



Corporation of the City of  
**NEW WESTMINSTER**

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

**March 3, 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

Jacklyn Altamura, Co-Chair/Recreation Supervisor, Century House

Karen Campbell, Policy Planner, Development Services

Alison Ching, Recreation Leader, Parks & Recreation

Shelley Cole, Tenant Support Coordinator, Integrated Services

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, Development Services

Ramona Manzer, Program Coordinator, Community Recreation, Parks & Recreation

Constable Camille Oliveira, New Westminister Police Department

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

Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor

Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society

Carter LaFontaine, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice

Allison Luke, New Westminister Mental Health and Addictions Centre

Richard Leggett, Holy Trinity Cathedral

Bonnie Moriarty, Elizabeth Fry Society of the Lower Mainland

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 the minutes are not verbatim but capture key items during the meeting and are a good way to catch up if you miss a meeting.

## **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 members that the web portal is updated regularly and includes COVID-19 resource information such as Key Information and Resources for Tenants, the List of Financial Supports, the Food Resources Calendar, the Survival Resources Guide, and the COVID-19 Trusted Links and Resources List.

Mr. Mehdic, also reminded members of the weekly resource emails that are sent out and now include a colour legend to make the emails, which include a large amount of resource information, more user friendly. He encouraged members to let staff know how the information outlined in the emails can be made more accessible to the community.

### *Financial Resources Update*

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, advised that it is anticipated that the List of Financial Supports will be updated by the end of the week, and shared that he has been working with the New Westminster Public Library on the creation of a list of tax assistance resources.

Mr. Johnson provided a review of COVID-19 statistics by sharing three graphs which outlined the number of COVID-19 cases in New Westminster per month in comparison to other municipalities, peak case times, etc.

Mr. Johnson announced that seniors 90 years of age and older and Indigenous people can soon start booking for their vaccinations via phone or online, advising members

to contact Fraser Health directly for full information, noting that links to vaccination information will be included in the weekly email.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that vaccination sites may not be initially offered in all cities and that, as New Westminster is a smaller municipality, the closest site may be located in Burnaby. He advised that consideration will need to be made to transporting seniors and other vulnerable people to vaccination sites, adding that he will follow up with Mr. Johnson on possible options for transportation such as taxi vouchers, transit passes, etc.

The Venerable Richard Leggett advised that he has not yet received a response from Fraser Health regarding the offer to use the Holy Trinity Cathedral as a vaccination site, and Mr. Stark agreed to follow up with them, acknowledging that they are probably extremely busy with all aspects of the vaccination roll out.

### *Tenant Resources Update*

Karen Campbell, Policy Planner, advised of the following:

- The Provincial Government has announced changes to legislation which, if passed, will include, amongst other things:
  - Extending the rent freeze to December 2021;
  - Capping future rent increases at inflation rates;
  - Starting on July 1, 2021, landlords will be required to apply to a Residential Tenancy Branch before they can end a tenancy agreement for renovation; and,
  - Landlords will not be able to evict tenants who can remain in place while renovations are underway.

It was noted that these significant changes will be reflected in the Resources for Tenants document, and Ms. Campbell will work with Mr. Mehdic to share the information through the New West Record, flyers in food hampers, etc., to ensure that it reaches as many people as possible.

### *Youth Services Update*

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

- Spring Break events will be starting soon; however, Youth Services will be closed on Saturdays during Spring Break;
- A podcast linked with the Leaders in Training Program will be starting soon on Mondays and Wednesday and will address a different topic each week such as mental health; and,

- Overall, Youth Services has been busy but did experience a slight decline in attendance due to inclement weather.

#### **4. Food Security Plans Update**

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

- The hot meal program run out of St. Aidan’s Presbyterian Church is now at capacity;
- Many new people are being seen at the food security and resource hubs, including populations that have not utilized them in the past;
- St. Aidan’s Presbyterian Church, Knox Presbyterian Church, and the Queensborough food and resource hubs, which are currently assisting 143 households, are moving away from canned goods and are now purchasing food such as chicken, etc., as a way to supply additional protein and healthier food options which would otherwise be too expensive for patrons to purchase on their own;
- Work will commence on a distribution program of basic pantry grocery bags for those 45 years of age and older who may not qualify for other programs;
- Included in the weekly resource email to members was a pandemic resource list addressing how to eat healthy on a budget, eating disorders, drinking too much, etc., as a lot of questions are coming from people about these topics;
- The Reaching Home (RH) grant program is also assisting MOSAIC with their Newcomer Feeding the Homeless Project which includes Food Safe training and other opportunities for clients; and,
- Funding received by the City through the RH grant program included \$101,000 which was dispersed to non-profit organizations to fund five food security and resource hubs, as well as \$31,000 of which \$9,000 of those proceeds providing portable toilets in the Uptown and Downtown and \$20,000 of the funding going to the Elizabeth Fry Society, the Lower Mainland Purpose Society and the Union Gospel Mission.

#### **5. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update**

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded members of the 10 new extreme weather response mats available at the “Honeymoon Suite” at 740 Carnarvon Street. Currently the Cliff Block is offering 16 physically distanced beds, whereas previously they were able to offer 30 beds.

In response to Constable Camille Oliveira’s enquiry regarding the possibility of opening a warming centre, Mr. Stark advised that Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer, made available the Arbutus, Birch, and Cedar rooms at Century House for a

warming centre; however, offering extreme weather mats for overnight stays when people are most vulnerable to the cold is being prioritized by BC Housing over a warming centre which would face the challenges of physical distancing and securing a non-profit organization to oversee the centre.

Mr. Stark advised that work continues with BC Housing on the Emergency Response Centre (ERC) to accommodate up to 40 people for approximately 18 months, acknowledging that it is very challenging to find a space large enough to accommodate pandemic-related physical distance requirements.

### **At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force Items**

#### **6. New Westminster Overdose Community Action Team (NWOCAT): Anti-Stigma Campaign Survey**

Courtney Pankratz of the Lower Mainland Purpose Society and NWOCAT, shared that NWOCAT is an overdose community action team that includes partnership with Fraser Health, New Westminster Fire and Rescue Services, and others which strive to identify local initiative strategies in response to the overdose crises.

Ms. Pankratz advised of the online anti-stigma campaign that an NWOCAT working group is currently creating to increase access to resources and supports to those who are using drugs alone, as well as to reduce the stigma associated with drug use overall. Ms. Pankratz stated that a public engagement process is currently underway with a survey that was sent out to Task Force members in the weekly resource email, noting that the more people who participate in the survey, which will be translated into multiple languages, the more strategic the campaign will be.

Mr. Stark stated that there is a real connection with COVID-19 pandemic and the overdose epidemic with people who may be isolated and self-medicating and overdosing in private residences, even more so than on the streets, which is the opposite to what most people believe is happening.

#### **7. Health Contact Centre (Overdose Prevention Site) Update**

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded members that the Lower Mainland Purpose Society was selected to operate the Health Contact Centre (HCC) and has applied for a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) as an overdose prevention site is currently not permitted on the site. He noted that recently a public information session was held and that feedback received is generally a combination of those supportive, those opposed, and those seeking more information. A report regarding the HCC will be going to Council on March 29, 2021 with the hope that that the Centre will open sometime in April at 40 Begbie Street.

Mr. Stark noted that as Council expressed concern that the process time of the TUP may take several months, the Lower Mainland Purpose Society has had peers go out in the community to witness consumption, administer naloxone when needed, and provide referrals in the interim. He reminded members that once open, the HCC will provide witnessed consumption, risk mitigation, drug testing, access to other health care resources, and that neighbourhood sweeps for discarded needles will be conducted on a regular basis.

Courtney Pankratz of the Lower Mainland Purpose Society and NWOCAT, shared that through work with the NWOCAT, a presentation has been developed that aligns with work of the HCC and outlines accurate statistics around the overdose crises, who is most at risk, maintaining safety, and various concerns and strategies. She advised that the presentation has been shared with the staff at the Anvil Centre and can be made available to others interested in learning more about the HCC. It was noted that the Anvil Centre staff found the presentation to be very informative and made them more comfortable in approaching various situations in a more effective and compassionate manner.

## **8. Laundry and Shower Initiatives**

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that, through the Reaching Home grant program, \$4,000 will provide a laundry service through the Lookout Housing and Health Society allowing for people to either drop off their laundry for cleaning, or receive a laundry voucher.

Mr. Stark advised that the shower program is provided by the Parks and Recreation Department along with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, and noted that it is important to have separate times for men and women so that people feel safe and comfortable when participating in the program and, as statistics show that men make up 75% of the street entrenched population, more time is made available for them. Work continues on possibly providing transit passes or other options for participants to get to and from the Canada Games Pool, and that participants receive a courtesy bag upon arrival at the facility which contains such items as a towel, shampoo, soap, toothbrush, granola bar, \$10 A&W meal card, etc.

Mr. Stark also noted that, as the homeless or precariously housed also have very limited access to washrooms, the City has provided three portable washroom facilities, and the City may apply for a Strengthening Communities' Services Program grant to possibly purchase one or two more permanent, free-standing washrooms as an alternative for beyond the pandemic. These washrooms would address the persistent washroom issues with the business community and residents, and the need for enhanced access to washrooms twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

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

- Bonnie Moriarty, Elizabeth Fry Society of the Lower Mainland, advised that the Society is currently housing women and children in two hotels located in Surrey; however, those residencies will end on March 31, 2021. She noted that the loss of the approximate 20 rooms in each hotel will impact New Westminister. In response, John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that, through the Strengthening Communities' Services Program grant application, the City may be able to partner with a local hotel to provide this essential shelter. Mr. Stark and Ms. Moriarty will discuss this issue further after the meeting.
- Ms. Moriarty announced that the Mazarine Lodge in Queensborough has some units available for single women with ties to New Westminister and urged members to share this information with those who may be interested. She advised that while children cannot reside at the Lodge, they can visit;
- Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, announced that he has received donation offer of Pull Ups Training Pants in various sizes for those who need them. Members were urged to contact Mr. Mehdic if they knew of someone who could benefit from this donation; and,
- John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that he will work with Mr. Mehdic on the creation of a posting program for donation and barter items.

## 10. Member Updates

### *Staff Updates*

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, announced that Fraser Health recently posted immunization clinic information including some immunization site locations which John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, noted speaks to the concern of seniors who do may not use public transit and have a difficult time accessing the clinics as they are not located in New Westminister due to it being a smaller municipality.

### **Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items**

Jacklyn Altamura, Recreation Supervisor, Century House, assumed the Chair.

## 11. Friendly Support Caller Program

Alison Ching, Recreation Leader, shared that the Program now has a total of 15 volunteers and 30 clients. She noted that since the last meeting there have been a total of 24 calls made over 589 minutes, averaging 24.5 minutes per call.

Ms. Ching advised that that program is running very smoothly, that there is no one currently on the waitlist, and that clients in need of extra support are connected to the Seniors Services Society and Fraser Health.

## **12. Identification of Other Issues and Suggestions to Assist Seniors and Person Living with Disabilities**

- Constable Camille Oliveira, New Westminster Police Department (NYPD), advised members who live in seniors buildings to call the NYPD's non emergency line if they are experiencing issues such as people sleeping in stairwells, etc., and that if issues are ongoing, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED) assistance can be received through the Department's Crime Prevention Unit and the individuals will be dealt with in a compassionate manner and be connected with outreach workers, shelters, etc.;
- Carts for people to use to bring home groceries or food hampers will be purchased and available through the food security and resources hubs. Members were encouraged to let Betina Wheeler, Coordinator, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, who is in need of cart and they will be added to the list; and,
- Regarding the vaccine rollout and access for seniors, John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that a small working group may be convened to ensure that frail seniors are provided transportation to get to vaccine sites, especially if there are no sites located in the city. He shared that he will contact Fraser Health to ensure that those most in need of the vaccines will have access those sites.

## **13. Member Updates**

No updates were received.

## **Next Step & Meeting Schedule**

## **14. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule**

Ms. Altamura thanked everyone for their feedback and advised that the next joint meeting of the Task Forces will be held on March 24, 2021. Mr. Mehdic advised that this would be the last meeting being held on the GoToMeeting platform and that future meetings will be held via Zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 2:13 p.m.

Original Signed  
**John Stark, Co-Chair**

Original Signed  
**Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk**