



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**

May 5, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

(Due to precautionary health measures, only City staff are permitted to personally attend meetings)

PRESENT (in Person):

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, Development Services

PRESENT (via Teleconference):

Staff:

John Stark, Co-Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning
Jay Young, Co-Chair/Manager, Recreation Services
Karen Campbell, Policy Planner, Development Services
Alison Ching, Recreation Leader, Parks & Recreation
Constable Camille Oliveira, New Westminister Police Department
Bal Varn, Bylaw Officer/Tenant Support
Paolo Zenone, Recreation Leader, Park & Recreation
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk, Legislative Services

Organizational Representatives:

Rick Bloudell, School District #40
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Calvin Donnelly, Sapperton Old Age Pensioners' Association
Fay Duxbury, New Westminister Family Place
Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor
Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience
Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society
Carter LaFontaine, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice
Jennifer Lee, Union Gospel Mission
Richard Leggett, Holy Trinity Cathedral
Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society/NWOCAT
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. Introductions & Roll Call

Introductions and a roll call took place.

2. Joint Meeting Minutes

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded members that they are not verbatim and are intended to help those who miss meetings keep up to date.

Joint Task Force Items

3. Update on Standing Items

Task Force Web Portal and Weekly Email Update

Anur Mehdić, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, reminded Task Force members that the Web Portal is a one-stop shop that provides information and links to residents including Key Information and Resources for Tenants, the List of Financial Supports, the Food Resources Calendar, the Survival Resources Guide, information on the Friendly Support Caller Program, and the COVID-19 Trusted Links and Resources List.

Mr. Mehdić noted that in addition to the Web Portal, a weekly email is sent out to Task Force members which highlights the above mentioned resource information as well as other relative information such as grants and funding links from both the Provincial and Federal Governments, tax filing assistance locations, vaccine and immunization information, mental health resources, etc.

Financial Resources Update

Anur Mehdić, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised that the Provincial Government has implemented job protection leave for employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and that people have until June 30, 2021 to apply for the BC Recovery Benefit.

Tenant Resources Update

Karen Campbell, Policy Planner, advised that there are no updates since the last Task Force meeting and that she was helping to update the Tenant Resource document on the Web Portal and the City's website. She reminded members that the rent freeze for tenants was extended to December 20, 2021; however, this does not apply to

commercial tenancies, non-profit housing, cooperative housing, and some assisted living facilities.

Youth Services Update

Paolo Zenone, Recreation Leader, provided various updates, including:

- Youth Week is currently taking place with events happening throughout the week such as the Mad Max Scavenger Hunt, the window of memories, the Youth Awards, a hoop shoot contest, etc.;
- Youth attending Youth Week activities receive a take-away bag of youth swag; and,
- The youth resource list is currently being updated and members are encouraged to send additions to the list to Paolo.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that a Welcome Centre for Newcomers will be opening in the new secondary school which will be a one-stop shop for newcomers to get oriented to the city and be referred to various settlement organizations to help them meet their needs. He noted that a Wellness Centre will also be opening on site to provide an array of health services, including mental health services which will be available to youth and young adults.

A Task Force member suggested that it would be useful if the City provided credit education to youth with respect to how to achieve and maintain a good credit rating.

4. Food Security Plans Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, and Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, advised of food security planning and program updates, including:

- The City previously received \$101,000 through the Federal Government's Reaching Home Program which is supporting five food security and resource hubs and, recently, an amendment contract was signed for an additional \$56,000 for a three month period to extend this essential programming;
- It is hoped that there will be another intake under the Reaching Home Program in July 2021 and that the City will again be able to extend funding;
- Staff are working on ways to sustain the five hubs past the pandemic as they are addressing important community needs;
- 290 hampers a week are being provided to people through the five food security and resource hubs and recently purchased shoes and unisex hoodies will also be given out at the hubs;

- St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church food and resource hub continues to provide 17 meals to those picking up food hampers and there is capacity to give out 20 meals with the hampers;
- Reusable, non-plastic bags were given out two weeks ago and a system is in place with Fraser Health to facilitate the reuse of the bags which will not only save money but help the environment;
- The City has applied to the Strengthening Communities' Services Program for additional funding in the amount of \$546,000;
- There is some funding for meal programs such as MOSAIC's Newcomer Feeding the Homeless Project which includes Food Safe and First Aid training as well as other skills;
- Lookout Housing and Health Society clients at the Cliff Block and the Russell Housing Centre are now being supported with nutritious foods as there is a lot of food insecurity in this segment of the population; and,
- Policy development is being worked on for the food security and resource hubs and training on how to write grants is also being conducted.

Discussion ensued, and in response to questions from Task Force members, Mr. Stark and Ms. Wheeler provided the following comments:

- Set foods are put into hampers each week including protein and a lot of fruits and vegetables. When hampers are delivered, it is easier to address specific food requests than when they are picked up which increases volunteer workloads; however, if someone does not want an item that is in their hamper, they may place it in a box that is provided for such instances, and the item will be handed out the following week; and,
- Work is being done with a local butcher to secure meat protein for the hampers.

Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor, shared that Legion Manor residents share their unwanted food with those in the Manor who may need it.

5. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that while a lot of progress is being made in securing a location for an Emergency Response Centre (ERC), details cannot be released until things are finalized; however, there is the potential for at least one ERC location and possibly a second, both of which may require Temporary Use Permits. He stated that the 25 to 50 ERC beds would be available for 12-18 months after which time the residents would move on to the longer term, supportive housing units which the City continues to work with BC Housing on and which is anticipated to see up to 50 units being made available in approximately 18 to 24 months.

Mr. Stark noted the increase in the unsheltered population due to pandemic-related physical distancing requirements which decreased the beds available at shelters such as the Cliff Block which went from having 30 spaces available to only 16 available.

In response to a question from a Task Force member regarding helping people clean up their credit in order to qualify for housing, Mr. Stark advised that Family Services of Greater Vancouver offers a money navigator program to assist people with financial essentials and money management, including filing a tax return which is required in order to receive government benefits. He also noted that the New Westminster Rent Bank, to which the City provided \$100,000 of funding, can also assist those in need of loans to help with paying utilities, etc.

Mr. Stark announced that the City is providing \$90,000 for homeless outreach, referral and advocacy services for which a request for proposals has recently gone out as the City is looking to partner with a faith-based or non-profit organization on these issues. He noted that the proposals will be evaluated soon so that the City will be able to offer even more services to those in need.

Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society/NWOCAT, advised that the Lower Mainland Purpose Society offers a COVID housing program that provides finances for temporary rent subsidies, damage deposits, and rental arrears. Additional information on this will be provided in the weekly Task Force email.

At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force Items

6. Health Contact Centre (Overdose Prevention Site) Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded Task Force members that the newly opened Health Contact Centre (HCC) provides, amongst other things, an overdose prevention site, checks for contaminated drugs, health services, etc.

Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society/NWOCAT, shared that in the month that the HCC has been open, it has seen 50 participants, including repeat users, and prevented six overdose deaths. She noted that it is going well and that the goal is to provide enhanced services including more clinical offerings. As well, Ms. Pankratz advised that the grand opening of the HCC was well attended with many people receiving tours of the site, with another outreach to community members taking place on Wednesday, May 12th and invited Task Force members to attend.

Mr. Stark stated that in 2020, there were 35 overdose deaths and in 2019 there were 20 overdose deaths, noting that those who overdosed and were resuscitated are not included in those numbers. He announced that part of the funding anticipated to be received through the Strengthening Communities' Services Program would go to support the Health Contact Centre.

A Task Force member shared that she had visited the site and was impressed at how respectful and discretely the clients were going to be treated, adding that nobody should be ashamed of going there.

7. Laundry and Shower Initiatives

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, shared that the shower program is going so well that it is challenging to keep up with the demand as many of those partaking in the initiative are returning up to four times. As such, she will be meeting with Canada Games Pool staff to determine how repeat clients can be accommodated, ensure that supplies are given out in an equitable manner, and how the initiative could run through the summer months as programs at the pool increase, leaving less time for patrons to access the showers. Ms. Wheeler will provide a further update on this at the next meeting.

In response to a question from a Task Force member, Ms. Wheeler advised that with the very challenging logistics of towel return and pick up, participants are given a towel to keep at each visit which increases the cost of the initiative.

With respect to the laundry initiative, Ms. Wheeler noted that while some people are participating in the initiative, most street entrenched people do not have enough belongings to make participation worth their while. She advised that as the focus on homeless people was not effective, a bulk purchase of laundry soap will be done with the soap being given out at the food security and resource hubs and that agreements with local laundromats will allow people to patronize their businesses and use the soap they have received from the hubs.

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

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that, as a result of the decrease in accessible washrooms, the increase in human waste in the Downtown area, and costs to maintain portable toilets which are often vandalized, staff are researching the longer-term solution of freestanding, self-cleaning toilets by contacting other cities who have them in order to determine if they would be appropriate for New Westminster. Mr. Stark noted that they are expensive, must be hooked up utility infrastructure, and would be available 24 hours a day. In advance of a report going to Council with the research findings, this item will come back to the Task Force for input to help inform the Council report.

In the meantime, Mr. Stark advised that interim measures include clean waste wag bags and a washroom trailer which would require oversight by a faith-based or other non-profit organization.

9. Member Updates

No updates were received.

Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

10. Friendly Support Caller Program

Alison Ching, Recreation Leader, shared that the Program has a total of 15 volunteers and 30 clients. She noted that since the last meeting there was a total of 39 calls made over 785 minutes, averaging 20.13 minutes per call.

Ms. Ching advised that there has not been a volunteer meeting since the last Task Force meeting and that clients are doing well and experiencing no major issues.

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, stated that the Walkers' Caucus could probably help with a walking buddy program.

11. Identification of Other Issues and Suggestions to Assist Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities

- The City could consider providing wheelchair accessible washrooms that include both shower and laundry facilities in them;
- The implementation of a walking buddy program for seniors who are stuck at home during the pandemic; and,
- Assistance for seniors with respect to credit checks and a maintaining good credit as good credit is required to secure rental housing.

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, suggested that the Walkers' Caucus may be able to help with a walking buddy program.

13. Member Updates

External Member Updates

- Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience, announced that New Horizons is creating 12 safety and technology videos which will be shared on YouTube. She encouraged Task Force members to share their ideas with her;
- Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, announced that New Westminster Family Place has been a recipient of items returned to Amazon and noted that products received thus far have been great and that, while they can be strategic with their asks to Amazon, they do not know what will arrive in the trucks and storage space is required; and,

- Ms. Wheeler advised that there may be opportunities with MOSAIC's Newcomer Feeding the Homeless Project to assist in the transition of the Tuesday and Thursday meal program run out of Century House.

Staff Member Updates

- Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised that the City has partnered with the Hey Neighbour Collective, an initiative to help facilitate social connectedness and resilience in multi-unit buildings. He shared that the City has a pilot building where this initiative will be implemented, noting that the building has a large number of senior renters. He asked Task Force members to consider how to integrate social connectedness in residential buildings with seniors, as this will be revisited at a future meeting; and,
- Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, announced that TransLink has partnered with Fraser Health to help seniors and vulnerable people get to vaccination centres, and that once someone has registered for a vaccination, they may then register for transportation to the vaccination centre through the Fraser Health website.

Next Step & Meeting Schedule

14. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

Mr. Young thanked everyone for their input and advised that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday, May 26, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 2:19 p.m.

Original Signed
John Stark, Co-Chair

Original Signed
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk