

**From:** "Singh, Sandra" <[Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca)>  
**To:** "[Direct to Mayor and Council - DL](#)"  
**Date:** 12/21/2023 1:57:44 PM  
**Subject:** Memo to Mayor and Council - STEP Program and Navigation Centre: Background and Update  
**Attachments:** ACCS - GM - Memo (Council) - STEP and Navigation Centre Update (2013-12-21).pdf

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Good afternoon Mayor and Council,

Please find attached a memo providing brief background information and an update on the work to establish a navigation centre in Vancouver and the STEP program, as requested by Council at its October 31, 2023 meeting. Highlights include:

#### STEP

- Initiated as a pilot in 2018, STEP is a partnership between BC Housing, the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health, and the Streethome Foundation.
- STEP supports people who are ready to move from supportive housing into more independent housing. In turn, this creates vacancies in limited supportive housing stock, providing an opportunity for people experiencing homelessness to have a home and access support services.
- By the end of the first two years, 88 clients were supported to transition from supportive to independent housing. Since 2020, an additional 40 clients were moved for a total of 128 individuals securing independent housing to date.

#### Navigation Centre

- BC Housing and the City announced a partnership to launch a Navigation Centre through the Province's 2020 Budget.
- The Province committed \$1.5 million in operating funding for Navigation Centres in both Vancouver and Nanaimo for three years. The City committed \$1.76m to support lease and tenant improvement costs.
- The proposed Navigation Centre would be the first of its kind in Canada. The Vancouver concept is for an innovative "shelter plus" model that more fully integrates the systems of care and provides wrap-around supports including shelter, system navigation and housing ready stabilization, integrated clinical health supports, and housing placement services to under-connected, unsheltered people experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Since 2020, BC Housing and City staff have been actively working to identify a suitable site for the navigation centre. Many sites were reviewed over these years, with two that were most promising. However, both eventually fell through.
- Given the length of time that has passed since the original funding was approved, BC Housing is bringing forward a proposal for the two sites to the Province (Ministry of Housing and Treasury Board) for approval. The results of the decision should be known by the new year.
- Staff will bring forward a report to Council recommending a grant to BC Housing to support tenant improvements and lease costs as per the original partnership discussions once a site has been identified by BC Housing and approved by the Province.

If you have any further questions, please email me directly and the incoming General Manager of ACCS Margaret Wittgens and I will ensure a response through the weekly Q&A.

Best,

Sandra

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*The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəjəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selwíwítlh (Tseil-Wautuh) Nations.*

## MEMORANDUM

December 21, 2023

TO: Mayor & Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC  
Teresa Jong, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Mellisa Morphy, Director of Policy, Mayor's Office  
Trevor Ford, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

FROM: Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager  
General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Update on STEP and the Navigation Centre

RTS #: N/A

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### PURPOSE

This memo provides an update on the Supporting Tenants, Enabling Pathways (STEP) program and efforts to develop a Navigation Centre in Vancouver to respond to questions raised following staff's presentation of the results of the 2023 Homeless Count at the October 31st council meeting.

### BACKGROUND

#### STEP

The STEP program is a partnership between BC Housing, the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health and Streethome (STH) Foundation. STEP supports people who are ready to move from supportive housing into more independent housing. In turn, this creates vacancies in limited supportive housing stock, providing an opportunity for people experiencing homelessness to have a home and access support services.

The main goals of the program are:

- efficient use of resources in the housing continuum;
- creating vacancies in supportive housing stock; and

- matching level of need to level of support, and enhancing quality of life for those experiencing homelessness.

Partner roles and responsibilities are described in the table below:

Implementation Team and Responsibilities		
BC Housing	Vancouver Coastal Health	City of Vancouver
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ identify and secure non-market units for involvement in STEP program</li> <li>▪ promotes program to sector and NPOs</li> <li>▪ initiates and coordinates lead up to transition</li> <li>▪ assesses tenant suitability for transition</li> <li>▪ identifies BCH STEP housing units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ initiates and coordinates lead up to transition</li> <li>▪ assesses tenant suitability for transition</li> <li>▪ provides referrals to the program for consideration</li> <li>▪ monitoring and tracking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ identify and secure non-market units for involvement in the STEP program</li> <li>▪ promotes program to sector and NPOs</li> <li>▪ assesses tenant suitability for acceptance to the Pilot</li> <li>▪ transitions tenants</li> <li>▪ creates follow-up plan and conducts follow-up</li> <li>▪ identifies housing</li> <li>▪ monitoring and tracking</li> </ul>

### Navigation Centre

BC Housing and the City announced a partnership to launch a Navigation Centre through the Province’s 2020 Budget. The Province committed \$1.5 million in operating funding for Navigation Centres in both Vancouver and Nanaimo for three years. The City committed \$1.76m to support lease and tenant improvement costs. BC Housing issued an RFP for the Navigation Centre operator and Community Builders Group was selected in the fall of 2021.

The proposed Navigation Centre would be the first of its kind in Canada. While they exist in the US, the Vancouver concept is for an innovative “shelter plus” model that more fully integrates the systems of care and provides wrap-around supports including shelter, system navigation and housing ready stabilization, integrated clinical health supports, and housing placement services to under-connected, unsheltered people experiencing chronic homelessness.

The goals of the Navigation Centre are to:

- to reach chronic unsheltered individuals that do not access traditional shelter models;
- prioritize Indigenous peoples and provide culturally appropriate services;
- provide low-barrier entry that includes storage of belongings, and where pets and partners are welcome;
- connect clients to health services to meet their complex unmet health needs; and
- pilot a new referral system into shelter.

## **DISCUSSION**

### STEP

STEP launched as a two-year pilot in 2018 with the goal of identifying 100 people who were ready to transition from supportive housing into independent housing, enabling that supportive housing to then be available for people who need those supports. By the end of the first two

years, 88 clients were supported to transition from supportive to independent housing. Since 2020, an additional 40 clients were moved for a total of 128 individuals securing independent housing to date.

Ninety-four (94%) supportive housing units vacated by STEP candidates were backfilled by people experiencing homelessness. The remaining 6% were from condemned buildings or facing eviction.

The success of STEP depends on a collaborative approach to information sharing and securing a sufficient supply of affordable housing units to support tenants transitioning out of the existing supportive housing stock.

Support for the program is provided through rent subsidies/supplements from BC Housing and “moving grants” funding from the Streethome Foundation. These grants cover critical expenses such as new furniture, Hydro account deposits, pet deposits, etc. to support tenant transitioning from supportive housing into their new affordable housing.

The City’s Homelessness Services Outreach team administers the program and works with non-profit supportive housing providers to identify tenants who may be suitable for the program, as well as supporting tenants in their transitions.

### Navigation Centre

Navigation Centres were announced for Vancouver and Nanaimo – neither centre has been opened. The key challenge in Vancouver has been securing a suitable site.

#### *Site Identification*

Since 2020, BC Housing and ACCS staff have been actively working to identify a suitable site for the navigation centre. Many sites were reviewed over these years, with two that were most promising. The first was identified in 2020 and was located on the 900 block of E. Hastings. Considerable scoping and lease discussions had occurred, but the site was ultimately deemed inappropriate for the needs.

The second site was located on 400 block of Alexander. Staff were in discussions with a non-profit organization to use a portion of a site they were going to purchase. Ultimately, after over a year of planning, the purchase did not proceed, the site was sold to another buyer, and use for the navigation centre was no longer an option.

Staff, in partnership with BCH, have continued to view and explore the use of other potential site options. In determining suitability, staff factor in location, layout, as well as building condition and life safety features through inspections with DBL and VFRS.

### **NEXT STEPS**

#### STEP

The pilot was successful, and staff continue to support tenants able to transition into more independent housing as it becomes available.

## Navigation Centre

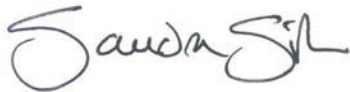
Given the length of time that has passed since the original funding was approved, BC Housing is bringing forward a proposal for the two sites to the Province (Ministry of Housing and Treasury Board) for approval. The results of the decision should be known by the new year.

Staff will bring forward a report to Council recommending a grant to BC Housing to support tenant improvements and lease costs as per the original partnership discussions once a site has been identified by BC Housing and approved by the Province.

The navigation centre concept is a new, enhanced shelter model that seeks to support people experiencing chronic homelessness who won't engage in the current shelter system. Meeting these individuals where they are at, and bringing them to a space that is welcoming, and provides the enhanced, wrap around supports they need in order that they can quickly be moved into more permanent housing would improve the lives of those experiencing chronic homelessness.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact me directly at [sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@vancouver.ca) and we will provide response through the weekly Council Q&A.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra Singh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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