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Date: 3/30/2021 2:39:28 PM
Subject: Update on Astoria and Drinkers Lounge

Dear Mayor and Council,

A number of you have requested an update on the implementation of the Drinkers Lounge Parklet and the activities outside of the Astoria.

Below is an update from staff on the status of the implementation of the program presented to Council. Please note that it does take some time to implement new programs after Council approval, which impacts how quickly intended benefits may be realized.

Background on Drinkers at the 700/800 E Hastings Block (Astoria)

- Staff have been meeting with the Astoria Steering Committee (Strathcona BIA, PHS Drinkers Lounge, VANDU, DTES Neighbourhood House) since August 2020 to address congregations of people experiencing multiple vulnerability factors drinking in public, especially at bus stops.
- A comprehensive strategy to address complex health issues was developed, including:
 - Expanding additional areas for public drinking starting with the expansion of the PHS Drinker.s Lounge at 111 Princess;
 - A washroom trailer program with respite area next to/nearby the Astoria;
 - A sequencing plan to address (i.e. move/remove bus stops); and,
 - Additional green space for gathering with outreach support for public drinkers once Oppenheimer re-opened.
- On February 24, 2021, Council approved a By-Law amendment and an additional \$25K to increase PHS Drinker's Lounge hours and outreach (\$75K was approved through DTES Capital in 2020). These operations are expected to scale up to full hours (from 10am-3pm to 9am-5pm) in early April once staffing is in place.

Status Update

1) PHS Drinker's Lounge – Community Managed Alcohol Program

- Core funding from VCH and FNHA has been received by PHS for 2021 fiscal year.
- City's grant agreement to PHS for \$75,000 is being finalized and executed for next week to allow for the expansion of hours for parklet as noted above.
- PHS scheduled to receive \$5,000 from Strathcona BIA for parklet by end of 2020 fiscal – PHS launched its incentive program ahead of receiving these funds this week and designed posters for Astoria liquor store and for distribution.
- Drinker's Lounge parklet opened and saw about 50 people at BBQ celebration –

official launch is being planned.

- PHS has developed a plan to respond to neighbour complaints re: parklet. So far only minor complaints e.g. noise from music from one neighbour.
- PHS increasing outreach from 3 x week to Astoria bus stop – 3 new drinkers from Astoria have come into Drinker's Lounge.
- PHS looking into sidewalk wayfinding decals from bus stop to Drinkers Lounge.

2) Astoria Washroom Trailer Program

- The City secured a portion of 369 Hawks through a lease this week to install a Washroom Trailer Program to be operated by WISH, working in partnership with PHS Outreach and DTES Neighbourhood House.
- Operations will include a 7 day/week, 16-hour model, including:
 - An 'all genders' daytime program to fill gap hours with the Drinker's Lounge in the early morning and on weekends. Hours are still to be confirmed, but staff anticipate the daytime program to be from 7:30am – 3:30pm. As a 7 day/week program, it's expected the Washroom Trailer Program will address weekend service gaps when the Drinker's Lounge is closed, and the early morning hours prior to the Drinker's Lounge opening at 9:00am.
 - Evening hours will provide long-needed access to washrooms and hygiene to sex workers who identify as women along the 800 block of East Hastings (11:00pm – 6:00am aligned with WISH Map Van services, open for women, TGD2S only).
- WISH has hired an operations staff lead to begin recruitment and an operations /partnership plan for this site, expected to be fully operational with the 16-hour model by mid-late May 2021 (soft opening in April).

Next Steps

- Operations: Non-Profit partners continue to address complex service needs. Many are experiencing staffing continuity issues and typically require approximately 4-6 weeks to become fully operational. Staff request that Council consider this flexibility required when responding to community members expecting to see immediate impacts.
- Engagement: Next Astoria Steering Committee meeting is before end of April to discuss fundraising and emerging issues, and will include new reps from WISH, WAHRS and Parks Board.
- Drinker's Lounge: Staff are in regular conversation with SBIA about consultation with BIA members, funding, and alternative safe space for drinkers. Second engagement with drinkers is being planned for mid-April to get feedback on parklet.
- Green Space: Staff are exploring options for aligning safe referral/space for community at MacLean Park and Oppenheimer after reopening spring/summer 2021.
- Other: ENG is removing homemade benches installed illegally on Hawks beside community garden at 369 Hawks and exploring opportunities to support safe access to space within the new Washroom Trailer Program site.

As well, to confirm, the two key staff working on this implementation are also working on the washroom trailers extension and implementation, sex worker drop-in implementation, VCH OPS liaison, and the s.56 exemption application so they are stretched in terms of current capacity, which impacts some of the operationalization of work, such as the finalization of the grant agreement noted above.

If you have any further questions, please send to Sandra Singh at Sandra.singh@vancouver.ca and she will ensure they are responded to in the regular roll-up.

Best,
Paul

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθθəm (Musqueam), lóóvú 7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.