



ON TABLE City Council Meeting
July 11, 2022 re: Item 3.1.a

HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY

Council Meeting

July 11, 2022

Vision

The 2022 Homelessness Action Strategy provides a five-year vision and plan for addressing homelessness in New Westminster and incorporates 46 actions.

The vision is of a desired 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.

"Everyone needs a home and everyone needs to belong."



Background

2006: The previous Strategy was one of the first in the Province, included the formation of a Homelessness Coalition and provided a five-year vision and plan for addressing homelessness in New Westminster.

2012: The Homelessness Coalition became a Society, and operated at more of an arm's length relationship from the City. During the next five years, the Coalition developed a series of action plans and undertook initiatives to address the basic needs of the unsheltered.

2008-14: During this period, unsheltered homelessness decreased by 53%.



Background

2018-20: New challenges emerged, which started to reverse some of the gains made in addressing unsheltered homelessness, including:

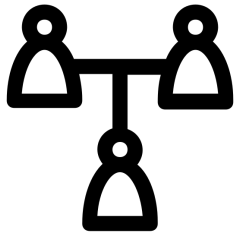
- a housing affordability crisis
- an opioid epidemic
- a COVID-19 pandemic

2021: In spring, the City completed work on a Homelessness Needs Assessment. In the fall, work commenced on a new Strategy, incorporating a five-year vision and plan to address homelessness.



Partnerships

A Homelessness Action Strategy Working Group was established, which met on five occasions and included representation from: the City, business associations, faith-based and non-profit organizations, residents groups, senior government ministries, and individuals with lived and living experience of homelessness.



The Strategy was developed in partnership with:

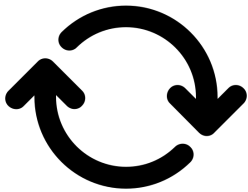
- The Homelessness Coalition Society
- The Community Action Network (CAN)
- The University of British Columbia (UBC) School of Community and Regional Planning

Case Study Research



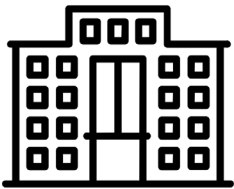
Housing First:

The research found that stable and secure housing is essential to transitioning people out of the cycle of homelessness and poverty. This finding very much informs this Strategy, with its emphasis on developing new supportive and non-market housing.



Systems Change:

The research confirmed the importance of addressing the underlying causes and not just the symptoms of homelessness by taking a holistic and systemic perspective.



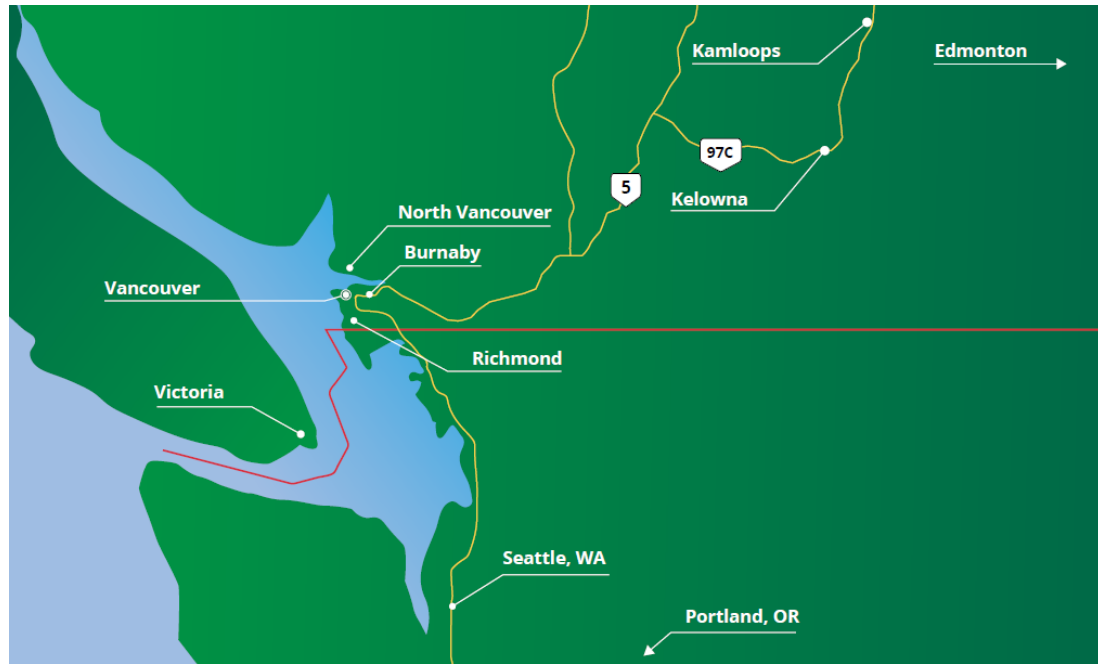
Collaborative Implementation:

The research highlighted that homelessness is a complex and multi-jurisdictional issue, and requires all interests working together to address it, including the senior levels of government.

Case Study Research

Case study research was conducted to learn about best practices, with specific attention to inclusive methods of engagement, promising approaches to addressing homelessness, and collaborative implementation frameworks.

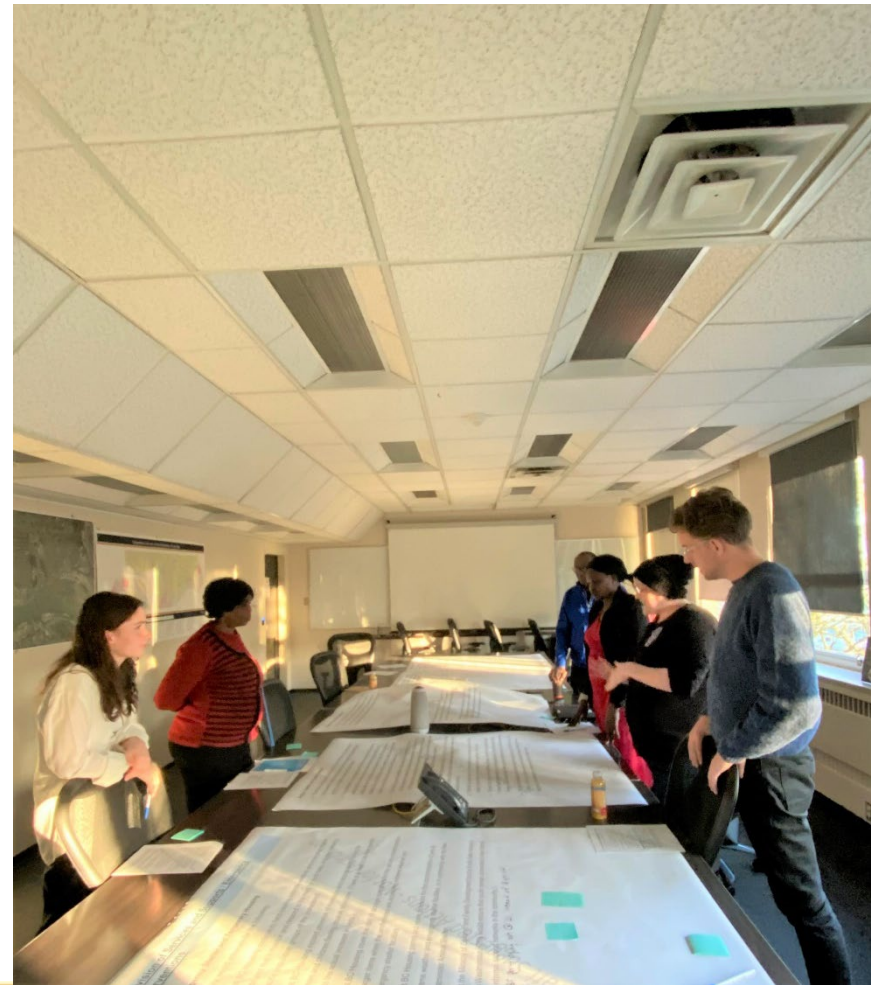
To this end, eight Canadian and two American municipalities were reviewed.



Community Action Network

The Community Action Network (CAN) leaders have lived and living experience of homelessness and poverty and have graduated from a training program to be better self-advocates and to inform civic plans, policies and practices.

They played a pivotal role in the development of the Strategy, including sitting on the Working Group, informing the engagement process, conducting engagement activities, and reviewing proposed actions. They will also be involved in the implementation of the Strategy.



Engagement Process

Engagement activities included:

- key informant interviews, focused discussions and surveys with people with lived and living experience of homelessness
- key informant interviews with service providers and ministry officials
- focus group discussions with business and resident associations



Engagement Process

- A Community Conversation on Homelessness, which included a Panel Discussion and a Question and Answer Session.
 - This event was also used to launch a Community Survey to identify community concerns or issues, potential opportunities, and proposed actions and interventions to address homelessness



In total, approximately 450 people were engaged as part of the Strategy.

Proposed Actions

Based on the Homelessness Needs Assessment, the case study research and the engagement process, 46 actions emerged, which are grouped 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**

Implementation Framework

The City and the Homelessness Coalition Society will take primary responsibility for the implementation of the Homelessness Action Strategy.

The Homelessness Coalition Society 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 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;
- inform monitoring and reporting related to the implementation of the Strategy.

City staff will resource the Working Group, including related to the four above cited responsibilities.

Implementation Framework

Given that homelessness has provincial and regional implications, the Strategy includes the following proposed action:

- That the City advocate that the Provincial government mandate that municipalities have Homelessness Plans (similar to Housing Needs Reports) and that Regional Districts be given more responsibility for the coordination of such plans across municipalities, including tying senior government funding decisions to municipal responsiveness.

This recognizes that the City, to be effective in addressing homelessness, requires the cooperation of neighbouring municipalities, and requires financial assistance from the senior levels of government.

Monitoring and Evaluation

City staff, with the guidance of and input from the Homelessness Action Strategy Implementation Working Group, will prepare an annual update report to Council and other interested public and non-profit bodies.

This report will summarize key indicators related to homelessness and provide an update on the progress in implementing the annual Action Plan. Regarding the latter, it will identify the status of action implementation – i.e., fully, partially or not at all. If partially or not at all, it will state the reason(s) (e.g., inability to involve key community partners, lack of resources, etc.).

Council Consideration and Approval

Council will be requested to approve the Homelessness Action Strategy in principle.

This recognizes that the proposed actions attributable to or involving the City have not been costed out and their implications on work programs has not been determined.

Prior to implementation of any action requiring City resources, Council will be provided with specific cost and work program information, and their approval will be required.