

Community Poverty Reduction Committee

Date: June 25, 2020
Location: Virtual
Time: 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Attendees: John Stark, City of New Westminster
Claudia Freire, City of New Westminster
Tristan Johnson, City of New Westminster
Lisa Paterson, Ministry of Child and Family Development
Christopher Koth, New Westminster Public Library
Elliot Rossiter, Douglas College
Murray Baker, Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Leah Campo, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society
Steven Lamothe, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

1. Introductions:

Notes: Everyone introduced themselves. Lisa Paterson let the group know that there would be a new representative from Fraser Health on the Community Poverty Reduction Committee soon.

2. Pandemic Update and Responses

Notes: John provided an update on the pandemic response, including the City's seven COVID-19 related working groups. Two of these task forces (At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Working Group and the Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Working Group) are related to poverty reduction. John discussed the work and activities of these two working groups, including social connected initiatives for seniors, the Emergency Response Centre at the Massey Complex, and food security programs. These task forces have also produced many resources, including lists of food programs and lists of financial benefits and supports. John also discussed the relationship building between non-profit organizations, the City and other organizations that has occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other members then discussed their own organizations' pandemic responses: Betina discussed her daily updates on resources and funding sources that she sends out to various community partners, Lisa

discussed the taxfiling and financial empowerment challenges during the pandemic, and Murray discussed the Covid-19 Money Navigator and online financial coaching services that the Family Services of Greater Vancouver are offering. The need for a coordinated approach to distributing information and resources was identified as something that had become apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Community Poverty Reduction Strategy Update and Related Initiatives

- **Arts Empowerment, Income Boosting and Social Change Project Grant**
Notes: John provided an update on the Poverty Reduction grant from the Province of British Columbia. The City was successful in its application for \$49,950 for an Arts Empowerment, Income Boosting and Social Change Initiative under the Poverty Reduction and Action Grant Program. Under the grant, \$40,000 is allocated to the Arts Empowerment and Social Change initiative and \$9,950 is allocated to the Income Boosting initiative.

The Arts Empowerment and Social Change initiative will empower residents with lived and living experience in poverty, enabling them to share their experiences through photography, poetry and storytelling. Participants will develop communication and presentation skills, and through mentorship and other opportunities, be connected to the arts and larger community. The experiences documented will form the basis of an on-line or mobile exhibit, which will be used to raise public awareness about poverty. Key outcomes will be to address misinformation and stigma associated with this issue and to provide a call for action for community members – i.e., what can individuals, groups and organizations do to make a difference.

The Income Boosting initiative will assist residents living in poverty to access all of the benefits that they are entitled to receive through the provision of four income boosting clinics. Participants will receive assistance in filing their income tax returns, as well as be able to access coaching, financial empowerment and referral services. Key outcomes will be to maximize income potential based on currently available benefit programs and to identify challenges that could be contributing to their poverty.

- **Community Action Network Training Sessions for Persons with Lived or Living Experience**

Notes: Claudia described the Community Action Network Training Program. In September 2019, Council endorsed a partnership with the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, and the Community Action Network Training Program (CAN), to significantly enhance the City's ability to engage people with lived and living experience of poverty. The CAN program would train up to 15 residents to better enable them to participate in City engagement and decision-making processes and to develop the knowledge and skills to be more effective self-advocates. The program will involve six or seven workshops over a period of approximately two months. The program will also include developing an engagement toolkit for the City that includes principles, guidelines, and resources for meaningfully engaging people with lived and living experience, including potentially engaging graduates from the program to train City staff. Information sessions with faith and non-profit organizations will be held in July to identify potential participants followed by an information session for interested participants. Staff are working with the CAN program staff on the specific dates for the sessions.

- **Food Security Pilot Project Proposal**

Notes: Claudia discussed the food security pilot project proposal. The need for food supports during COVID-19 has significantly increased and while food security programming has increased beyond pre-pandemic levels, it is not keeping up with increased demand associated with employment disruption and personal income reductions. Recognizing the increasing need for food supports, the City, in collaboration with the At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations and Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Task Forces, has taken on a coordinating role in food security response, including related to planning, food sourcing, packing, distribution, and grant writing.

With the announcement of the BC Restart Plan, the current model of support for these programs is not sustainable in the medium to long term, as local governments will soon begin to transition to a modified version of business as usual. At the same time, as federal and provincial financial subsidies and supports come to an end, the need for food supports is expected to increase beyond pre-pandemic levels. Local faith and non-profit organizations have also pointed to a need for longer-term food security planning and responses that are sustainable and that build capacity in the faith and non-profit

sector. In response the City is proposing to develop a pilot food security strategy on planning and response for COVID-19 recovery. The pilot strategy would build on the programming put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and on the City's Food Security Action Plan (FSAP), endorsed by Council in October 2018. In this way, current and future programming would be developed and supported within the framework of the FSAP and would build capacity in the organizations delivering programs and sustainability for current and future food security planning and delivery. The scope of the proposed strategy will be upwards of one year, and include supports for a possible second wave of COVID-19. The City will be seeking senior government funding, possibly from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to develop the pilot strategy.

4. Other Business

- Digital Inclusion

Notes: Issues related to digital inclusion were discussed. Concerns related to seniors isolation and a lack of access to technology for seniors and persons with disabilities were discussed. The New Westminster Public Library's role in assisting with technology access, including free wifi and the loaning of computers, was also discussed. The City of New Westminster described their program with Douglas College in connecting persons experiencing homelessness with phones and internet access, as well as the Province of British Columbia's program (through SPARC BC) to provide phones and internet access to persons experiencing homelessness.

- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Notes: The attendees from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction discussed their programs and the desire for input and feedback from persons with lived experience of poverty in regards to the services that they provide moving forward.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development

Notes: Local offices are open. Centralized screening phone number (1800-663-9122) Social workers and Child & Youth mental health clinicians are available. Please get in contact if families need support.

5. Next Meeting – Proposed for September

Notes: A meeting will be set up for September 2020 at a later date.