

# REPORT

## *Climate Action, Planning and Development*

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** November 27, 2023

**From:** Jackie Teed, Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development  
**File:** 2394416-v1  
**Item #:** 2023-778

**Subject:** **Staff Recommendation Related to the Council Motion Regarding the Chinatown Community Stewards Program**

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That** Council direct staff not to pursue a similar initiative to the Chinatown Community Stewards Program for New Westminster.

**That** Council direct staff to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society to incorporate attributes of the Chinatown Community Stewards Program into the I's on the Street Program.

**That** Council direct staff to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society to identify and potentially realize funding to maintain current service levels for the I's on the Street Program.

**That** Council direct staff to add \$24,000 to the 2024 Crisis Response Team budget to provide bridge funding for the I's on the Street Program and seek reimbursement when grant or senior government funding is secured.

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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is threefold: (1) to provide a recommendation to Council with regard to the Chinatown Community Stewards Program; (2) to seek direction from Council to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society to incorporate attributes of the Chinatown Community Stewards Program into the I's on the Street Program; and (3) to seek direction from Council to help identify and potentially realize funding to maintain current service levels for the I's on the Street Program.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On June 12, 2023, Council endorsed a motion to bring an initiative similar to the Chinatown Community Stewards Program to New Westminster. This program, which was developed in 2019, employs people with lived or living experience of homelessness and/or poverty to act as stewards for the Chinatown neighbourhood in Vancouver. On September 25, 2023, staff brought a report to Council which shared some preliminary research on the Stewards Program. As part of the report, Council endorsed a staff recommendation with regard to conducting further research on this program, including its implications for the New Westminster I’s on the Street Program.

Staff has conducted this research and has determined that there is considerable overlap between the two above cited programs. Based on this research, staff are recommending that some attributes of the Stewards Program could be incorporated into the I’s on the Street Program. Regarding the latter program, the federal grant which has enabled it to expand into three neighbourhoods in New Westminster ends as of December 31, 2023. As such, staff are recommending that Council direct staff to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, who coordinates the program, to identify and potentially realize funding to maintain current service levels.

**BACKGROUND**

***Council Direction***

At the June 12, 2023 Regular Meeting, Council endorsed the following motion:

*Whereas the City of New Westminster is focusing on enhancing livability in the downtown and throughout the entire city; and*

*Whereas the City of New Westminster prioritizes compassion and proven solutions;*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

*THAT Council directs staff to report back on opportunities to bring a program similar to the Chinatown Stewards model to New Westminster.*

At the September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting, Council endorsed the following staff recommendation:

*That Council direct staff to pause other projects in the Community Planning work program to conduct further research on the Chinatown Community Stewards Program, including its implications for the New Westminster “I’s on the Street” Program, and that staff report back the findings to Council.*

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Consultation Process***

City staff conducted interviews with the following individuals who are familiar or involved with the Chinatown Community Stewards Program:

- Belle Cheung, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives, City of Vancouver
- Joey Kwan, Executive Director, Vancouver Chinatown BIA Society
- Johanna Li, Manager, EMBERS Eastside Works
- Helen Ma, Planner, Downtown Eastside Neighbourhoods Group, City of Vancouver

Staff also conducted Internet research on the Chinatown Community Stewards Program.

### ***Chinatown Community Stewards Program***

The Chinatown Community Stewards Program was established in 2019 and is primarily funded by the City of Vancouver and operated by EMBERS Eastside Works. It employs people with lived or living experience of homelessness and/or poverty to act as stewards for the Chinatown neighbourhood in Vancouver.

Based on the interviews, the program has five main objectives:

- facilitating low-barrier employment opportunities and wrap-around supports for persons with lived or living experience of homelessness and/or poverty;
- assisting with litter collection and sharps pick-up;
- liaising with and assisting businesses to respond to issues, including by notifying City staff;
- offering information, assistance and directions to visitors; and,
- providing resource information to vulnerable residents, including assisting with referrals.

Key successes and benefits highlighted by all interviewees included: assisting residents with lived or living experience of homelessness and/or poverty to build self-esteem and to gain work experience; building positive relations between all parties, enhancing response times in addressing issues; and preventing escalation of some situations. Regarding challenges, all interviewees cited the lack of long-term, sustainable funding and need for greater collaboration.

The annual cost to operate the program is about \$250,000, with the City providing \$177,000 to cover the salary of stewards, the administration fee and a portion of the equipment costs.

### ***New Westminster I's on the Street Program***

The I's on the Street Program was established in 2010 and is coordinated by the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society. It employs people who are experiencing homelessness and mental health issues. Duties include but are not limited to collecting litter, including drug paraphernalia; disseminating resource information, including the Food Resources Calendar and the Survival Guide; and assisting with referrals to community-based organizations. Participants receive training in administering Naloxone and handling hazardous materials. The program operates in the Downtown, Sapperton and Uptown neighbourhoods, with the primary source of funding being senior government grants, including through Strengthening Communities. Regarding these grants, the majority of this funding will end as of December 31, 2023.

The annual cost to operate the program is between \$130,000 and \$140,000.

### **ANALYSIS**

Based on the consultation and research, staff has determined that there is considerable overlap between the two programs. In fact, the I's on the Street Program offers three of the five key objectives underpinning the Chinatown Community Stewards Program. Regarding the other two key objectives, they could be incorporated into the I's on the Street Program, with these being: liaising with businesses regarding issues and notifying City officials; and offering information, assistance and directions to visitors.

The major funding source for the I's on the Street Program ends as of December 31, 2023. If additional funding is not realized, the program will have to significantly scale back its service levels. Launching a similar initiative to the Chinatown Community Stewards Program in New Westminster would see two programs competing for limited funding, which would not be ideal for either program.

Given the above, it is recommended that Council direct staff to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society, who coordinates the I's on the Street Program, to incorporate attributes of the Chinatown Community Stewards Program and to identify and potentially realize funding to maintain current service levels.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

City staff have been successful in reallocating \$11,000 from a Homelessness Community Action Grant towards the I's on the Street Program, and has requested a time extension with regard to applying \$18,000 in unused funds from Strengthening Communities to the I's on the Street Program. At the time of report submission, it was not known if the City has been granted an extension. If yes, then the \$29,000 in combined grant funding would enable the I's on the Street Program to operate until March 31, 2024. This would provide four months for the City and the Coalition to identify and potentially realize funding to maintain current service levels.

City staff are recommending adding \$24,000 to the 2024 Crisis Response Team budget to provide bridge funding for the I's on the Street Program and seeking reimbursement when the above grant or senior government funding is secured

### **OPTIONS**

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council direct staff not to pursue a similar initiative to the Chinatown Community Stewards Program for New Westminster.
2. That Council direct staff to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society to incorporate attributes of the Chinatown Community Stewards Program into the I's on the Street Program.
3. That Council direct staff to work with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society to identify and potentially realize funding to maintain current service levels for the I's on the Street Program.
4. That Council direct staff to add \$24,000 to the 2024 Crisis Response Team budget to provide bridge funding for the I's on the Street Program and seek reimbursement when grant or senior government funding is secured
5. That Council provide staff with other or additional direction.

Staff recommends options #1, #2, #3 and #4.

### **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:  
John Stark, Manager of Community Planning

This report was approved by:  
Jackie Teed, Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development  
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer