

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

Minutes

September 16, 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
Ramona Manzer, Program Coordinator, Centennial Community Centre

Organizational Representatives:

Rick Bloudell, School District #40
Melita Caissie, Fraserside Community Services Society
Erin Daly, Fraser Health Authority
Richard Leggett, Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral
Allison Luke, New Westminster Mental Health and Addictions Centre
Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society
Ingrid Timmermans, Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice
Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society

The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m.

1. Introductions

Task Force members introduced themselves.

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, shared that updates to information on the Task Force Web Portal continue to be made, including to Key Information and Resources for Tenants, the List of Financial Supports, the Food Resources Guide, as well as the Survival Resources Guide which includes information on emergency shelters, health and harm reduction services, etc. Members were urged to regularly visit the Web Portal and to let staff know of any additional resource information or updates which could be added to the resource documents.

Tenant Resources Update

Karen Campbell, Policy Planner, announced that since the August 5, 2020 Task Force meeting, a number of changes affecting tenants have occurred, including:

- As of August 18, 2020, tenants may now be evicted for non-payment of rent owed before March 18, 2020 or after August 18, 2020; however, both parties can enter into a repayment plan for overdue rent;
- The BC Temporary Rental Supplement ended on August 31, 2020;
- Rental charges can be increased as of December 1, 2020; however, the maximum increase for 2021 has been limited to 1.4 percent; and,
- Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) will conclude on September 27, 2020 and current participants in the Program will automatically be rolled over to Employment Insurance.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, shared that since over 40% of households in New Westminster are renters, recent changes to tenant initiatives will definitely have an impact in the city. He reminded Task Force members of the New Westminster Rent Bank Program which should be of assistance; however, the City recognizes the ripple effect that the pandemic has had on things such as people possibly using their food budget to pay rent and therefore leaving them in a position of food insecurity.

Youth Services Update

Paolo Zenone, Recreation Leader, announced that Youth Services hosted their “soft” opening on Friday, September 11, 2020, noting that the Youth Centre, now organized into pods, allows youth to reserve hour long blocks of time to access activities. As well, youth workers continue reaching out to youth online and that youth counselling will soon be offered in person in conjunction with online sessions.

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:

- The plans for Thanksgiving meals are underway;
- The St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church community is experiencing volunteer fatigue and are currently seeking volunteers through Facebook and holding a volunteer information forum;
- The Greater Vancouver Food Bank Hamper Program continues at Olivet Baptist Church but may move to another location in the fall; and,
- The Lower Mainland Purpose Society Hamper Program is ongoing, with no end date currently in sight. Those who may benefit from the Hamper Program are encouraged to sign up.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, provided a recap of the potential pilot project being worked on by Claudia Freire, Housing and Social Planner and Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society, to address adequate and sustainable funding for food security programs and look to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to fund or sponsor the pilot program for approximately 12 to 24 months. Given pandemic-related economic and employment restructuring, along with tenant issues, food insecurity may remain a challenge for many people for a long time. Staff will be reaching out to the Ministry during the UBCM Conference to determine interest in the potential pilot project and move forward from there.

Discussion ensued, and Task Force members and staff made the following comments:

- There has been a noticeable increase of single women participating in the Saturday Food Program at the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral;
- Historically, high school students volunteered in order fulfill public service requirements for their Dogwood Graduation Certificates. Rick Bloudell, School District #40, will see if that is still a requirement and report back to the Task Force; and,
- Staff can raise awareness of the need for volunteers through social media and CitiPage and connect those interested with the appropriate programs.

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

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, reminded members of the CAN Training Program, an initiative of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, in partnership with the City to provide opportunities for those with lived and living experience in poverty to increase their involvement in anti-poverty advocacy, policy

development, and the creation of poverty reduction plans at both provincial and civic levels. The barrier-free Program will be comprised of seven workshops for up to 15 participants, include breakfast, lunch, and refreshments, with transit and off-site child care costs provided for those who need it. The meeting's follow-up email will include information for those interested in participating in the Program.

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stressed the importance of the CAN Training Program, noting that Council has expressed a desire to see a better representation of City residents during public engagement. Mr. Stark added that the Program is a great opportunity for participants to learn about advocacy, City committee structure and decision-making, etc., and advised that an engagement toolkit will be created to aid staff in facilitating more inclusive City engagement.

6. Shelter and Temporary Housing Update

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, reminded members that the Mazarine Lodge, a supportive modular housing development in Queensborough with 44 units, including six accessible ones, still has spaces available and those interested should contact the Elizabeth Fry Society. He advised that placement will prioritize New Westminster residents first and then those applying from outlying communities.

Regarding the Emergency Response Centre (ERC), Mr. Stark informed members that the City continues to work with BC Housing on additional shelter capacity which has become particularly important due to physical distancing requirements reducing existing shelter capacity. He advised that an appropriate location is still being sought as civic and school facilities have become unavailable as they start to reopen; therefore, the possible lease or purchase of private facilities is being investigated through the BC Housing Real Estate Division for a space that could be utilized as an emergency shelter initially and then transition into a supportive housing facility.

7. Interdepartmental Working Group on the Overdose Epidemic

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, stated that the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Overdose Epidemic is comprised of representatives from various City departments who are working together to address the overdose epidemic in New Westminster. He advised of the September 14, 2020 Council report regarding the possible provision of an overdose prevention site and safe supply program, which the Fraser Health Authority will work with the City. The Fraser Health Authority's safe supply presentation had to be postponed due to the New Westminster Pier Park fire; however, it has been rescheduled to October 5, 2020.

Courtney Pankratz, Lower Mainland Purpose Society, shared that they continue developing their Peer Leadership Mentorship Program and engaging the local business community. She stressed that time is of the essence to implement an overdose

prevention site and advised that the Purpose Society is available to assist in facilitating or addressing these issues.

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, informed members that the designated stream of the Reaching Home has received \$1 million in COVID-19 funding to be distributed to the community for the remainder of the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021. He advised that Reaching Home is seeking input from municipalities on COVID-19 related questions, including 1). What are your most pressing concerns related to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness?; 2). Where are your most critical needs and funding gaps?; and, 3). How might additional funds be used to best address current and emerging priorities? Other comments will also be received. Task Force members were encouraged to share their responses with Tristan Johnson, Senior Planning Analyst, by tomorrow afternoon.

8. Identification of Other Issues

- John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, advised a number of people have reached out to the City regarding poor air quality which is especially an issue for those without access to indoor space, particularly in the evenings. BC Housing recognizes this issue and the challenges faced with respect to physical distancing requirements, and shelters being unable to accommodate additional people;
- Mr. Stark advised that all City Departments are developing second wave plans outlining what will happen if we continue under Phase 3 of the BC Government's Restart Plan or if we go back to Phase 2 or 1, which would see the Task Force meeting more frequently, staff again being redeployed to assist with food security programs, working with BC Housing to activate non-operational civic facilities for emergency shelter, etc. All second wave plans will be submitted to Council for approval;
- Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst, announced that the City has officially launched its COVID-19 engagement sessions, information for which will be included in the follow up email;
- Betina Wheeler, New West Homelessness Coalition Society, advised of the United Way's Local Love Campaign, noting that they are looking to assist organizations with emerging needs which may not have been considered in the past. During her follow up meeting with them next week, she will bring forward the volunteer issue as well as anything else that comes to her attention that can be done now to address community needs;
- Mr. Stark shared that the City has been contacted by many faith and non-profit organizations in need of larger outdoor and indoor spaces as their current space does not adequately accommodate physical distancing requirements. He noted that they continue to pay leases on unusable spaces and this has created issues around equity for those that can afford to pay higher rental amounts. Mr. Stark advised that staff will reach out to the United Way or the Vancouver Foundation

to see if they are able to provide assistance to faith and non-profit organizations through programming to provide rental space in civic and school district facilities, also taking into consideration the extra costs incurred with cleaning. Mr. Stark will share additional information on this issue with Ms. Wheeler prior to her meeting with the United Way;

- The Venerable Richard Leggett, Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral, shared that a challenge for faith organizations is that they often subsidize rental of their space which often results in the rent charged being less than operating costs.
- Mr. Stark shared that the City continues to work on addressing challenges associated with the City's growing unsheltered population including the possible addition of another portable washroom to address sanitation issues and seeking additional shelter space as inclement weather moves in; and,
- Mr. Mehdic advised that, since a lot of our food comes from California where there have been an unprecedented number of wild fires, our food may become more expensive which may be an issue for food security programs moving forward.

9. Member Updates

Rick Bloudell, School District #40, announced that school lunch programs will resume on Monday, September 21, 2020, and which may alleviate some stress for families. He advised that program subsidy applications are available online and that school staff will be available to walk through the online application process with those interested. Some schools will be sharing program information via emails which will include a web link to the school lunch website. Mr. Bloudell will share the web link with Task Force members.

10. Next Steps and Meeting Schedule

John Stark, Supervisor, Community Planning, thanked members for their input and advised that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 30th.

The meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

Original Signed _____
John Stark
Chair

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Carilyn Cook
Committee Clerk