



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: December 9, 2009
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Meeting Date: December 15, 2009

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: Managing Director of Social Development
SUBJECT: 2010 Winter Homelessness Response

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council direct staff to work with the Provincial Government, private sector and non-profit partners to implement the Winter Response 2009/2010 as identified in this report and that \$500,000 be allocated to the Winter Response, source of funds to be the Contingency Reserve 2009.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to expedite the permitting process for emergency shelter locations, subject to the neighbourhood notification and liaison process described in this report.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Community Services RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

COUNCIL POLICY Council policy is to maintain and expand housing opportunities for low and modest-income households with priority for families with children; seniors on fixed incomes or in need of support; Single Room Occupancy (SRO) residents; the mentally ill, physically disabled, and others at-risk of homelessness.

In June 2005 Council adopted the *Homeless Action Plan* which identifies three priorities to address homelessness: improved access to income, more supportive housing and expanded mental health and addiction services.

In December 2008 Council approved resources for the implementation of the HEAT strategy which resulted in the opening of 5 shelters in the downtown for the 2009 winter months.

In April 2009 the Interim Housing Strategy was presented to Council and on April 23, 2009 Council unanimously passed a motion asking for all provincial parties to support the City's Interim Housing Strategy. The strategy seeks to bridge the gap between immediate needs and long-term solutions to homelessness.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to identify actions that the City and its partners are taking to assist homeless people during the 2010 winter season and recommends the City allocate \$500,000 to these efforts.

SUMMARY

Homelessness continues to be one of City's top priorities, and this priority was confirmed through the recent operating budget consultation process in which Vancouver residents identified social issues, including homelessness, as very important.

The City has an important role to play in addressing homelessness, but if we are to achieve our goal of ending homelessness, we need the involvement of all governments, all sectors of the community and business. In the past year the City has increased its efforts to encourage more housing along the entire housing continuum.

The City has committed significant resources to the issue of homelessness and affordability of housing over the last 5 years. The Homeless Action Plan (2005) identified the need for 3800 supportive housing units. Through our partnership with the Province, approximately 900 units of new capacity have been brought on stream since 2005. Under this partnership an additional 800 units have been funded for a total of 1700 additional supportive housing units that will be available by late spring 2011. At that point there will be a gap of 2100 supportive units.

However, at this point for the winter of 2010, the housing gap stands at approximately 2900 units.

Therefore, options are needed for those who remain on the streets today. The city has committed to an interim housing strategy to help address this situation, and this report recommends that Council direct staff to work with our partners on a 2009/2010 winter response and allocate \$500,000 to this initiative.

DISCUSSION

1. Winter Shelter Response 2009

Last year Council directed staff to open safe and secure buildings to shelter people immediately. Council allocated \$750,000 towards this goal. The first \$500,000 of this allocation was used to open the shelters over the winter months, and the remaining \$250,000 has contributed to keeping the shelters open beyond last April.

The Mayor launched the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) initiative and five temporary homeless shelters were opened bringing 450 people inside every night. Funding totalling \$1.5 million was provided from BC Housing, Streethome Foundation, the City and other donors. The initial funding for the shelters covered operations until March 31, 2009. Over those winter months 31,000 bed nights were provided to homeless individuals in Vancouver (when all the shelters were on stream - approximately 450 per night) through the HEAT program. In April 2009, the Province through BC Housing took over funding and extended operations until June 30, 2009. Two shelters were closed in the summer, but funding for the remaining three shelters was provided by the Province through April 30, 2010. Data indicates that the HEAT shelters, which provided hot meals twice a day, continued to be full even through the summer season.

In late December 2008/January 2009 five HEAT shelters were opened as follows:

- First United Church operated by Church staff and volunteers with assistance from Lookout Emergency Aid Society
- 1435 Granville Street operated by RainCity Housing
- The Stanley New Fountain Hotel operated by PHS
- 201 Central Avenue operated by the Aboriginal Friendship Society
- 1442 Howe Street also operated by RainCity Housing (February 2009 opening)

The HEAT initiative successfully achieved its objective of providing safe, temporary shelter to people who are homeless during the winter months. HEAT had additional benefits which were described in a Council Report in April 2009 and these included positive health outcomes and access to longer-term housing for some people staying in the shelters. In addition, Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association data demonstrates a 95% reduction in rough sleeping and 80% reduction in aggressive panhandling immediately following the opening of the HEAT shelters.

The City and its partners also had challenges stemming from the HEAT initiative, particularly the Granville and Howe Street shelters that were located adjacent to residential condominium towers. No concerns were raised about these shelters during the winter months. However, the two shelters faced significant community opposition in the Spring and Summer as the weather improved and both shelter guests and neighbours spent more time outside. They were closed in June and August of 2009 respectively. This was an important learning experience for the City and its partners and a number of changes have been made to address neighbourhood feedback. For example, temporary shelters were initially run on a first-come first-served basis. This approach resulted in line ups, which have neighbourhood impacts. Temporary shelters now operate on a reservation system, where people are guaranteed of a space as long as they need it, eliminating the need for line ups.

2. Winter Response 2010

In the winter of 2009, the HEAT initiative demonstrated what can be achieved in a short period of time to provide the resources to allow people to come inside. Given the ongoing gap in housing and services, a similar response is needed again this winter.

Our plans this year are designed to address homeless people who were not served last year, as well as continuing to make shelter available to people in the downtown peninsula. Our

optimal approach, as identified in Appendix A, includes opening shelters, drop-in spaces and nutritious food to the homeless for a four-month period from December/January to April 2010. Last year's HEAT initiative also highlighted the importance of food in helping people who are homeless, and perhaps dealing with mental health and addictions issues, to stabilize and begin to access services. This year's winter response seeks to expand the provision of food beyond the shelters, both by providing more places for people to come inside during the day and by increasing funding for food provision through existing service providers.

We have identified four areas of the city with the highest levels of need and the fewest shelter resources available, and are actively seeking opportunities to expand shelter capacity in these areas. These areas include the Downtown peninsula, Mt. Pleasant, Kitsilano and Grandview-Woodlands (Commercial Drive). The total investment would amount to \$3.1 million. This report recommends a \$500,000 City contribution to the ongoing partnership with the provincial government. The source of funds is the 2009 Contingency Reserve. The Province has already committed \$1.2 million, but more is needed if the full range of shelters, drop-in spaces and food are to be provided. With the \$1.7 million that is currently identified, the priority is to increase shelter capacity in three areas including the Downtown peninsula, Mt. Pleasant and either Kitsilano or Grandview-Woodlands. With additional funds, the priorities are to expand capacity in a fourth neighbourhood, provide additional shelter options for youth, expand drop-ins and food provision.

The City is also making a broad public appeal to assist in our response to the homeless this winter. In early December the Mayor held a meeting with over 50 leaders of the faith community to discuss how we can work together as part of the Winter Response. The City is calling on all sectors of the community, including residents, business leaders and non-profit societies to assist with solutions. We are also working with community centres and neighbourhood houses to see how the pivotal role they play in our communities can be extended to assist the homeless this winter.

In order to open the emergency shelters in a timely way, staff recommend that Council direct Development Services staff to expedite the permitting process for the temporary shelter locations. Shelters will receive time limited Development Permits that allow them to operate as emergency shelters until April 30, 2010. All shelter locations opened through this initiative will close on April 30, 2010.

While an expedited permitting process is needed to open the shelters as quickly as possible, the City will act on learnings from last year's HEAT initiative:

- Permits will be issued and will be time-limited, ensuring that the shelters will close on April 30, 2010.
- Neighbours will be informed of the locations of the shelters, the dates of opening and closing and allowable capacity at each shelter.
- Neighbours will be provided with operations management plans for each shelter (hours of operations, staffing levels, security plans, etc.).
- Neighbours will be provided with contact numbers for the shelter operator and for City staff.

As an additional step, the City will organize public open houses for each shelter location. These open houses will be held in January 2010, and will provide an opportunity for residents to speak with shelter operators and staff from the City and BC Housing. Through these open houses, residents will be able to get information, ask questions and discuss any operational

issues. During last year's HEAT initiative; many residents were interested in how they could help shelter operators and guests. These open houses will also provide a point of contact for people who are interested in learning how they can help.

3. Interim Housing Strategy

In the 2005 Homeless Action Plan, the City identified a need for 3800 supportive housing units to eliminate homelessness by 2015. There has been an increase of about 900 units since 2005 through the City's partnership with the Province through BC Housing. The projects are listed in Appendix B. There are an additional 800 units which include six of the fourteen projects as part of the City/Province partnership that have been funded and will be occupied by late spring 2011. Altogether these 1700 units mean that in 2011 the gap will be 2100 supportive housing units. However, right now, in the winter of 2010, the housing gap stands at 2900 units.

Given the gap in bringing new capacity on stream, in April 2009, City Council endorsed an Interim Housing Strategy aimed at providing bridge housing until the permanent supportive housing that is under development is completed. As part of this strategy, the City played a significant role in the securing and renovation of the Dunsmuir Hotel in a rapid cycle process (4 months) to bring 160 units on stream for use as supportive housing over the next three to six years. The City provided a grant of \$500,000 toward capital renovations. Dunsmuir House was acquired by BC Housing through a lease with the Holborn Group. The 160 units in this building is being managed by Atira Property Management, with tenant supports provided by RainCity Housing. Approximately 90 rooms are now occupied with the remainder of the rooms needing minor renovations before they can be tenanted.

In a separate report on December 15, 2009, Council will also consider a recommendation to provide a grant of \$500,000 to support a second hotel, the Bosman Residence. The Bosman was secured by the Mental Health Commission of Canada through a lease with the property owner. This 102 unit building will be managed by PHS. It will be part of the pilot project on supportive housing by Mental Health Commission of Canada, and as a result the tenants will receive extensive support services. These hotels are important components of bringing people inside until permanent housing can be constructed.

The city has also signalled to BC Housing a commitment to providing more capital resources for interim housing as opportunities are identified.

The emergence in the last year of the Streethome Foundation, an innovative partnership involving the city, the province and the Vancouver foundation has created a focal point for private sector involvement in finding solutions to homelessness. In addition, the Mayor has recently brought together a large number of faith groups to provide support and advice on their role in addressing homelessness. Discussions are currently underway with all these organizations regarding their potential involvement in shelter, interim housing, and permanent housing solutions.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The City is a financial partner in housing and homelessness initiatives, providing land at nominal lease rates, capital grants and other incentives to support these initiatives.

This report specifically requests \$500,000 from the 2009 Contingency Reserve to support the City's role in a winter response partnership with the Province of BC to provide additional shelter, drop-in spaces and nutritious food to people who are homeless from January to April 2010.

CONCLUSION

This report provides an overview of housing and homelessness initiatives in the City of Vancouver since December 2008. The City and its partners have made progress on these initiatives over the course of 2009, addressing all parts of the shelter and housing continuum.

The HEAT initiative resulted in a substantial increase in shelter capacity in the City during 2009 with visible results. Efforts continue to build permanent supportive housing to meet the goal of 3800 units. While significant progress is being made, for 2010 we still have a significant gap of 2900 units against our plan. This gap represents the rationale for our 2010 Winter Response and the need for interim housing initiatives (such as Dunsmuir House) which can address needs while we work to create the permanent solutions.

The proposed 2010 Winter Response will continue the partnership with BC Housing and others which was established last year with the HEAT initiative. There are sufficient funds to open three shelters from January to April 2010, but the full plan involves additional shelter capacity, drop-in spaces and food provision. Additional funding and support is required from governments, all sectors of the community and business to implement the full Winter Response.

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Appendix A: Winter Response 2010: Priority Projects and Funding Requirements

Project	Total Funding	Cumulative Funding
1. Priority projects with \$1.7 million total funding		
• Downtown Peninsula Shelter	\$900,000	\$900,000
• Mt. Pleasant Shelter	\$375,000	\$1,275,000
• Kitsilano or Grandview Woodlands	\$375,000	\$1,650,000
2. Priority projects with \$2 million total funding		
• Kitsilano and Grandview Woodlands	\$375,000	\$2,025,000
3. Priority projects for additional funding		
• Youth Shelter, expanded shelter hours, food services, and drop-ins	\$1,085,000	\$3,110,000
Total Cost of Optimal Winter Response		\$3,110,000

Appendix B: Housing Units Addressing Homelessness: Completed or with Confirmed Funding, 2006-2009

Project	Low-income Singles/Supportive/ Transitional Units
Supportive Housing Additions (2006-2009)	
Supported Independent Living Units Added since 2005 (Vancouver Coastal Health)	560
Fraser Street Transitional Housing	30
Onsite (137 East Hastings)	30
Doug Storey Residence (768 Richards)	46
Pennsylvania Hotel (411 Carrall)	44
65 E. Hastings	92
Kindred Place (1321 Richards)	87
SIL units and 6 Projects	889
Funded and occupancy late Spring 2011	
Woodward's	125
Union Gospel Mission	91
1308 Seymour Street	105
337 W. Pender Street	96
1005 Station Street	80
525 Abbott Street	108
3595 West 17th Avenue (at Dunbar)	51
188 East 1st Avenue (at Main)	129
8 Projects	785
TOTAL :	1,674