

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

**January 12, 2022 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
Nayel Halim, Community Energy and Emissions Specialist
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Bal Varn, Bylaw Officer/Tenant Support Coordinator
Camille Oliveira, New Westminster Police Department, Vulnerable Persons Liaison
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk

Organizational Representatives:

Rick Bloudell, School District #40
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Calvin Donnelly, Sapperton Old Age Pensioners' Association
Laura Dunne, Westminster House Society
Fay Duxbury, New Westminster Family Place
Lynda Fletcher Gordon – Lower Mainland Purpose Society
Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience
Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society
Natalie Johnston, Fraser Health Authority
Carter LaFontaine, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice
Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society
Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society

Guest:

Rowan Burdge, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

The meeting convened at 1:03 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.

Procedural note: In order to accommodate Nayel Halim, Community Energy and Emissions Specialist's schedule, agenda Item 8: Equity in Climate Action, was addressed first, followed by the remainder of agenda items.

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 noting that the Web Portal provides resource information such as 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 and encouraged Task Force members to forward to him, relevant items of interest for inclusion in the newsletter. He shared that Upfront Updates can be found at the top of the email and includes such items as the Identification Bank Pilot Program, etc. The Newsletter also provides information and updates on Council and other relevant reports, major funding opportunities, upcoming events such as the January 19, 2022 Plain Language Workshop and the January 26, 2022 Building Bridges Workshop, surveys, interview requests, mental wellness resource information, vaccination and testing centres updates, etc.

Financial Resources and COVID-19 Updates

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, advised of the following:

- The List of Financial Supports was updated on January 10, 2022 with respect to the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) subsidy, the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) subsidy, the Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit, the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, and the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit; and,
- As of January 1, 2022, employers are mandated to provide up to five days of paid sick leave to employees experiencing illness or injury.

Tenant Resources Update

Mr. Johnson noted that the Tenant Resources Guide was last updated on January 10, 2022, and shared that the rent increase freeze has now ended with the allowable rent increase for 2022 at 1.5 percent.

COVID-19 Statistics

Mr. Johnson shared the following COVID-19 statistics:

- As of January 1, 2022, 19 out of 20 New Westminster residents 12 years of age and older have had at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine;
- New Westminster residents aged 5 to 11 years old have the highest rate of vaccinations than any other geography in the Fraser Health Region; and,
- Hospitalizations of those with the virus have doubled between December 29, 2021 and January 11, 2022.

4. Food Security Planning 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:

- The highest number of hampers was handed out shortly before Christmas with approximately 343 hampers being handed out through the Firehall in Queensborough, St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church, Sapperton, St. Barnabas Anglican Church, and Holy Trinity Cathedral;
- Saturday hamper programs were halted over the holidays;
- Challenges and concerns include the continued increase in demand, food prices, supply chain issues, and the sustainability of food security initiatives as grant programs come to an end;
- Registration to utilize Food Security and Resource Hubs is not required; however, participants have been asked if they are also accessing other services with the understanding that they would not be penalized if they were. It was determined that approximately one quarter of the clients were

using other food resources and that most people visiting the St. Barnabas Anglican Church were from the area; and,

- During a meeting with the Inter-Ministerial Association in November 2021 it was clarified that a coordinated effort between the organizations must be undertaken to strategize and come up with solutions to address the sustainability of the food security programs.

Discussion ensued, and Task Force members noted the following:

- The Lower Mainland Purpose Society distributes 850 to 950 hampers on a weekly basis which is a significant increase from previously. The Society will deliver food hampers if clients are unable to pick them up themselves;
- Volunteerism may be an issue moving forward; and,
- The increased cost of food and supply chain issues are the result of a variety of issues, including recent flooding, not just the pandemic, and we need to plan and be able to address these challenges throughout the year.

In response to suggestions from Task Force members, Mr. Stark advised that a meeting would be scheduled for those involved in food programming to address the ending of grants and to explore sustainability options. He agreed that a policy or provision could be looked into wherein grocery stores could donate consumable, past due food, or unsold food from closing grocery stores, to food security programs.

5. Shelter and Temporary Housing Updates

Extreme Weather Response Program Shelter (EWRPS)

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, announced that there are currently 65 Extreme Weather Response beds with up to 50 mats and/or cots located at 502 Columbia Street (former Army and Navy Department Store) and up to 15 mats at The Russel Housing facility. These will be in effect during extreme weather until March 31, 2022. He noted that opening the Shelter took a lot of collaboration with a number of organizations over a short period of time and learnings from the process will be used moving forward.

Mr. Stark advised that, in collaboration with the Lower Mainland Purpose Society, a Warming Centre was opened over the Christmas period at the Health Contact Centre which operated from 11:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. over four nights providing an opportunity for people to go inside and warm up. He noted that discussions with New Westminster Fire and Rescue Services are ongoing with respect to emergency preparedness management and how to work more closely with faith-based and non-profit organizations moving forward.

Lynda Fletcher Gordon, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, shared gratitude for the assistance provided by the New Westminster Police Department and New Westminster Fire and Rescue Services.

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homeless Coalition Society, advised that there were noticeably less people on the street since the Shelter opened.

Proposed Supportive Housing Projects at 60 to 68 Sixth Street

Mr. Stark shared that Council has approved the 52 modular supportive housing units at 60 to 68 Sixth Street for people who are experiencing homelessness.

At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force Items

6. Community Action Network (CAN) 2022 Overview

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, introduced Rowan Burdge the Provincial Director of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (BCPRC). He noted that in 2019, Council directed staff to partner with the BCPRC in order to involve those with lived and living experience in poverty and homelessness in the Community Action Network Leadership Training Program. Mr. Mehdic also advised that in 2021, seven training sessions of the Program were completed involving 10 participants, eight of which are now supporting a number of City initiatives such as the Digital Inclusion Initiative, the Sanctuary City Policy, Homelessness Action Strategy, etc.

Rowan Burdge provided a presentation which outlined the CAN 2022 Program and recruitment, including:

- It is anticipated that the first of the seven CAN training sessions, a low-barrier leadership program, being run in 2022, will commence in April;
- The aim of the Program is to build communities with strong relationships and leadership to impact poverty reduction work through continuous engagement of Program graduates;
- The curriculum includes seven workshops over seven Fridays, during which food, transit tickets, child care (either provided on site, or for which a stipend is supplied), etc., are provided in order to keep the Program as low barrier as possible; and,
- Each workshop addresses specific topics, such as public speaking, etc., and no previous training is required.

Currently, 12 participants are being sought for the April Program, which is being run in New Westminster, and Task Force members were encouraged to share information about the Program with anyone they think may be interested in participating.

In response to a request from a Task Force member, Rowan advised that they are hosting an open house and would also be willing to attend other types of engagement to share the information outlined, which may help motivate people to participate in the Program.

Discussion ensued and a Task Force member stated that an online open house event may not reach the target audience as many of them are not online.

7. Enhanced Personal Identification Services Update

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, announced that the Enhanced Personal Identification Services Initiative is now up and running.

Lynda Fletcher Gordon of the Lower Mainland Purpose Society shared that they have had six referrals and that staff are able to respond to calls, emails, and walk-ins, and that outreach workers are also aware of the initiative and have application forms for clients who wish to participate. Ms. Fletcher Gordon stated that the initiative, which is widely available in New Westminster, is anticipated to be very successful given the current activity being seen.

Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, advised that their staff have been informed of the Enhanced Personal Identification Services which may result in even more participants.

8. Equity in Climate Action/Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) 2050 Engagement Workshop

Nayel Halim, Community Energy and Emissions Specialist, provided a brief presentation regarding New Westminster's Community and Emissions Plan (CEEP) 2050 and an upcoming workshop, including:

- The CEEP 2050 will help the City to reduce energy and emissions thereby achieving the City's climate action objectives;
- The Plan will inform City decision making over the next 30 years with respect to land use, waste management, sustainable transportation, and energy infrastructure; and,
- A workshop will be held on January 25, 2022 to share updates of the Plan and to seek input from underrepresented groups to receive diverse perspectives to support achieving the objectives of the Plan.

Discussion ensued and a Task Force member suggested that, in order to get more people interested in providing input into the Community Energy and Emissions Plan 2050, additional information should be included in the advertising material so that people know more specifically what the Plan is and how their input will facilitate it being put into action.

Staff encouraged Task Force members to share the Workshop information through their own social media platforms and advised that the City would be sharing the information through the regular distribution process (website, social media, email, etc.).

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

There were no comments.

10. Member Updates

Staff Member Updates

- The Shower Program is still running on Friday afternoons from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Centennial Community Centre; however, a drastic reduction in participation was seen once it became coed;
- Work is still being conducted on the Laundry Love Program with laundromats being sought to host the free Program in communities, such as Queensborough, which are most desirous of it as determined by a recent survey. Everything is in place to host Laundry Love days and, although laundromat owners no longer wish to participate due to COVID-19 concerns, it is still being worked on; and,
- With respect to mental health, the Fraser Health Authority has developed an integrated mental health response team focussed on the unsheltered population and New Westminster Secondary School has a Wellness Centre that is just getting up and running. Staff will look at how mental health in New Westminster can be further addressed.

External Member Updates

- There has been a large increase in the number of seniors going to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction for assistance as they are no longer receiving some benefits and are unable to pay rent, etc., as they may need to transition over to other benefits once they reach the age of 65; and,
- The City of Maple Ridge has funded a homeless hub that includes an on-site shower and washroom trailer and other amenities such as foot care, transportation, etc. Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, will contact Maple Ridge city staff for further information on this initiative.

Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

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

11. Friendly Support Caller Program

Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society (SSS), 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, recently, there have been a total of 18 calls made, totaling 719 minutes, with the average length of a call being 17.7 minutes.

Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, requested direction on the future of the Friendly Support Caller Program from the Task Forces as the agreement for the SSS

to run the Program expired at the end of 2021 and City funding has not been put aside to run the Program in 2022.

Mr. Young queried the feasibility of continuing to run the Program which started at the beginning of the Pandemic during lockdown when many seniors were extremely isolated. During that time, 19 calls were made per week whereas today the Program is seeing only four calls being made per week as seniors have become much less isolated. He asked if more resources should be sought to continue the Program and if it should stay with the SSS or return to Century House to be run.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, suggested that the Program could transition to be part of the Seniors Peer Counselling Program or be maintained another way by the City to support the current participants without recruiting more.

Discussion ensued, and Task Force members noted the following:

- We should not be premature in ending the Program as COVID-19 is not going anywhere and numbers may pick up again; and,
- Consideration should be made to possibly rebuilding the Program which may allow help for more clients.

Messrs. Stark and Young advised that this item should be revisited at the end of February and that it could be worked into the budget but that there are other programs and services in place that could possibly fill this void.

12. Seniors Housing Collaborative Introduction

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, informed Task Force members that the Seniors Housing Collaborative (SHC), which is comprised of seniors with lived and living experience, the City, and housing providers, recognizes that low-income seniors experience inadequate access to services and community disconnection due to fragmented senior housing. As such, the SHC is looking to change policies and practices to allow seniors to age in place with appropriate services and strong networks through a list of recommendations for submission to advocacy groups and policy makers. He noted that areas under consideration include building management, the impacts of climate change, government finance programs, government housing programs, etc.

Mr. Mehdic advised that Mariam Larson, Gerontologist, is the Collaborative's Project Manager and will be attending the next meeting to provide further information and receive input from members.

13. Seniors Access to Food Security Programs and Other Support Services

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that seniors' ability to access food security programs and other support services is an issue as transmission of COVID-19 is very high and they may be challenged in accessing programs. He noted that this will be discussed at the upcoming food security meeting.

Discussion ensued and Task Force members shared that many housing resources and food delivery services require a credit card, which many people do not have and which would inhibit their ability to access these necessities.

Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, advised that, when protocol allows, Century House could possibly host an information session regarding how seniors could use pre-paid credit cards to access resources, etc.

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

There were no comments.

15. Member Updates

Laura Dunne, Westminster House Society, announced that this week they opened a solution-focused recovery house for women who have been clean for 90 days or longer.

Next Step & Meeting Schedule

16. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, thanked everyone for their input and advised that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 2, 2022.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Original Signed

John Stark, Co-Chair

Original Signed

Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk