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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council"](#)
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Subject: Uplifting the DTES Motion Update: Follow-up Information

Hello Mayor and Council,

Further to the questions of staff in Council last Tuesday morning during *the Uplifting DTES motion progress update* report regarding the notion of service concentration in Vancouver, migration to the DTES and Vancouver in general, the need for a regional response, and data sources, please find some additional information below.

Current situation

- To confirm the numbers from recent homelessness counts:
 - 2023: of the 2,420 people counted in Vancouver, the majority - 78% - of respondents reporting already living in Vancouver when they became homeless and 22% reported being homeless already when they came to Vancouver
 - 2020: the balance was 84% in Vancouver already and 16% reporting being homeless when they came to Vancouver
 - 2019: 81% and 19% respectively
 - 2018: 79% and 21% respectively
- Sources: [Homeless Count | City of Vancouver](#)
- As a point in time count, the Homeless Count data is indicative at a point in time

Interpretation and observations

- Respondents who note that they were already homeless when they came to Vancouver are usually a subset of the total respondents (not everyone chooses to answer each question) but staff use that subset to extrapolate across the respondents. The respondents include people who have been in Vancouver for a long time and some who are relatively new.
- Certainly, people come to Vancouver from other communities because they can find low-income housing in Vancouver (we have the largest stock of

- low-income housing - SROs among this) and then find themselves evicted or priced out of that housing and homeless here in Vancouver.
- To confirm, staff's intention when raising an observation that the lack of services in other municipalities creates a draw to Vancouver where there are many services was to reflect the impact of lack of service deployment in other municipalities on Vancouver.

Evolving discussion around regional approach

- It was observed that staff messaging around the homeless count data in this report has changed from previous year's commentary.
- Staff have always advocated for a regional approach to addressing homelessness as we know homelessness is not confined to our municipal boundaries. Our experience with unsheltered homelessness has demonstrated:
 - The extensive resources needed to be activated to address successive encampments: 2 at Oppenheimer, Strathcona, and CRAB Park.
 - When E Hastings emerged within a year of Strathcona's closure, it became clear to staff that the investments and efforts while important to maintain were not seeing the desired impacts.
- In response to E Hastings and CRAB Park, staff started to discuss with community advocates the extensive investments Vancouver had made and was continuing to make and started to contrast these investments with other communities.
 - In November 2022, as staff were starting to do focussed by-law enforcement in parts of the E Hastings encampment – knowing that our change in approach in the encampment would draw extensive critique – we started to do the modelling for regional share.
 - The ability to contrast with other municipalities was a key point to demonstrating leadership and to buffering staff doing the work from the resentment directed at them by many advocates.
 - The data demonstrated a disproportionate allocation beyond what staff would expect for a central city and highlighted what staff saw as a key issue.
 - Staff shared this information with colleagues at the province, noting that central cities generally do have more services, but the current disproportionality was much greater than we would expect.
- Throughout the closure of E Hastings (spring 2023), the work to clean-up CRAB Park (March-April 2024), and the work to close CRAB Park (Oct-Nov 2024), City communications have highlighted the extensive land, capital, and operating investments Vancouver has made as a City to address these crises, the high numbers of stock and services in Vancouver.
 - CRAB Park clean-up plan and media briefing in spring 2024 was the first time the City included the regional data.

Need for more investment across the Region

- Arising from some questions from the Province about what data demonstrates movement into the DTES and Vancouver, staff drew the Province's attention to this January 2016 peer reviewed study in the British Medical Journal's open access research journal: [Migration to the Downtown Eastside](#)

[neighbourhood of Vancouver and changes in service use in a cohort of mentally ill homeless adults: a 10-year retrospective study | BMJ Open \[bmjopen.bmj.com\]](https://bmjopen.bmj.com/).

- A few interesting points re: methodology:
 - They are careful to say that the interactions between variables that they have observed are correlations, not necessarily causations, but at the same time:
 - o It was an impressively large study: 433 eligible participants in the cohort.
 - o It covered a long period of time: 10 years.
 - o It used reasonably dependable data sources (administrative data such as BC Health Card location records) rather than relying solely on self-reporting or other sources that are less reliable.
 - There are many studies that only worked with 10-40 people over a short period. With this scale and methodology, this study seems to be a significant improvement.

Key findings:

- Conclusion: Significant increases in service use over a 10-year period coincided with significant migration into an urban area where relevant services were concentrated. These results highlight opportunities for early intervention in spatially diverse neighbourhoods to interrupt trajectories marked by worsening health and extremely high service involvement. Further research is urgently needed to investigate the causal relationships between physical migration, health and social welfare, and escalating use of public services.
- References 13, 14, and 15 are to studies in which migration of homeless people into large urban centres was measured for Osaka, São Paulo, New York, and Philadelphia. The Vancouver situation does not appear to be unusual.

About the Journal and Article

- British Medical Journal is well-known and well-respected with a robust peer review process.
- Key researcher: [Julian M. Somers - Faculty of Health Sciences - Simon Fraser University](#)

Operational considerations

- Vancouver continues to have extensive pressures that create homelessness here in Vancouver, including increasing downward pressure on the availability of lower cost housing due to increasing financial pressure on families, eroding and, conversely, gentrifying SROs, and the ongoing mental health crisis.
- From a “what we experience on the ground” perspective and operational impacts for the City, 22% of 2,420 people is 532 people.
- As I noted, when we work in increments of 40 units here and there, or 10 shelter beds here and there, and we have a gap in drop-in and hygiene

- spaces, an additional 500 people is a lot for the City to absorb and respond to when we are already dealing with the scale of challenges we have in Vancouver.
- Interestingly, between 2000 and 2024, the City supported the creation of 469 new shelter spaces – 382 year-round and 87 seasonal. Between 2000 and 2023, our homeless count numbers went from 2,095 to 2,420 – a difference of 325 people.
- As staff noted, staff believe that the Provincial Housing Target Orders represent the first step toward a regional approach to homelessness and that a regional approach can only be achieved with Provincial leadership and investment.

Data Sources for Regional Data

- There has been some question about the data sources in the staff report. Please find below information about the data sources. I apologize for not including this information in the report – it was an oversight.

Population Data: 2021 Census

Number of people experiencing homelessness: Metro Vancouver Homeless Count

Number of shelter spaces: BC Housing's Research and Corporate Planning Dept. Number of Units Under BC Housing Administration By Municipality and Service Allocation Group/Subgroup in the Fraser Valley Regional District

Number social housing units: Metro Vancouver Housing Data Book, Part 5 Data Tables - Non-Market Housing

Number supportive Housing Units: BC Housing's Research and Corporate Planning Dept. Number of Units Under BC Housing Administration By Municipality and Service Allocation Group/Subgroup in the Fraser Valley Regional District. Utilizing data from categories: Homeless Housed: Housing for clients who are at the risk of homelessness, or formerly homeless for a period of at least 30 days and up to two or three years. This type of housing includes the provision of on- or off-site support services to help the clients move towards independence and self-sufficiency, and Women and Children Fleeing Violence: BC Housing provides funding for transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing programs that support women and their children who have experienced violence or at risk of experiencing violence by providing temporary shelter/housing and support services. For City of Vancouver, data taking from internal metrics.

- Staff will connect with colleagues at BC Housing to understand how the numbers they provided to the Province differ from the numbers we have pulled together. Staff had shared this data with the Province in the past and the modelling had been published before and we had not received corrections from the Province or BC Housing. Staff agree that it is not ideal for Council nor the Province when the numbers do not align or when the

- discrepancy cannot be immediately explained.
- With a planned 2025 Homeless Count next week, we will be in a position to have updated data by the fall.

We hope some of the additional information above is useful for Council as staff work to advance the directions in the Uplifting DTES motion.

Thanks,

Sandra

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the x m k y m (Musqueam), S wx\u817_wu7mesh (Squamish), and Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.