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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)
Date: 12/19/2022 12:57:04 PM
Subject: [Work to explore alternative response to some 911 calls](#)

Dear Mayor and Council,

This email provides a brief update from GM, ACCS Sandra Singh on work currently underway by staff in response to a Council motion directing staff to explore and bring back recommendations related to: (a) *alternative non-police responses to some 911 calls* and (b) *alternatives to VPD presence during street cleaning and Steet and Traffic By-Law Enforcement*.

Below is an update on (a) *alternative non-police responses to some mental health calls ("alternatives to 911")*.

BACKGROUND

Staff work related to identifying alternatives to 911 arises from a Council motion to decriminalize poverty passed on July 27, 2020. In April 2021, staff reported back with a proposed approach to undertaking the work. Feedback from community resulted in the creation of two working groups focusing on alternatives to 911 and City street cleaning services to gather input from community service providers, peers, and other community members.

Staff undertook a review of approaches undertaken by other jurisdictions to provide alternative crisis response options and/or decriminalize health and social issues (**Appendix B in the 2021 report to Council**). From this review, staff found that other cities piloting non-police responses to emergencies, such as Toronto, face different barriers due to BC's province-wide legislative approach to emergency dispatch, policing, as well as health care and social assistance provision. These dissimilarities point to the need for a coordinated approach to developing an effective pilot for BC municipalities.

Staff maintain communications with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) who have been invited to participate in the alternatives to 911 working group. The CMHA Peer-Assisted Care Team (PACT) program has been implemented in North and West Vancouver since November 2021, with pilots in New Westminster and Victoria in development.

CURRENT STATUS

Staff have received and are reviewing Council's motion passed on November 22, 2022 which in part directs staff to reach out to CMHA, Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and the VPD, with respect to the implementation of the PACT program in Vancouver:

THAT Council direct staff to work with their counterparts at Vancouver Coastal Health and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to explore options and opportunities to implement CMHA's Peer Assisted Care Teams (PACT) in Vancouver, as part of the Province's Safer Communities Action Plan or otherwise, to serve as a complementary mental health service to existing VCH and VPD mental health partnerships, in consultation with stakeholders and other relevant partners

Currently staff are also:

- Organizing and aligning recommendations from a downtown eastside (DTES) engagement process as well as provincial police reform work (stemming from the April 2022 report from the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act) to guide the development of a pilot emergency response.
- Engaging with provincial staff to identify opportunities for partnership in developing alternative emergency responses, given alternatives to 911 was also identified through the Police Act review process, and the Province has indicated interest in working with Vancouver and potentially other municipalities on pilot approaches.
- Scoping a city-wide approach, understanding that particular 911 alternatives may be needed in the DTES. Staff are submitting application for a BC Civil Forfeiture grant to fund further engagement in

neighborhoods outside the DTES to identify priorities across neighborhoods for emergency response.

- Connecting with BC municipalities engaged in community safety work for collaboration and advocacy for developing alternatives to police response.

Analysis:

- Early information on CMHA's pilot programs in BC show that these programs may not be effective for high-needs groups experiencing intersecting challenges related to homelessness, substance use, and mental health. Many cities across the province struggle to meet the needs of this demographic and the high level of emergency response resources they often demand.
- Further, information gathered from the working group and DTES engagement with residents has revealed that existing models such as CMHA's pilot programs may not be suitable for this neighborhood because of the essential need for a peer-led response embedded in the existing 911 dispatch system.
- PACT may be better suited to other areas of Vancouver and staff will review the potential for a PACT pilot as directed by Council with this geographic consideration in mind.

Next Steps:

- Engage with CMHA, VCH and VPD as per the November 22 Council motion.
- Provide recommendations for Council consideration in 2023 with the purpose of developing an evidence based emergency response pilot(s) that meets the safety needs of a diverse range of Vancouver residents.
- Continue to convene BC municipalities and provincial stakeholders in alternative emergency response pilot development.

Staff understand Council's strong interest to move swiftly and, as noted above, are actively engaged with the Province and other stakeholders to identify the appropriate approach or approaches for Vancouver given the diverse communities we serve across the city.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more, please feel free to reach out to Sandra directly at [**Sandra.singh@vancouver.ca**](mailto:Sandra.singh@vancouver.ca).

All the best,,

Karen

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm/Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh/Squamish and səliilwətaʔ/Tsleil-Waututh nations