

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

**September 29, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.**

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

**PRESENT:**

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, Development Services

**PRESENT (via Teleconference):**

***Staff:***

John Stark, Co-Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning

Jay Young, Co-Chair/Manager, Recreation Services *(joined the meeting at 1:48 p.m.)*

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst

Camille Oliveira, New Westminster Police Department, Vulnerable Persons Liaison

Katie Stobbart, Committee Clerk, Legislative Services

***Organizational Representatives:***

Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society

Rishi Chattarjee, Lookout Housing and Health Society

Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor

Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience

Kay Johnson, New West Hospice Society

Natalie Johnston, Fraser Health

Richard Leggett, Holy Trinity Cathedral

Allison Luke, New Westminster Mental Health and Addictions Centre *(joined the meeting at 1:21 p.m.)*

Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society

Patricia Steiner, Family Services of Greater Vancouver

Travis Walker, Site Coordinator, Health Contact Centre

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society

The meeting convened at 1:01 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 capture key discussion points shared during the meetings. Two sets of minutes will be coming to the Task Force this week.

### 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. Mr. Mehdic highlighted:

- The newsletter is colour-coded with new information in yellow, reminders in green, and mental health resources in purple;
- Updates of the week include the upcoming Homelessness Action Week, the 2022 annual recruitment call for City committees, and the Youth Neighbourhood Small Grants program;
- There was no update this week on tenant supports;
- There is a new section on City Council reports of interest to the group; and
- Upcoming events include New West Hospice Society's community memorial and a caregiver support circle for emotional eating.

### *Financial Resources and COVID-19 Updates*

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, provided the following updates:

- The last monthly financial update was September 15, 2021;
- There is a new BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions' Wellbeing website with a search function for finding services;
- There are new funding programs for residents and non-profit organizations:
  - There is financial assistance available from Canadian Red Cross for BC residents impacted by the 2021 wildfire season, and
  - For non-profit organizations there are two new grants: one being the Anti-Racism Community Engagement Grant, the other is the BC Government's Fairs, Festivals, and Events Recovery Fund;

- There are also two federal programs with changes: the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program now includes ventilation improvements as an eligible project type, and the Canada Small Business Financing Program now accepts non-profit, charitable, and religious enterprises as eligible borrowers;
- 91% of New Westminster residents over the age of 12 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and 85% have received two doses. That leaves approximately 6,600 residents with no doses, and 11,100 who have not yet received two doses;
- In BC, hospitalizations are nearing 10,000 throughout the pandemic, of which just over 5,000 have been in Fraser Health. There are 316 people currently hospitalized in BC due to COVID-19, and 105 in Fraser Health, which only includes active cases, not people who were admitted with COVID-19 and are still in hospital but no longer active. Actual demand on hospitals is likely higher;
- There is an average of six deaths per day currently in BC due to COVID-19. Overall there have been 1,942 confirmed deaths due to COVID-19 over the course of the pandemic, including 967 in Fraser Health; and
- Overall case numbers in BC and Fraser Health seem to be increasing, particularly among children and in schools.

#### *Tenant Resources Update*

No update was provided

#### *Youth Services Update*

No update was provided.

#### **4. Homelessness Action Week**

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, and John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, provided the following updates on activities during Homelessness Action Week:

- Promoting food programming in the community as well as health clinics people might not be aware of, like the dental clinic at Elizabeth Fry and the multi-barrier health clinic at Purpose Society;
- Holding two immunization clinics for the flu shot;
- There will be a food drive for the food security and resource hubs;
- The Union Gospel Mission will do a takeaway Thanksgiving dinner on Monday, and Ms. Wheeler will distribute gift cards at Holy Trinity Cathedral so people have food on Sunday as well;

- World Food Day (Saturday, October 16, 2021) is being scaled down due to COVID-19, but there will be takeaway soup at the food security and resource hubs;
- The Mayor will proclaim the week of October 10 to 16, 2021 as Homelessness Action Week; and
- On Tuesday, October 12, 2021, there will tentatively be an interactive event to get feedback from unhoused individuals, with a meal from Holy Trinity Cathedral at 4:30 or 5:00 p.m.

Mr. Stark also advised that the City is working to update its homelessness strategy, which will include a Community Action Network: a group of people with lived or living experience with homelessness and poverty.

## 5. Food Security Plans Update

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, provided the following updates on food security planning and related programs:

- Currently working to supply demand at the food security and resource hubs, which are now serving nearly 160 hampers per week among the three locations;
- Pacific Immigrant Resources Society is offering English classes at Holy Trinity Cathedral so people can get hampers on their way from English class;
- Have increased quantity of food being given to the Lookout Housing and Health Society, as they will be offering a new community lunch program; and,
- Working with the Holy Trinity Cathedral and the Union Gospel Mission to get meal gift cards out so people will have food over the Thanksgiving weekend.

## 6. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, provided the following updates:

### *Extreme Weather Response Program Shelter*

- The Extreme Weather Response Program operates between November 1 and March 31 each year, providing additional shelter capacity for extreme weather;
- The shelter with 30 beds (20 for men and 10 for women) was offered pre-pandemic at the Cliff Block, which will now be hosting a multidisciplinary health clinic for the unsheltered instead;
- The Lookout Housing and Health Society may be able to offer 10 beds;
- Exploring other options with the Salvation Army, the Elizabeth Fry Society, and BC Housing to have beds in place by November 1, 2021; and,
- Last year the Emergency Response Centre was housed at Massey Theatre gymnasium, but this year BC Housing has been unable to secure a location and

are moving away from emergency shelters in favour of supportive housing. The City is working with the Province for 24/7 emergency shelter capacity, for which the need is approximately 50 beds.

*Proposed Supportive Housing Projects at 68 Sixth Street and 350 to 366 Fenton Street*

- At 68 Sixth Street there will be 52 units of supportive housing for men and women with a history of homelessness—this will go through a review process with consultation, and if all goes well, should be in place within 14 to 18 months;
- At 350 to 366 Fenton Street, there will be 58 units available; this is a partnership between the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Vancouver Native Housing Society; and
- Between those two developments there will be 110 units of new supportive housing.

*Other updates*

- The City has provided \$90,000 to fund two outreach workers being provided through the Lookout Housing and Health Society. One has been hired and one is coming soon.

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

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

Travis Walker, Site Coordinator, Health Contact Centre, provided a brief introduction of the site at 40 Begbie Street, which offers services related to harm reduction. In addition, Mr. Walker provided the following updates:

- Currently, visit numbers are holding steady, with about 150 visits per month for supervised consumption services, and many more for other services offered. Those numbers may increase as the weather gets colder, as more people may look for indoor space to use their drugs and get warm;
- Overdoses had decreased in August but increased again significantly in September, with 10 overdoses—the most in one month since the Health Contact Centre opened;
- According to reports at the Community Advisory Committee meeting, residents have been encountering more discarded needles and open drug use on Clarkson Street between Begbie and Sixth. Outreach workers have been sent to that area more often; and
- Outreach workers are also encountering a lot of unhoused people at the library and in and around Moody Park.

Mr. Walker reminded the Task Force the Community Advisory Committee meets monthly online for community members of New Westminster who have concerns about our unhoused population and the services the Health Contact Centre offers. If Task Force members know of anyone who would like to be involved, they are encouraged to contact Mr. Walker.

In response to comments from the Task Force, Mr. Walker advised that outreach workers have also been visiting the Holy Trinity Cathedral on a nightly basis, where there are a number of corners and niches in which people have been using drugs.

## **8. Enhanced Identification Services (ID Bank) Requests for Proposals**

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, advised:

- Currently in the last stages of finalizing a Request for Proposals looking for a qualified proponent to deliver the services of an ID bank;
- Vulnerable populations can be made more vulnerable when lacking access to identification, so ID banks help safely store that information as well as helping to apply for lost or missing identification;
- Looking for the proponent to provide broad outreach communicating the availability and benefits of the ID bank, to proactively connect with at-risk and vulnerable populations who might require this service, and to demonstrate familiarity with applying for identification service needs and providing assistance or referrals if other needs come up; and
- This service will be offered at least until May 31, 2022, and possibly longer.

In response to questions from the Task Force, John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that as the ID bank will likely be tied to another service, hours may be limited. Though some of the need for the ID bank may be in the event of an emergency, which does not always happen during the day, the service will aim to be proactive to prevent such situations from arising.

Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience, advised that an app called Fongo can connect people to resources and phone services as long as they have WiFi access. Mr. Stark will forward that information to the Digital Inclusion Initiative group.

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

There were no updates.

## 10. Member Updates

### *Staff Updates*

- Anur Mehdic, Housing and Childcare Planning Analyst, noted there will be a welcoming ceremony to open the community space at the new secondary school on Saturday, October 10, 2021 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.; and
- John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that the City will be focusing additional resources on the Downtown area, e.g. on 24/7 access to toilet facilities.
  - The Task Force highlighted the importance of wayfinding for toilet facility access.

### *External Member Updates*

- Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, stated that shortly after starting the shower program there, the Canada Games Pool needed to shut down for a next few weeks. In the meantime, the shower program is available from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the adjacent Centennial Community Centre; and
- Allison Luke, New Westminster Mental Health and Addictions Centre, reported that additional annualized funding has been provided to increase the integrated response teams from Fraser Health, including the addition of clinical support workers and peer support workers.

## Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

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

## 11. Seniors Integrated Support Pilot Project at Ross Tower

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Childcare Planning Analyst, advised:

- There is evidence that seniors' independent living residences are often poorly prepared for emergency situations like COVID-19 and extreme heat events, as they are generally less staffed than assisted living facilities, with occupants who have often not developed their own emergency plans and procedures;
- The City partnered with the Hey Neighbour Collective in February 2020 to help meet this challenge, using Ross Tower as a pilot site;
- The Seniors Services Society is locating a project funded by the United Way delivering a suite of integrated services at Ross Towers, including meal

deliveries and shuttle services. The City will be part of this project particularly as it relates to emergency preparedness and digital inclusion;

- Although the initial focus is on Ross Tower, other opportunities are being identified for this kind of project; and
- On October 7, 2021 from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. there will be a kick-off event at Ross Towers to highlight the work the Seniors Services Society is doing, and the City will be there providing resources as well.

In response to questions from the Task Force, Mr. Mehdic advised the project will include design upgrades such as developing areas for people to socialize (lobby areas, gardens, etc.) and opportunities for people to meet each other.

## **12. Friendly Support Caller Program**

Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society, reported that in September, the Friendly Support Caller program had 20 registered seniors participating, and 9 volunteers. The average participant was 78 years of age. There were 27 total calls, totaling 537 minutes, with the average length of a call being just over 19 minutes.

## **12. Century House Food Program**

Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, updated the Task Force that this will be the last week of the food program at Century House. On October 7, 2021 the program will be offered at the Royal City Legion Manor. The second site for Tuesdays has yet to be confirmed, but may move to Dunwood Place.

## **13. Walking Buddy Program**

Jay Young, Manager, Recreation Services, clarified that the suggestion at the last meeting was not to create a new walking buddy group but to integrate into the existing program at Century House. If someone is not a Century House member and cannot afford the fee, Mr. Young assured that cost will not be a barrier to participation.

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

The Task Force discussed access to WiFi as part of the Digital Inclusion Initiative, and noted there is a map of all accessible WiFi locations in the city. As well, low-cost antenna kits are being created to provide to community members and extend the range of the city's free WiFi.

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Childcare Planning Analyst, will ensure a more detailed update on WiFi access is provided at the next meeting.



## 15. Member Updates

There were no updates.

**Procedural note:** Allison Luke, New Westminster Mental Health and Addictions Centre, provided an update that has been recorded under Item 10 – Member Updates.

## Next Steps & Meeting Schedule

## 16. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

The next meeting is October 20, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

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

Original Signed  
**Katie Stobbart, Committee Clerk**