

REPORT

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** October 18, 2021

From: Lisa Spitale,
Chief Administrative Officer **File:**

*On behalf of the Senior Management
Team*

Item #: 2021-467

Subject: Downtown Livability Initiatives

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse the actions as outlined in this report and direct staff to advance the short-term actions with budget implications to the 2022 Budget process.

PURPOSE

This report provides immediate and short-term (one to three months) actions aimed at improving the livability of the Downtown. Immediate actions will be managed within existing 2021 Operating Budgets. Some short-term actions have budget implications which will be added to the 2022 Budget deliberation process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness, the opioid and illicit drug epidemic, and the COVID-19 pandemic are all impacting the livability of New Westminster, in particular, in the Downtown. Residents and businesses have corresponded with the City seeking assistance to address these challenges, including: additional waste clean-up and pick-up; mental health outreach and support; addiction intervention, needle sweeps and outreach support; and new emergency shelter and housing with wrap-around supports.

Based on the correspondence, and as directed by Council in recent resolutions such as the Downtown Motion, the Senior Management Team has been working on a series of immediate and short-term actions. The actions identified in this report are within the City’s control and, as such, are being prioritized as integral next steps. Moreover, all of these actions are directly aligned with existing Council priorities such as enhanced homeless outreach, referral and advocacy services and the advancement of the supportive housing project at 68 Sixth Street.

The Senior Management Team has identified five categories of issues in order to address the livability of the Downtown. Immediate actions are those currently underway and are resourced through existing Department budgets. Short-term actions are those that fall between one to three months for implementation. Short-term actions that require additional resources are being highlighted in this report and will be moved to the City’s 2022 Budget process.

ANALYSIS

The Senior Management Team has identified the following five categories of issues.

#1 – Need to improve general cleanliness and the provision for 24 hour, public toilets in the Downtown

- During COVID and due to the shift to take-out, there has been a noticeable and on-going increase in garbage both in receptacles and strewn on City sidewalks and in parks. Complaints include size of receptacles and frequency of pick-up.
- There is also a noticeable increase in human waste and a need for 24 hour, accessible, public toilets, especially in the Downtown. Both stand-alone public toilets and 24/7 access to existing public toilets in City facilities and at the Skytrain stations are being investigated.

#2 – Homeless outreach and added emergency shelter capacity

- Aligning with the work of the COVID-19 At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force, the City has been advocating for additional homeless outreach, referral and advocacy funding. In addition to this funding, more coordination is needed between City Departments when addressing homeless encampments.
- There has been a significant increase in unsheltered homelessness due to COVID, with service providers estimating this population at between 150 and 200. Supportive housing is 14 to 18 months away, if approved. In the interim, there is a need for up to 50 emergency shelter beds, which would preferably be 24/7.

#3 – Opioid epidemic and illicit drug response

- The opioid epidemic and the supply of illicit drugs continues to create unprecedented levels of overdoses and overdose deaths.
- Many City Departments lack the necessary training and mandate to effectively address this epidemic.
- The BIA and the Downtown Residents' Association are supportive of addiction services and are seeking additional support from the City.
- The Health Contact Centre requires additional Provincial funding to expand its hours of operation, particularly during the morning and early afternoon, and to address neighbourhood concerns related to discarded needles and the public use of illicit drugs.
- Departments are evaluating proactive actions from other municipalities aimed at improved outcomes, in addition to actively participating in regional approaches.

#4 – Business support and engagement

- COVID has created financial hardships for local businesses. Combined with trying to mitigate ongoing construction challenges, the Downtown BIA is seeking City support in the following areas: acquiring timely information; having assurances that cleanliness standards are maintained over the long-term (this includes street and sidewalk, and garbage pick-up).
- The BIA requests that the City's tenant improvement permitting processes be streamlined and that priority be given to building permit applications for businesses seeking a business license to operate, to support more effective business recruitment and retention strategies.

#5 – Need to work with Fraser Health in addressing mental health issues which are contributing to increasing homelessness and illicit drug use

- Mental health issues are contributing to increasing homelessness and illicit drug use, and are challenging City staff and service providers.
- Those suffering from mental health issues are isolated and being victimized, and have few options with regard to housing, support and treatment.

ACTIONS

ISSUE	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS	SHORT TERM ACTIONS
<p>Need to improve general cleanliness and the provision for 24 hour, public toilets in the Downtown</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Engineering Department has added larger garbage receptacles throughout the Downtown and increased collection frequency. 2. Expression of Interest has been developed for specialized waste management in the Downtown. 3. The City is adding one portable toilet in Hyack Square. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate resource requirements to support late night garbage collection (refer to 2022 Budget process). 2. Continue workplan to provide 24/7 washrooms in City facilities, and report back to Council. 3. Investigate with Translink the provision of public washrooms at Skytrain stations. 4. Investigate additional fee for service with faith-based or non-profit service providers as washroom attendants/outreach service providers. 5. Prepare to purchase and install a prefabricated stand-alone public toilet in the Downtown and report back to Council (already identified in the 2022 Budget).

<p>Homeless outreach and added emergency shelter capacity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Police, Bylaws, Engineering and Fire Departments are creating a coordinated multi-departmental Team. 2. The multi-departmental Team is working on a protocol to check the well-being of homeless individuals and attend to any safety or environmental hazards on a daily basis. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing a workplan and resource requirements to implement seven day and evening bylaw coverage (refer to 2022 Budget process). 2. Working collaboratively with service providers and BC Housing for up to 50 emergency shelter beds in the Downtown 3. Interdepartmental Inspection staff will prioritize the emergency shelter application.
<p>Opioid epidemic and illicit drug response</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Fire Department is evaluating an interdepartmental and inter-agency medical approach. Learning from successes in Vancouver – Vancouver Fire and Vancouver Coastal and Surrey Fire and Fraser Health. 2. Outreach and training between Fire and Police first responders, Bylaw staff and Social Planners. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a workplan and resource requirements to develop: a customized screening process to identify suitable candidates to connect with existing social, mental and medical services designed to address the issues and facilitate access and introduction to these services. 2. Work with Fraser Health to expand hours of the Health Contact Centre, including during the morning and early afternoon, and to increase needles sweeps and outreach.

<p>Business support and engagement</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a dashboard for Economic Development to understand the current situation from other divisions when businesses reach out with who to contact for further information. 2. Formalized plan and materials for business outreach that cohesively relays information coming from City Departments. 3. Targeted overdose awareness and education for trades, temporary labour, and construction companies by refocusing existing work with the BIA, WorkSafe and Purpose Society. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing a workplan and resource requirements between Building, Licensing and Economic Development to reduce timelines for building permit applications and business license applications requiring building permits (refer to 2022 Budget process).
<p>Need to work with Fraser Health in addressing mental health issues which are contributing to increasing homelessness and illicit drug use</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. City staff will work closely with Fraser Health’s new Integrated Response Team which will support sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons with mental health issues. The team will include a mix of nursing, allied health professionals, and clinical and peer support workers; operate 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, including weekends; and serve New Westminster and the Tri-Cities. 2. City staff will clarify the role of the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team, which includes the City’s Mental Health Police Liaison Officer, and serves adults living with serious mental illness. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The City to provide mental health education, information and training to staff on the front lines, including in Engineering Operations, Integrated Services, and Parks and Recreation.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

All departments are working on this high priority initiative and have collaborated in the writing of this report.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council's consideration; they are:

Option 1 - Council endorse the actions as outlined in this report and direct staff to advance the short-term actions with budget implications to the 2022 Budget process; or

Option 2 – Provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommend Option 1

This report was prepared by:
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer

This report was reviewed by:
Senior Management Team staff

This report was approved by:
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer