

Memorandum

To: Lisa Spitale,
Chief Administrative Officer

Date: November 20, 2023

From: Lisa Leblanc,
Director of Engineering

File:

Jackie Teed,
Director of CAPD

Subject: 2024 Budget – Addressing the three Crises with a Crises Response Team Pilot Project

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is twofold: (1) to outline the two-year Crisis Response Team pilot project to address the crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use affecting the community; and (2) to outline the financial implications associated with this pilot for the 2024 and 2025 annual budgets.

BACKGROUND

As outlined in a report to Council on October 23, 2023, New Westminster is facing the crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use which are complex, inter-related and are impacting and broadly affecting the community in a number of ways.

Homelessness Crisis

The City's Housing Needs Report (June 2021) identified a need for 358 supportive housing units between 2021 and 2031. Of this, 52 have been approved and funded but this only accounts for 14.5% of the total units needed. The Point-in-Time Homeless Count conducted in March 2023 confirms the city's needs remain unmet, as it showed that there are 57 unsheltered and 146 sheltered homeless people in New Westminster. This represents a 65% increase between the 2020 and 2023 counts. In the most recent count, 63 sheltered homeless people did not have access to a 24/7 shelter so the daytime unsheltered homeless count is actually much higher at 120 people. Additionally, the count identified a significant over-representation of Indigenous people in the unsheltered homeless population (43%) compared to the Indigenous sheltered population (12%), as well as compared to the overall City's Indigenous population (3.1%).



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Mental Health and Substance Use Crisis

The Point-in-Time Homeless Count identified that 61% of unsheltered and 33% of sheltered homeless people in New Westminster self-reported a mental health issue. Additionally, 78% of unsheltered and 25% of sheltered homeless people self-reported some form addiction indicating that any strategy to address homelessness should also include strategies to address mental health and substance use issues.

OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

New Westminster is facing the crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use which is impacting the community in a number of ways including through the suffering by those directly experiencing these crises, but also by those affected by the externalities of these crises, and by placing a strain on City resources. The City recognizes that its existing responses to these crises are not working. Given this, Council endorsed a two-year pilot organizational project based on promising practices and lessons learned from other municipalities that are proactive, responsive, people-centered and strategic. The pilot project includes three united inter-departmental teams which will consist of both existing and new staff.

- 1. Crises Response Team** – Is a new team that will address community requests and complaints and provide support to those who are experiencing homelessness, mental health and substance use issues by coordinating, and providing people-centered referrals to Provincial, non-profit and faith-based support teams.
- 2. Operations Support Team** – comprised of existing staff and will support the new Crises Response Team and address many of the externalities of these crises.
- 3. Policy Development and Advocacy Team** – is primarily comprised of existing staff and will: lobby senior levels of government for additional funding, resources and supports needed to sustainably address the needs and issues associated with the three crises; work to align external supports and enhance their services in our city; and work to facilitate development of the needed housing and shelter units.

This pilot project will require engagement with First Nations, Indigenous organizations, the community and with people with lived and living experience. It will also require enhanced relations with provincial bodies and the realization of 50 to 60 24/7 shelter beds, 50 to 60 supportive housing units and the development of a Health and Connect Resource Centre. To accomplish this, the City is working towards MOUs with BC Housing, the Fraser Health Authority, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Community Belonging and Connecting

This pilot project will strive to connect and develop relationships with the people experiencing these crises and work to have them develop positive, non-judgement and



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stigma-free relationships with the community. The Health Connect and Resource Centre will create a connection point where everyone can feel welcome and create a place where health and support teams can meet. The people-centered approach will strive to create a strong sense of belonging and support for people experiencing these crises.

Housing Options

The Policy Development and Advocacy Team will be striving to realize housing options for the unsheltered and precariously sheltered and housed within New Westminster. Its work will be based on the City's Homelessness Action Strategy (July 2022), Housing Needs Report, (June 2021) and Downtown Livability Strategy (September 2021) and will work to collaborate with senior government to facilitate development of new shelter, housing and health and support services.

Reconciliation

It is recognized that Indigenous populations are significantly over-represented amongst the homeless population in New Westminster, especially amongst the unsheltered homeless. This could be a result of the lack of culturally appropriate options. An objective of this pilot project is to engage First Nations Health Authorities and Indigenous organizations to better serve all Indigenous homeless and precariously housed people in New Westminster.

Public Engagement

Virtually the whole community is affected by these crises thus a broad and ongoing evaluation, engagement and communications strategy will be implemented to continue to monitor community needs, develop iterative strategies and communicate to the community the pilot projects actions.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (DEIAR)

The pilot project will embrace a people-centered, non-judgmental and stigma-free accessible approach towards people experiencing homelessness, mental health and substance use issues. It will strive to provide strategies that are culturally-appropriate, respectful and address social inequities and meet the needs of these populations.

Organizational Effectiveness

The pilot project will use specialized staff and have a new, strategic, well-organized approach which will be more responsive and effective, and will enable staff in Integrated Services, Engineering and Fire to refocus on core service functions. It will also properly train and equip staff to work in this increasingly challenging environment, enhancing their safety, keeping them motivated and preventing them from burning out.

Healthy Governance

The new structure will strengthen internal engagement, information sharing, decision-making and coordination and will better serve the community, those impacted by the externalities of the crises and those directly experiencing them. The Policy Development and Advocacy Team will directly support Council's role advocating to senior levels of government.

Resilience

By understanding and responding to the needs of staff and ensuring that appropriate training and resources are in place, the resiliency of both staff and assets such as public toilets and elevators will be improved. Likewise, the pilot project should improve the community's resiliency through increased communication, information-sharing and educational materials.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is recognized that many of the roles and responsibilities in this pilot project fall within the Province's mandate. Part of the mandate of the Policy Development and Advocacy Team is to work to secure funding from the Province. As noted in the October 30, 2023 report to Council – the projected annual budget for 2024 is \$770,000, plus benefits.

Operations Support Team (\$90,000)

- Communications Support – 0.5 FTE, two-year contract (\$30K per year)
- Human Resources Support – 0.25 FTE, two-year contract (\$15K per year)
- Data Analyst Support – 0.5 FTE, two-year secondment with backfill (\$35K per year)
- Equipment, supplies, materials and contracted services – (\$10K per year)

Crises Response Team (\$450,000)

- Manager of Crises Response – 1.0 FTE, (\$105K per year)
- Crises Response Livability Supervisor – 1.0 FTE (\$0 per year)
- Encampment Safety Officer – 1.0 FTE, two-year contract (\$80K per year)
- Non-Clinical Outreach Workers – 2.0 FTE, two-year contract, (\$85K each per year for a total of \$170,000 per year)
- Homelessness Services Coordinator 1.0 FTE, two-year contract (\$75K per year)
- Equipment, supplies, materials and contracted services – (\$20K per year)

Policy Development and Advocacy Team (\$230,000)

- Deputy Fire Chief – 0.5 FTE, one-year secondment with backfill (\$75K)
- Homelessness Planning Analyst 1.0 FTE, two-year contract (\$70K per year)
- Indigenous consultant to support engagement (\$85K per year)



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Recommended Funding Strategy

It is recommended that the City seek \$585K of provincial funding for both 2024 and 2025 for the following positions:

- Manager of Crises Response (1 FTE \$105K)
- Encampment Safety Officer (1 FTE \$80K)
- Non-Clinical Outreach Workers (2 FTE \$170K / year)
- Homelessness Services Coordinator (1 FTE \$75K / year)
- Homelessness Planning Analyst (1 FTE \$70K/ year)
- Indigenous Consultant to support engagement (\$85K / year)

It is recommended that the City fund the:

- Crises Response Homelessness Livability Supervisor (1 FTE \$85K / year) from an existing staff vacancy
- \$185K for the Operations Support Team and the Policy Development and Advocacy Team

Given the crises, time is of the essence. It is imperative that the recruitment for these positions commence immediately. Funding for these positions will be from the Reserve. When the Province provides the above necessary funding, the Reserve will be reimbursed accordingly.

Advocacy Update

Since presented to Council on October 30, 2023, the following new advocacy work has been undertaken:

- The Mayor has met with the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to secure provincial funding for the initiative within this pilot project.
- The Team will be meeting with the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions in mid-November 2023 to advocate for funding and services for the pilot project.
- The Team has met with the First Nations Health Authority and will be scheduling follow-up meetings to explore collaboration related to the pilot project.
- The Team has met with Fraser Health Authority's Medical Health Officer and has scheduled a presentation to the Medical Directors for Fraser Health Authority to obtain their clinical endorsement of this project.
- The Medical Health Officer has requested the Advocacy team present this project to the Royal Columbian Hospital (RCH) Emergency Department Managers who expressed interest in exploring the possibility of integrating this project into one being undertaken by RCH Emergency Department.