

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** July 11, 2022

From: Emilie Adin, MCIP
Director, Climate Action, Planning and
Development **File:** 13.2630.09

Item #: 2022-530

Subject: **New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse in principle the attached New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy.

PURPOSE

To seek Council endorsement in principle for the attached New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy (2022), which provides a five-year vision and plan for addressing homelessness and related issues.

SUMMARY

The New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy incorporates a five-year vision and plan for addressing homelessness and related issues. It contains 46 actions that meet the diverse needs of the unsheltered and precariously housed; ensuring that facilities, programs, services and supports are responsive to those needs, and that barriers to access are eliminated or significantly reduced.

In consultation with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, a Homelessness Action Strategy Working Group was established in fall 2021. It met on five occasions. The working group was comprised of representatives with a mandate or an interest to address homelessness. The City partnered with the Community Action Network (CAN), which comprises leaders with lived and living experience of homelessness and poverty, and the University of British Columbia (UBC) School of Community and Regional Planning to develop the new Strategy.

The Strategy was informed by case study research. More specifically, eight Canadian and two American municipalities were reviewed as to their homelessness plans and best practices. Particular attention was paid to inclusive methods of engagement, promising approaches to addressing homelessness, and collaborative implementation frameworks. Of these ten case studies, the Cities of Burnaby and Victoria are highlighted in the Strategy as to lessons learned.

The Strategy was also informed by an extensive community consultation process. This included but was not limited to: people with lived and living experience of homelessness and poverty; faith-based and non-profit service providers; provincial ministry officials; business and resident interests; and the general public. In total, over 450 people were engaged throughout the process. This is a high number especially given that the entire engagement process took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Strategy, based on the research and engagement, and with the support of the Working Group, contains the following vision. It is a future:

- where all residents can locate affordable and secure housing;
- where there is an adequate income and opportunities for employment, including supported, to maintain one's housing; and,
- where there are services and supports to assist the unsheltered and precariously housed, and to address underlying issues which may jeopardize one's housing.

The Strategy contains 46 actions which are organized according to the following five categories:

- Coordination and Partnership
- Shelter, Housing and Tenant Support
- Income, Employment and Financial Literacy
- Services and Supports
- Communication, Engagement and Involvement

Regarding implementation of the Strategy, the City and the Homelessness Coalition Society will take primary responsibility. To this end, the Coalition will establish a Homelessness Action Strategy Implementation Working Group, which will be co-chaired by the City and the Coalition. This body will include a diverse membership, including people with lived and living experience of homelessness and poverty, and have the following responsibilities:

- inform updates related to the Homelessness Needs Assessment;
- develop an annual Action Plan based on the actions as contained in the Strategy;
- inform the implementation of specific actions; and,
- inform monitoring and reporting related to the implementation of the Strategy.

City staff will resource the Working Group.

With guidance from the Working Group, City staff will prepare an annual monitoring report to share with Council and other interested public and non-profit bodies. This report will summarize key indicators related to homelessness. It will also provide a progress update on implementing the annual Action Plan; indicating for each action item whether it was achieved fully, partially or not at all. If partially or not at all, reason(s) will be stated (e.g., inability to involve key community partners, lack of resources, etc.).

The Homelessness Action Strategy Implementation Working Group will meet three times during fall 2022, and will prepare an Action Plan for 2023. This Action Plan is intended to be presented to Council in December 2022 or January 2023, and will include specific costing information related to recommended actions and implications for staff work programs. The City and the Working Group will apply for funding and grants for recommended actions that necessitate collaboration and partnership with the senior levels of government.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff is recommending that Council endorse in principle the Homelessness Action Strategy. This recognizes that the proposed actions attributable to or involving the City have not been costed out and their implications on work programs have not been determined.

OPTIONS

There are two options for consideration:

1. That Council endorse in principle the attached New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy.
2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends option 1

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Staff Memo

Attachment 2: Background

Attachment 3: New Westminster Homelessness Action Strategy (2022)

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Emily Huang, Affordable Housing Planning Analyst

This report was reviewed by:
John Stark, Acting Manager of Planning

This report was approved by:
Serena Trachta, Acting Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer