

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

January 13, 2021 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):

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst

PRESENT (via Teleconference):

Staff:

John Stark, Co-Chair/Supervisor, Community Planning
Jacklyn Altamura, Co-Chair/Recreation Supervisor, Century House
Karen Campbell, Policy Planner
Alison Ching, Recreation Leader
Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst
Ramona Manzer, Program Coordinator, Community Recreation
Constable Camille Oliveira, New Westminster Police Department
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk

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
Vivian Garcia, Spinal Cord Injury BC/Lived Experience
Tim Hicks, Century House
Carter LaFontaine, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice
Jennifer Lee, Union Gospel Mission
Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society/NWOCAT
Karl San Ramon, Seniors Services Society
Pat Steiner, Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Rocio Vasquez, Family Service of Greater Vancouver
Betina Wheeler, New Westminster 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 Pending

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised that the minutes of the last two meetings would be sent out prior to the next 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 was developed to provide information and access to the various pandemic-related resources available, including 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 noted that the weekly Task Force emails also include information regarding the resources stated above, as well as links to City surveys, relevant Council or external reports, and upcoming meeting schedules and events. Members were encouraged to contact Mr. Mehdic regarding additions or corrections to information shared in the emails or on the City's website.

Financial Resources Update

Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, advised of a number of new government grants available to faith and non-profit organizations, including the Federal Government's Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, the Canada Summer Jobs Grant, the Canadian Women's Foundation's Safer and Stronger Grant for organizations offering significant gender-based violence supports and services to women, as well as the Provincial Government's Poverty Reduction Grant. Mr. Johnson noted that these grants will be included in the List of Financial Supports and included in the follow-up email.

Tenant Resources Update

Karen Campbell, Policy Planner, clarified that the Provincial Government's freeze on rent increases, which has been extended to July 20, 2021, does not include commercial rentals, non-profit housing, or assisted living facilities.

Youth Services Update

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

- The Youth Centre weight room is now open with COVID-19 protocols in place;
- The Youth Resource Guide has been updated and is now on the Youth Services website. Task Force members were invited to let Mr. Zenone know of any corrections or additional information that can be added to the Guide;
- The Youth Services model has been modified with the merging of age groups, resulting in programs being open to youth aged 11 to 18 years of age; and,
- Questions regarding registration in programs are now answered in video format at newwestyouth.ca.

4. New Tax Filing Partnership

Rocio Vasquez, Family Service of Greater Vancouver, advised that she, Lisa Paterson of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, ACORN, and Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, have been working together to provide aid to people who need to file their income taxes in order to access government benefits, noting that those in need of this support can call 1-800-609-3202 for assistance. Ms. Vasquez added that although the Federal Government does not accept online tax filings from January 23 to February 23, 2021, paper filings will still be accepted during that time period.

Mr. Johnson reminded members that in order to receive the BC Recovery Benefit, applicants must have filed their 2019 taxes.

Ms. Vasquez shared that Family Services of Greater Vancouver also advocates for those requiring assistance in accessing other benefits or community resources such as credit counselling, etc.

5. Food Security Plans Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, Betina Wheeler, New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, and Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society/NOWCAT, advised of food security plan and program updates, including:

- The City has been approved for funding from the Federal Government’s Reaching Home Initiative (RHI), which will be used to support up to five food security and resource hubs;
- Discussions with faith and non-profit organizations regarding how to most efficiently use the funding, which must be used by March 31, 2021, suggest that the funds may be put towards such items as community notice boards, program sandwich boards, extending the WiFi at food hub sites, personal protective equipment, shopping buggies for people to get their groceries home, canopies and tents for outdoor support programs, as well as more personal items such as ponchos, socks, feminine hygiene products, etc.;
- The City has also recently applied to the RHI for additional funding to cover the costs of portable toilets and to assist faith and non-profit organizations supply basic aid to those in need; and,
- The Lower Mainland Purpose Society’s Hamper Program continues to serve approximately 900 people per day and is still receiving referrals.

Mr. Stark thanked the faith and non-profit organizations and others who have served and continue to serve the community throughout the pandemic, noting that their efforts are greatly appreciated.

6. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded Task Force members that the contract for the Emergency Response Centre (ERC) to remain at the Massey Gym was not renewed due to the new high school not being complete, resulting in the School District’s need for the gym. Therefore, the City, along with BC Housing, has identified another site for the ERC which the parties are planning to move forward. Mr. Stark advised that the site, which will require a Temporary Use Permit from the City, could accommodate 40 to 50 people for approximately 18 months at which time it is anticipated that those remaining at the ERC would transition to the supportive housing units that the City is hoping to make available through BC Housing and the Federal Government’s Rapid Housing Initiative.

Mr. Stark noted that the ERC, which has been a challenging project, is anticipated to be open by spring or summer 2021 and that an upcoming Report to Council regarding the ERC will be shared with Task Force members.

At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force Items

7. Health Contact Centre Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, announced that a Downtown location for the Health Contact Centre is in the process of being secured and will require a Temporary Use Permit from the City. As well, Fraser Health has selected a non-profit

operator for the Centre and additional information will be made public by the end of January 2021. Mr. Stark noted that in 2020 there were over 30 overdose deaths in New Westminster which speaks to the necessity for the Centre. He acknowledged the link between the pandemic and less access to resources which has resulted in an increase in mental health issues and overdose deaths.

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

- In response to a member's enquiry, John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, offered to contact the Fraser Health Authority and report back to the Task Forces with respect to the prioritization of front line workers, including volunteers, during the planned roll out of COVID-19 vaccinations; and,
- Mr. Stark advised of emails received regarding access to showers and the continuation of portable toilets for unsheltered community members and noted that, through the Parks and Recreation Department, the City is seeking access to showers and has also reached out to several faith and non-profit organizations for advice. He advised that those desirous of utilizing available shower facilities would be required to make an appointment beforehand and that access to showers will be available at the Canada Games Pool, with COVID-19 protocols in place. With respect to the portable toilets, it is hoped that funding will be received to maintain the three existing portable toilets beyond March 31, 2021 and that, unfortunately, some have had issues with drug use and vandalism which becomes costly.

9. Member Updates

Rick Bloudell, School District #40, announced the upcoming Parents' Night Out Zoom event, "Nurturing Emotional Resilience and Well-Being for Ourselves and Our Children" which will be held on February 2, 2021 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. An event flyer will be shared with Task Force members after the meeting.

Mr. Bloudell also advised that, in light of financial restraints many families find themselves in due to the pandemic, after school programs will now either be free of charge or cost a maximum of \$25.00 in order to ensure that they are as accessible and barrier free as possible.

Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Force Items

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

10. Friendly Support Caller Program

Alison Ching, Recreation Leader, shared that the Program now has a total of 15 volunteers and 31 clients. She noted that from December 18, 2020 to January 12, 2021, 66 calls were made over 1,572 minutes, averaging 24.12 minutes per call, and advised that no issues were reported over the Holiday Season as clients have managed well during this time.

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

- Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, will contact the Transportation Division's Task Force representative regarding a map of the City's accessible parking spaces; and,
- Sharon Ennis, Royal City Legion Manor advised that she met with the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition's Community Action Network regarding the Provincial Government's \$300 reduction to disability benefits. She shared that they will be lobbying the Government to address and stop the reduction and requested that Task Force members contact her if they have any suggestions or experiences to share in support of their cause.

13. Member Updates

- Karl San Ramon, Seniors Support Services, shared that seniors can call the Society at 604-520-6621 to book an appointment for assistance in applying for the BC Recovery Benefit; and,
- Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, stated that the City continues working with Douglas College and the Lower Mainland Purpose Society on the Digital Inclusion Project, which will provide digital access to Internet education, and tech resources to assist people with accessing government grants and resources. Additional information will be shared at the next meeting.

Next Step & Meeting Schedule

14. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

Jacklyn Altamura, Recreation Supervisor, Century House, advised that the next meeting of the Task Forces will be held on Wednesday, January 27, 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 2:22 p.m.

Original Signed _____
John Stark, Co-Chair

Original Signed _____
Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk