

COVID-19: AT-RISK & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS TASK FORCE

Minutes

April 29, 2020 at 1:00 p.m., Committee Room 2 – City Hall

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

PRESENT (in Person):

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning/Chair
Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst
Rob Dick, Assistant Deputy Fire Chief
Dylan Myers, Acting Emergency Support Services (ESS) Chief Deputy
Mike Antoniali, Acting ESS Operations Coordinator
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk

PRESENT (via Teleconference):

Staff:

Claudia Freire, Housing and Social Planner
Nazanin Esmaeili, Planning Assistant
Shelley Cole, Bylaw Officer, Tenant Support Coordinator
Diana McDaniel, Inspector, New Westminster Police Department
Camille Oliveira, Constable, New Westminster Police Department
Ramona Manzer, Program Coordinator, Centennial Community Centre
Karen Campbell, Planner
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Silisha Ali, Youth Program Coordinator
Ryan Weber, Program Coordinator, Queensborough Community Centre

Organizational Representatives:

Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Edith Tazumi, Union Gospel Mission
Linda Fletcher-Gordon, Lower Mainland Purpose Society for Youth and Families
Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society
Lorrie Wasyliw, Monarch Place (WINGS)
Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society
Leonard Levy, Lookout Housing and Health Society
Sukhdeep Jassar, Fraser Health
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Allison Luke, New West Mental Health and Addictions Centre
Kaley Merritt, Westminster House Society
Ingrid Timmermans, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice
Mavis Brownlee, St. Barnabas Anglican Church
Esther Hsieh, Umbrella Multicultural Health Co-op
The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m.

1. Introductions

Task Force members introduced themselves.

2. Review of Draft Minutes

No comments were provided.

3. Update on Actions Taken Since Meeting of April 22, 2020

Tenant Support Resources

Karen Campbell, Planner, announced that the City is focusing on getting tenant support information to tenants, as some are overwhelmed and do not know where to begin or where to look for information. She shared that staff are working on the creation of an information fact sheet which will be available to members soon.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that Council emphasized the importance of getting tenant support information distributed as widely as possible; therefore, staff will disseminate the information through the Record, BC ACORN, the New West Tenants Union, etc.

Youth Services Update

Ryan Weber, Program Coordinator, shared that staff have been working on the following:

- Receiving feedback from other municipalities with respect how they are reaching out to and involving youth in their communities;
- Developing a plan for a virtual Youth Week from May 1st to 7th, as well as virtual programming beyond May 7th which would include video counseling, etc.;
- Exploring the expansion of the Youth website to include information related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and,
- Food insecurity outreach, noting that this particular issue does not seem to be impacting the youth that they connected with.

Discussion ensued and a Task Force member advised that the upcoming rent payment due date will be a problem for many people and will have a huge impact on the Rent Bank which will only get worse over time.

John Stark, Supervisor of Community Planning, informed members that there is a need for increased subsidies as opposed to loans or deferrals, which have to be paid back.

He noted that if a commonality of issues with other cities is discovered, then municipalities may be able to advocate on behalf of renters.

Mr. Stark also advised of the development of a Task Force Bulletin which will highlight new programs and be another way of getting information out and letting the community know what the Task Force is working on.

4. Food Security Plans Update

Claudia Freire, Housing and Social Planner, and Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, shared food security plan updates including:

- This was the second week of the hamper delivery program which the City is running in partnership with the Greater Vancouver Food Bank for seniors and those with disabilities who normally use the food bank but are currently unable to access it;
- St. Barnabas Anglican Church has started a Friday Grab and Go food program;
- St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church is working on implementing a food program that will run on Saturdays;
- Staff are reaching out to organizations to establish more food resources in the east end of the City;
- A report went to Council regarding the Food Security Plan which highlighted new programs and, per Council's request to ensure broad information sharing, staff are working with the Communications Department regarding doing a possible mailout, sharing more on social media, etc.; and,
- The Lower Mainland Purpose Society also has a hamper program; however, it is dependent on the availability of delivery drivers. Those interested can submit a hamper request form via fax, email, or in person.

Mr. Stark also advised that a balance needs to be found with respect to ensuring that the increasing demand for food can be met, while still marketing the programs.

5. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor of Community Planning, informed members that the emergency shelter would be in place for May and June, with the possibility of month to month extensions depending on the need and availability of the facility being used. Mr. Stark also shared that, while the temporary housing site which will house 40 people via a referral process cannot be publicly announced yet, the goal is to have it operational by May 15th, and be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week by an experienced non-profit organization. A committee or task force will be established to address concerns as they arise.

In response to questions from Task Force members, Mr. Stark advised:

- The shelter will likely be for adults; therefore, shelter needs for youth should be investigated, including what may be available in other municipalities;
- Staff will follow up with BC Housing to determine if the shelter will be able to accommodate a co-ed population; and,
- The Elizabeth Fry Society, along with BC Housing, is placing women at the Inn at the Quay as some women may be reluctant to be in the presence of males.

6. Proposal to Increase Digital Inclusion and Connection

Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, advised of the Digital Inclusion Initiative with Douglas College wherein donation of tech devices are being sought to be provided to those in need in order to keep them connected to resources and their support systems. She shared that TELUS has already donated phones for 911 and online access and that there will be an option of desktop computers for those that are housed. She added that expansion of the City's public Wi-Fi would be helpful in getting people online, including the creation of hot spots.

A Task Force member suggested that the devices be pre-programmed to allow the users access to websites regarding health care, etc.

7. Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic

John Stark, Supervisor of Community Planning, shared that several members have reached out with concerns for those with mental health issues and their ability to stay connected with others, get counselling and other support, etc.

Allison Luke, New West Mental Health and Addictions Centre (NWMHAC), shared that they are continuing to receive referrals and providing services, some in person but most over the phone or by video. She advised that while they have discontinued group sessions, they are working to resume the anxiety/depression groups on a virtual platform, stating that since not all of their clients have online access, the Digital Inclusion Initiative will help out.

Ms. Luke reminded members that the Survival Resource Guide includes the phone number for the NWMHAC. It was noted that Fraser Health also has a crisis line for those in need.

In response to a suggestion from a Task Force member, Mr. Stark advised that staff will look into including additional information outlining the precautionary measures taken at food resource pick up sites to ease concerns of those who may be anxious about attending these programs due to proximity of others, etc.

8. Identification of Other Issues

- Staff will provide information regarding the protocols in place for those taking family members to the hospital;
- As reductions have been made to public transit operations, members were encouraged to email staff if they have clients affected by these reductions and experiencing difficulty getting to work, picking-up food, attending appointments, etc., as the City may have to advocate for more transit as the reductions also affect essential workers; and,
- Staff to follow-up on the loss of the Uptown shuttle which affects a lot of seniors.

9. Member Updates

Staff Updates

Ramona Manzer, Program Coordinator, shared that interest has been expressed in developing a strategy to address the issue of social connectedness, and that the Kids New West website will be able to assist families who are finding it difficult to keep kids busy, especially when parents are working from home.

External Member Updates

- St. Barnabas Anglican Church started their grocery hamper program last week and had just under 20 people being served in two hours; and,
- The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction office is still open from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays for personal visits, with precautions in place; however, members were encouraged to continue emailing and calling the office with enquiries.

10. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, announced that a new task force is being created to address recovery from the pandemic with one of the issues being addressed being the depletion of fundraising and volunteerism in the faith and non-profit sector. Mr. Stark stated that, as needs will continue even after the pandemic is over, staff want to be prepared to act on funding opportunities that the government may offer. Claudia Freire, Housing and Social Planner will be the staff lead for the new task force and will be reaching out to organizations accordingly.

The meeting adjourned at 2:07 p.m.

Original Signed
John Stark
Chair

Original Signed
Carilyn Cook
Committee Clerk