

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

Minutes

September 30, 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, Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning
Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk

PRESENT (via Teleconference):

Staff:

Paolo Zenone, Recreation Leader, Youth Services
Karen Campbell, Policy Planner
Shelley Cole, Bylaw Officer, Tenant Support Coordinator
Jacklyn Altamura, Recreation Supervisor, Century House
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst

Organizational Representatives:

Rick Bloudell, School District #40
Constable Camille Oliveira, NWPD
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Erin Daly, Fraser Health Authority
Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society
Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society
Shannon Patrick, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Linda Fletcher-Gordon, Lower Mainland Purpose Society
Edith Tazumi, Union Gospel Mission

The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m.

1. Introductions

Task Force members introduced themselves.

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, took a few minutes to acknowledge Orange Shirt Day, emphasizing the importance of remembering those who were and continue to be affected by the residential school system.

2. Review of Draft Minutes

No comments were received.

3. Update on Actions Taken Since Meeting of August 4, 2020

Task Force Web Portal Update

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised that staff continue to keep the Web Portal, a central repository for all COVID-19 related resource information, up to date. He noted that the meeting follow up emails also provide a variety of links to trusted resources and that federal, provincial, and municipal information sources around COVID-19 remain up to date. Resource information that can be found on the Web Portal include: the Food Resources Guide, the Survival Resources Guide, the List of Financial Supports, etc. Members were urged to let staff know of additional updates or information that should be added to the site.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that the Task Force's Second Wave Plan will be added to the Web Portal to inform the community of what to expect if we have to roll back to Phases 1 or 2 during the pandemic.

Financial Resources Update

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, shared that new Employment Insurance (EI) benefits were under discussion by the Federal Government, noting that the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) ended on September 27th and that EI will cover the loss of that benefit.

Mr. Johnson advised that an updated version of the List of Financial Resources will soon be posted on the Task Force Web Portal. As the list is updated bi-weekly, usually with a fair amount of new information, members were urged to visit it regularly.

Youth Services Update

Paolo Zenone, Recreation Leader, advised that the Youth Centre is open and they are currently doing outreach programs throughout the city, with youth staff visiting various locations to touch base with youth in the community. He announced the start of a new scavenger hunt type of game in which youth find painted rocks throughout the city and post photos of them on social media, and noted that the centre is preparing for a possible rollback to Phase 1 or Phase 2.

Tenant Resources Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that tenant resource information on the Task Force Web Portal remains relatively unchanged since the last meeting and encouraged members to review the last meeting's follow up email for further information.

4. Food Security Plans Update

Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society, and Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, shared food security plan updates including:

- Volunteer training and reviews have taken place at the St. Aidan's Presbyterian food hub to ensure safety; however, volunteers are still needed. Further discussions regarding the anticipated second wave and how that will be addressed will also occur;
- The Greater Vancouver Food Bank Program will continue to run out of the Olivet Baptist Church until an appropriate indoor venue can be secured for use over the winter months; and,
- The Lower Mainland Purpose Society continues its programs through the Health Van, etc.

Other Program Updates

- Edith Tazumi, Union Gospel Mission, announced that the Union Gospel Mission will serve a Thanksgiving meal out the door on Friday, October 9, 2020 between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. The Mission will be closed on Thanksgiving Monday; however, a meal will be offered at the Honeymoon Suite, in the Russell Housing Centre, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.;
- John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that staff met with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction during the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) convention regarding both the New Westminster Rent Bank (NWRB) and the City's proposed pilot program to address sustainable funding for food security programs. He shared that the Ministry considers the NWRB a leading practice model and would like to continue supporting it, and they are interested in learning more about the pilot food program but did not commit to funding at this time; and,
- Linda Fletcher-Gordon, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, shared that they have recently applied for additional funding for the NWRB to assist with other issues that people may encounter such as truck rental for moving, etc.

5. Partnership with the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (BCPRC) on Community Action Network (CAN) Training Program

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, provided a brief reminder of the CAN Training Program noting that the sessions, which will include training on advocacy, committee structure, etc., will be starting on Friday, October 9, 2020 and those interested can find more information on program registration in the meeting's follow up email.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, note that there are five of 15 spaces left for the program, and that a report will be going to Council with respect to graduates of the program receiving compensation, child care reimbursement, transit passes, etc., for their participation in assisting staff to ensure that City policies, programs and facilities are fully inclusive

6. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that the City, along with BC Housing, has identified a site for up to 50 units of supportive housing but is unable to disclose the location at this time. He advised that Selina Robinson, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, indicated that supportive housing is preferred over an emergency shelter, as supportive housing would provide tenants housing for two years or longer.

Regarding the Federal Government's Reaching Home Program and Rapid Housing Initiative, Mr. Stark informed members that the City is looking to identify potential opportunities and support services for the homeless or those at risk of homelessness.

Mr. Stark reminded members that the Mazarine Lodge is now open and providing supportive housing for women 19 years of age or older. He shared that a community advisory committee meeting will be held in October to discuss this housing and noted that more resources are needed to move people off of the street and into supportive housing.

7. Interdepartmental Working Group on the Overdose Epidemic

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that the city is above the provincial average in overdose deaths and that on Monday, October 5, 2020, the Fraser Health Authority will provide a presentation to Council regarding an overdose prevention site, which would serve the larger New Westminster community, and to explore a safe supply program. Currently, the Fraser Health Authority is seeking a location for an overdose prevention site that offers both indoor and outdoor space, as well as a nonprofit operator to run the site.

Linda Fletcher-Gordon, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, stated that in response to overdoses, Naloxone is administered a great number of times but is not necessarily recorded or noted anywhere; therefore, overdoses may be under reported.

8. Identification of Other Issues

- John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is still hard to access or cost prohibitive for some organizations and encouraged Task Force members from faith and non profit organizations who are experiencing this to contact staff for approval and assistance in procuring PPE; and,
- Linda Fletcher-Gordon, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, advised of the need for non low-barrier shelters to house those who do not feel safe or comfortable around drug use and who may choose to stay outside in effort to avoid being near drugs.

9. Member Updates

- Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society, stated that smoke from the Pier Park fire and the California wildfires had an impact on the Downtown community which stressed the need for an air quality response by the City. She noted that residents of the Downtown had nowhere to go to get out of the smoke and that buildings with poor ventilation actually brought smoke inside. In response, Mr. Stark advised that the City is currently debriefing on recent fire and air quality issues to determine how to move forward and be prepared for similar events in the future, and that the City would like to work with BC Housing with respect to additional shelter capacity for extreme heat and poor air quality events.

10. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

Discussion ensued regarding the frequency of Task Force meetings and members agreed to continue with bi-weekly meetings until more is known about the anticipated second wave of the pandemic and reevaluate meeting times during the second week in November.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, thanked members for their input and advised that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 14th.

The meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

Original Signed _____
John Stark
Chair

Original Signed _____
Carilyn Cook
Committee Clerk