



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**

July 7, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

(Due to precautionary health measures, meetings are held virtually)

PRESENT (via Teleconference):

Staff:

John Stark, Co-Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning
Jay Young, Co-Chair/Manager, Recreation Services
Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, Development Services
Constable Camille Oliveira, New Westminster Police Department
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Paolo Zenone, Recreation Leader, Park & Recreation
Bal Varn, Bylaw Officer, Tenant Support Coordinator

Organizational Representatives:

Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Housing Society
Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society
Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience
Natalie Johnston, Fraser Health, Community Health Specialist
Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Patricia Steiner, Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Travis Walker, Site Coordinator, Health Contact Centre
Wazhma Wakil, Umbrella Multicultural Health Co-op

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 the minutes are not verbatim and are a summary of the meeting, capturing key discussion points and are a good reference for members who may not be able to attend all of 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, reminded Task Force members that the purpose of the Web Portal is to help individuals and faith-based and non-profit organizations access reliable information and support resources. He noted that it is updated regularly and includes such references as Key Information and Resources for Tenants, the List of Financial Supports, the Food Resources Calendar, information on the Friendly Support Caller Program, the Survival Resources Guide, and the COVID-19 Trusted Links and Resources List.

Mr. Mehdic advised that the weekly Task Force Summary email includes all of the information listed above as well as:

- Updates on vaccinations and other time sensitive material;
- Information on the Accessible British Columbia Act; and,
- Funding opportunities and upcoming events such as the “What’s Up Doc”, through the Northwest Division of Family Practice, in which physicians provide information to the public on health-related issues.

Financial Resources and COVID-19 Updates

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, advised of the following opportunities and updates which are included in the List of Financial Resources:

- The Canada Workers’ Benefit, a refundable tax credit for low income individuals and families, which can be applied for at the time of tax filing;
- A Call for Proposals for a grant for systemic change informed by Gladue Principles to address Indigenous overrepresentation in the criminal justice system;
- The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy have been extended to September 25, 2021; and,
- Canadian Heritage announced new funding for arts, culture, heritage, and sports programs.

Mr. Johnson shared some COVID-19 statistics, included but not limited to:

- In June 2021 the City had 70 new COVID-19 cases during the entire month which is less than a quarter of the cases seen in May of 2021;
- Between January 2021 and June 2021, the City had 2,762 total cases of COVID-19, or about 3.4 percent of the population; and,
- As of July 6, 2021, 83 percent of New Westminster residents 12 years of age and older had received at least one dose of the vaccine

Tenant Resources Update

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised of the following:

- As of July 1, 2021, changes have been introduced to further protect tenants from evictions for the purpose of renovations;
- The rent increase freeze has been extended until December 31, 2021; and,
- In 2022 rent increases will be capped at the rate of inflation.

Youth Services Update

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

- As restrictions have lifted, Youth Services has removed the pod protocol that was in place and youth are now free to move around the Youth Centre with social distancing and mask wearing being encouraged;
- Information on programs such as Royal City Sound DJs and gardening can be found at newwestyouth.ca; and,
- A drop in for middle school aged youth is being offered at the Youth Centre on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, announced that as part of the New Westminster Secondary School there will be two new spaces including a Wellness Centre, which is anticipated to open in mid-fall, as well as a Welcome Centre, which is expected to open in late-summer, early fall to offer settlement support for newcomers.

4. Food Security Plans Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised of food security planning and program updates, including:

- On July 5, 2021 a grant application was submitted under the Reaching Home Grant Program requesting \$181,000. Previously, the City received approximately \$190, 000 under the Program which went to support the five

food security and resource hubs, shower and laundry programs, portable toilets, and other initiatives. If the latest request is approved, the monies will provide continued support for the food security and resource hubs, which are feeding approximately 750 people weekly, and other programs previously mentioned. The funding would run through to March 31, 2022;

- A food hub grocery challenge will take place from July 1 to 24, 2021 in support of the St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church and the St. Barnabas Anglican Church food hubs. Community members will be challenged to fill a bag with the most needed items and drop it off at one of the hubs. An advertisement poster for the challenge will be included in the weekly Task Force summary email; and,
- Conversations are taking place about moving beyond emergency food supplies and determining how New Westminster can become a more food secure city.

5. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that Council provided \$90,000 for homeless outreach and advocacy services, with Lookout Housing and Health Society being awarded the contract to provide those services. To date, they have retained two outreach workers who will assist staff in better addressing the needs of the city's precariously housed and unsheltered population.

Mr. Stark acknowledged that securing a space for emergency shelter continues to be very challenging but assured members that the city will continue to work with BC Housing to meet the goal of having 50 emergency response shelter beds in place by the fall or winter.

Additionally, the City continues working to provide up to 52 units of supportive housing with a report going to Council in mid-August/early September regarding a possible location and rezoning considerations which may be expedited in order to have the units available in the next 18 months.

Mr. Stark advised that the 16 emergency shelter beds at the Cliff Block are not wheelchair accessible; however, the goal is that the new shelter beds and supportive housing be fully accessible.

With respect to safe housing for youth, Mr. Stark shared that staff are in discussions with the Spirit of the Children Society to develop a safe house for youth in New Westminster which would have an Indigenous focus but could also accommodate other youth. It was noted that previous discussions with the City of Burnaby regarding a youth safe house were unsuccessful due to lack of operational funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

6. Health Contact Centre (Overdose Prevention Site) Update

Travis Walker, Site Coordinator of the Health Contact Centre (HCC), advised that the HCC has been open for three months and that visits remain steady. He noted that, while visits dropped off a bit during the heatwave, staff were able to provide cold water and information about the cooling centres and the signs of heat exhaustion to those who did drop in for supplies. Mr. Walker noted that the HCC's Outreach Program, which sees outreach workers making connections in the community and providing support and resource information to people, has been running for a few weeks and is going well. Task Force members were encouraged to let Mr. Walker know of locations where there are people who may benefit from a visit from the outreach workers.

Mr. Walker shared that their Community Advisory Committee, which offers a space for community members and local business owners to share any concerns or suggestions they may have about the HCC, meets approximately once per month. Task Force members were asked to let him know if they or anyone they know would like to be involved with the Committee.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that as of June 23, 2021 there were 12 overdoses at the HCC, none resulting in death, which shows the importance of the HCC. He noted that the City will be contacting Fraser Health regarding extending the hours of the HCC so that it is open for people to visit during the morning hours.

7. ID Bank Update

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, shared that those in the community who do not have appropriate identification to apply for government benefits become even more vulnerable. As such, a report will be submitted to Council requesting that previously allocated and unused funding be reallocated to support an ID Bank service in New Westminster at which clients can receive support to apply and store their Birth Certificate and other types of BC identification documents, which will allow them to apply for various government supports. He advised that it will be requested that \$10,000 be reallocated from the previous Task Force budget to support the ID Bank for the short term, with the goal of the initiative being funded by additional Reaching Home Grant funding over the long term, as well as other funding streams as they become available. A call for proposals will go out to secure a non-profit organization to run the program, including provision of a safe place to store identification documents.

Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society, noted that they, too, need safe storage for advanced care planning information that can be accessed 24 hours a day. Mr. Stark advised that staff will investigate storing that information along with identification documents.

8. Reaching Home Grant Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that if the requested \$181,000 Reaching Home Grant Program funding is successful, it will fund the five food security and resource hubs until March 31, 2022, as well as the ID Bank, portable toilets, shower program and other initiatives. He advised that this may be the last intake of funding requests for the Reaching Home Grant Program.

9. Strengthening Communities' Services Program Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded members that the City requested funding in the amount of \$464,000 under the Strengthening Communities' Services Program to meet the essential needs of the at-risk and vulnerable population, including enhanced drop-in services, meal programming, and outreach. In addition, funding will be allocated for the following:

- \$127,000 for the I's on the Street Program, which will have those with lived experience paid to clean the neighbourhood enabling them to gain work experience and education, while addressing business and resident concerns;
- \$50,000 for the Health Contact Centre for enhanced outreach;
- Additional funding for coordination services through the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society;
- Funding for the New West Hospice Society to enable individuals in precarious situations to make end of life decisions and to have those decisions documented and filed in the event that they become incapacitated; and
- \$75,000 to apply an Indigenous lens to all of the city's homelessness services, in partnership with the Spirit of the Children Society and the Musqueam Indian Band.

Mr. Stark advised that if both funding requests are successful, they will provide about \$1,200,000 to assist faith-based and non-profit organizations that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 with respect to both funding and volunteer base.

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

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that access to washrooms for the unsheltered, seniors, and persons with disabilities, an issue identified through both Task Forces, was recently discussed at the Inter-Departmental Working Group on

Homelessness. The group discussed the research conducted on free standing, self-cleaning toilets, noting that data indicated that they are expensive to install and maintain. As such, staff are exploring free-standing, pre-fabricated toilets similar to the Portland Loo. He advised that the working group will also work with TransLink to enhance access to their toilet facilities at SkyTrain stations and that keeping washrooms in parks open for extended periods of time may also be a consideration, although they would be vulnerable to vandalism if left open overnight.

11. Member Updates - No updates were provide.

Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, assumed the Chair.

12. Friendly Support Caller Program

On behalf of Karl San Ramon of the Seniors Services Society, Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, advised that currently there are the total 12 volunteers, 25 clients averaging 77 years of age, and that a total of 34 calls were made over the last three weeks averaging 21 minutes per call. He noted that one person was no longer in need of the service and that it would be interesting to see if more clients opt out as businesses and facilities continue to re-open.

13. Extreme Heat Event

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that hundreds of people over the lower mainland died suddenly during the extreme heat event, many of them seniors living alone, noting that the City has a large number of older, non air conditioned, three-storey walk-up buildings that are occupied by seniors living alone. He shared that extreme heat precautionary information was circulated to faith-based and non-profit organizations, and that funding was available through the Task Force to purchase bottled water for those organizations to share with their clients and others requiring assistance. Additionally, work was done with Emergency Services to distribute bottled water at Hyack Square and the city opened two cooling centres.

Mr. Stark advised that a debriefing of the city's extreme heat response is being conducted to determine how the needs of the more vulnerable populations can be met during an event such as this. The Extreme Weather Response Plan, which includes a distribution list for extreme weather alerts to faith-based and non-profit organizations during cold weather could be used as a template for extreme heat events moving forward to better coordinate a response.

Additionally, Mr. Stark announced that \$15,000 of funding will go towards work with the Hey Neighbour Collective and the Seniors Services Society to enhance social

connectedness and emergency preparedness at Ross Tower, a pilot site, which is managed by BC Housing and houses low-income seniors, most of whom live alone. The Hey Neighbour Collective is also applying for a grant to sustain funding of the initiative for an additional two years. Learnings from the initiative may be applied to the three-story walk-ups in the city.

Mr. Young advised that both Century House and the Queensborough Community Centre were opened up as cooling centres during the extreme heat event and that the number of visitors to the centres increased steadily over the weekend and into the beginning of the week and included people of all ages.

Mr. Stark noted that the challenge moving forward would be how to reach out to seniors living alone and who are not affiliated with groups and programs, and that keeping the centres open overnight will also be addressed.

14. Amazon Donation

Constable Camille Oliveira, New Westminster Police Department (NWPD), advised that they were approached last month by Amazon Canada regarding donation of returned goods for the Police Department to distribute to charitable organizations, noting that yesterday they received \$12,000 worth of merchandise and non-perishable food which volunteers will separate out for non-profit partners, including the food security and resource hubs and various shelters. She shared that this will be an ongoing project between the NWPD and Amazon.

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

- Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, advised that volunteers could be sought for the suggested Walking Buddy Program or someone to join seniors in their homes for a cup of tea, possibly through Century House or the Friendly Support Caller Program. However, the Seniors Peer Counselling Program does allow for seniors to be visited in their own homes and tables at Century House are now available for people, even those without a membership, to meet up for visits;
- John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that through the Hey Neighbour pilot program at the Ross Tower, the Seniors Services Society, through the Better at Home Program, will be providing a suite of services, including implementing social connectedness initiatives through a social coordinator/programmer. Part of this program may also include the Parks and Recreation Department providing in-house services;
- New West Hospice Society and the Seniors Services Society are starting a navigation-type program to assist seniors in getting their social needs met which will increase their chances of better health;

- The Chamber of Commerce and the Massey Theatre are raising funds to assist those affected by the recent wildfires, and air quality also needs to be considered in the extreme heat response;
- Century House, the Queensborough Community Centre, and other civic facilities are open to everyone, whether as cooling centres or not, and will facilitate older bodies adjusting to the change in temperatures after an extreme heat event; and,
- Information that seniors can obtain a wheelchair through the Red Cross could be shared on the website and other ways.

16. Member Updates

Staff Updates

- The dinner program that has been operating out of Century House, Mr. Young advised that they are looking at alternate location options in the Uptown area that would target seniors and ensure that all of the food is being used.

Member Updates

- The Health Services Association Union, Westminster House, and Empty Cradle will be holding a community memorial service on October 9, 2021 called, “Grief and Gratitude: A Path to Healing” to assist those experiencing grief due to a variety of reasons; and,
- Videos are being made for seniors and vulnerable populations, including one that was just completed on assisted sailing. Information to be provided in the weekly email.

Next Step & Meeting Schedule

17. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, thanked everyone for their input and stated that the next meeting will be on August 18, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

Original Signed
John Stark, Co-Chair

Original Signed
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk