlighting their vulnerability. He noted that seniors in independent living residences may not have necessary supports and are even more vulnerable if they are isolated. In addition, many of these residences do not have emergency preparedness plans and only have an on-site building manager who is not responsible for the wellbeing of tenants.

In order to address this issue, Council supported a partnership with the Hey Neighbour Collective to facilitate social connectedness, community engagement, and resilience in these residences. As a result, the Collective has undertaken a pilot project at the Ross Tower, a BC Housing managed building that has 101 units of subsidized housing, for emergency preparedness, social programming and other interventions. Mr. Mehdic noted that the Seniors Services Society was already providing light housekeeping services, meal deliveries, and shuttle services to a number of seniors in the building through their two-year Seniors Integrated Support Pilot Program.

Mr. Mehdic advised that the emergency preparedness aspect of the project would be addressed with New Westminster Fire and Rescue Services who would assist in creating a plan that would involve the on-site coordinator, Ross Tower residents, Seniors Services Society, the City, and BC Housing.

Many residents are very interested in participating in the program which will be implemented in other, similar, residential buildings over time.

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

There were no comments.

13. Member Updates

- The Elizabeth Fry Society has been awarded a project in Burnaby to provide housing for women and children which will be up and running soon;
- The New Westminster Police Department will deliver toys donated by Amazon to the Elizabeth Fry Society for their clients;
- Westminster House Society has created an Amazon “wish list” on their website for donations. And, while they will not be conducting home visits this year, they are always looking for donations of warm boots and coats at this time of year; and,
- Westminster House Society raised over \$4,000 during Giving Tuesday for a new washer and dryer and encourages other organizations to try this fund raising avenue next year.

Next Step & Meeting Schedule

14. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that there would not be a meeting on December 22, 2021 due to the holidays and that the next meeting would be scheduled for early to mid-January.

Mr. Stark reminded Task Force member to remember the importance of giving and reaching out to those less fortunate and vulnerable and wished everyone a safe and enjoyable Holiday Season.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

John Stark, Co-Chair

Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk