

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council in Regular Meeting **Date:** November 1, 2021

From: Emilie K. Adin, Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development **File:** TUP00027

Item #: 2021-492

Subject: Temporary Use Permit: 502 Columbia Street (Former Army and Navy Department Store) – For Emergency Shelter

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council provide notice that it will consider issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP00027) for an Emergency Shelter at 502 Columbia Street as outlined in this report.

THAT Council approve a grant-in-lieu to the applicant in the amount of \$1,542.50 for the purposes of waiving the fee for the Temporary Use Permit.

PURPOSE

For Council to consider a Temporary Use Permit for an emergency shelter on the lower floor of the former Army and Navy Department Store, located at 502 Columbia Street.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lower Mainland Purpose Society has applied for a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) to operate an emergency shelter on the lower floor of the former Army and Navy Department Store, located at 502 Columbia Street.

The emergency shelter could comprise an Extreme Weather Response Program (EWRP) shelter, which would be operational from November 1 to March 31 and activated during extreme weather events, or an Emergency Response Centre shelter, which would operate 24/7 for up to 18 months or until new supportive housing is in place. The shelter would provide up to 50 mats or beds; serve adults, could offer support services, and would be accessible off of Front Street.

The Official Community Plan designates the land as Columbia Street Historic Mixed Use, and the property is zoned C-8 (Columbia Street Historic Comprehensive Development Districts). An emergency shelter is not permitted under the current zoning. As such, a TUP would be required, which would allow the emergency shelter to operate for three years, with an option to renew for an additional three years subject to Council consideration.

BACKGROUND

Homelessness Situation in New Westminster

Based on the 2020 Homeless Count, 52 unsheltered and 71 sheltered homeless people were enumerated in New Westminster, for a total of 123 homeless people. The count report authors note: "The count includes persons if they are found during the count period and complete a survey, which is believed to be a small proportion of the total population experiencing unsheltered homelessness."

In September 2021, City staff reached out to service providers with a mandate to address homelessness in order to provide an update as to the estimated number of unsheltered homeless people in New Westminster. Based on the responses received, it was estimated that the unsheltered homeless population is now measured in the hundreds, and likely three to four times the pre-pandemic number. It was also reported that this population is more challenging to serve as a result of the pandemic.

Extreme Weather Response Program Shelter

The Extreme Weather Response Program (EWRP) is funded by BC Housing, operates between November 1 and March 31, and is intended to reduce the risk of illness, injury and death among unsheltered homeless people during extreme weather events. In New Westminster, the EWRP shelter was housed on the lower floor of the Cliff Block, located at 606 Clarkson Street. Prior to the pandemic, this shelter accommodated 30 men and women, and during the pandemic, it accommodated 16 men due to physical distancing requirements. The Cliff Block is currently in the process of being renovated to house a multidisciplinary health clinic for the unsheltered which will displace the shelter, thus necessitating a new location.

Emergency Response Centre Shelter

In response to the pandemic, BC Housing, based on a license agreement with School District #40, established an Emergency Response Centre (ERC) shelter with up to 40 men and women at the Massey Gymnasium. The ERC shelter was operated and staffed 24/7, provided a range of support services, and incorporated physical distancing requirements. Unfortunately, the shelter only operated from May 11 to July 13, 2020, at which time School District #40 did not renew the license agreement for a number of reasons, including the resumption of in-person learning in September 2020. BC Housing and City explored other locations but a replacement shelter was not realized.

Current Crisis Situation

Prior to the pandemic, there were 52 emergency shelter beds and 30 Extreme Weather Response Program (EWRP) shelter mats in New Westminster, with an unsheltered homeless population enumerated at a little over 50 persons. Of significance, it was almost impossible to make a placement for one of these beds, with all shelters reporting high numbers of turn-aways. As cited, 40 Emergency Response Centre (ERC) shelter beds were operationalized for a short period between May 11 and July 13, 2020.

Currently, there are 52 emergency shelter beds, no EWRP shelter mats, and no ERC shelter beds in New Westminster. The unsheltered homeless population is estimated in the hundreds, and three to four times the pre-pandemic number. Winter is fast approaching, and a fourth wave of the pandemic is threatening to be the worst yet.

A 52-unit modular supportive housing development is proposed for 60 to 68 Sixth Street; however, this development, if approved by Council, is about 18 months away. The ERC shelter, if funded by BC Housing, would operate until this new supportive housing is in place.

SITE CONTEX AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Site Characteristics and Context

The site is approximately 3,411 square metres (36,715 square feet), and is surrounded by other commercial and high rise residential buildings. To the south is the Front Street Parkade and the Railway.

The building is 7,393 square metres (79,576 square feet), is leased by the Lower Mainland Purpose Society, and houses Purpose Independent Secondary School on the third and fourth floors, which is accessed off of Columbia Street. The emergency shelter is proposed to be housed on the lower floor, which is about one-quarter of the total floor space, and is accessed off of Front Street.

Proximity to Public Transit

The location is across the street from Columbia Street SkyTrain Station, thereby providing for access to rapid transit, frequent transit, and a number of other bus routes, as well as providing for strong regional connections.

Transit Facility	Frequency	Distance
SkyTrain Station	SkyTrain: 2-3 minutes (peak hours) Buses: Approximately 15 minutes	30 metres (90 feet) to Columbia Street station

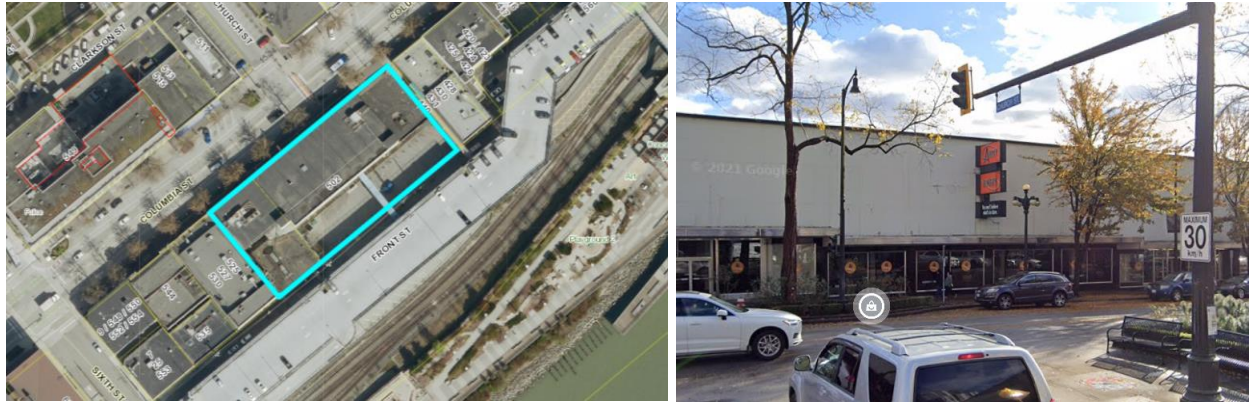


Figure 1: Site Context Map and Street View

Land Use Designation and Zone

The Official Community Plan designates the land as Columbia Street Historic Mixed Use, which allows for mixed-use (commercial and/or residential) along Columbia Street, with retail, office, service, restaurant, entertainment, arts and culture, and recreation at street level. The retention of heritage buildings is expected. The property is zoned C-8 (Columbia Street Historic Comprehensive Development Districts).

The proposed use is not permitted in the property's C-8 (Columbia Street Historic Comprehensive Development Districts) zoning district, so it would require a Temporary Use Permit. Further details on Land Use Policies and Temporary Use Permits are included in Attachment 1.

PROPOSAL

The proposed emergency shelter, located at 502 Columbia Street, could comprise an Extreme Weather Response Program (EWRP) shelter, which would be operational from November 1 to March 31 and activated during extreme weather events, or an Emergency Response Centre shelter, which would operate 24/7 for up to 18 months or until new supportive housing is in place. The shelter would provide up to 50 mats or beds; serve adults, could offer support services, and be accessible off of Front Street.

There would be no changes to the exterior of the building façade on Columbia Street, as the majority of the changes would occur on the lower floor of the interior of the building. These changes would necessitate a Building Permit review but would not trigger a design review. If the preferred option is an Emergency Response Centre (ERC) shelter, then there could be a need for enhanced physical accessibility, possibly in the form of ramping, off of Front Street.

The applicant requests that the term of the Temporary Use Permit (TUP) be for a period of three years, which is the maximum time period for a TUP. The applicant would have to discontinue the proposed emergency shelter use after three years or apply for a TUP

extension which would be subject to Council consideration. If a TUP were not to be approved by Council, the applicant would be required to apply to rezone the property or find another location that permits the proposed emergency shelter use.

DISCUSSION

The application has been evaluated using the evaluation criteria for Temporary Use Permits (TUPs), per Section 190.46 of the Zoning Bylaw. The full evaluation is available in Attachment 2. The application would provide a community benefit in regard to providing emergency shelter and support services for unsheltered homeless people, would be temporary in nature, and would generally be compatible with the surrounding properties and the mix of uses expected in an urban Downtown. The applicant has indicated that they would have the proper measures in place to address potential community concerns around management, staffing and security. The TUP would include conditions relating to maintenance and operation requirements as listed in Attachment 3.

CONSULTATION

Given the current crisis situation (see Background), the potential loss of life, and the temporary nature of the proposed use, City staff are not recommending that a public information session be held.

In alignment with the development review process, no Opportunity to be Heard will be held. The City will notify the properties within 100 metres of the proposal that feedback on the application can be provided to the City by e-mail or mail. The feedback would be provided to Council prior to consideration of a motion to issue the Temporary Use Permit.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The applicant has requested that the fee be waived for the Temporary Use Permit application given that the emergency shelter is meeting an identified and urgent community need. In the past, the City has waived this fee for non-profit organizations addressing an identified and urgent community need. Should Council wish to waive the application fee for this project, staff would recommend a grant-in-lieu, which would be covered by the Affordable Housing Fund in the amount of \$1,542.50.

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS AND NEXT STEPS

Given the significant increase in homelessness, staff are proposing to expedite the development approvals process. This would mean allocating additional staff resources to the application to ensure that it can be made a priority and be processed as efficiently as possible while allowing for some opportunities for community engagement.

The anticipated steps in this application's review process are:

1. Report to Council requesting that Council provide notice that it will consider issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP). **(we are here)**
2. Notices sent out by City Clerks Department, followed by Council consideration of the TUP.

OPTIONS

There are three options for Council's consideration:

1. That Council provide notice that it will consider issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP00027) to allow an emergency shelter at 502 Columbia Street as outlined in this report;
2. That Council approve a grant-in-lieu to the applicant in the amount of \$1,542.50 for the purposes of waiving the fee for the Temporary Use Permit;
3. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends options 1 and 2.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Land Use Policy and Temporary Use Permits
Attachment 2 – Evaluation Criteria for Temporary Use Permits

This report was prepared by:
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