

**REPORT**  
***Planning and Development***  
***Engineering Services***  
***Office of the Chief Administrative Officer***

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council      **Date:** November 18, 2024

**From:** Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer      **File:** Doc#2595828

Lisa Leblanc, Director, Engineering Services

Jackie Teed, Director,  
Planning and Development

**Item #:** 2024-631

**Subject: Crises Response Pilot Project: Q4 2024 Update**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** Council direct staff to provide a further update in Q2 2025.

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**PURPOSE**

This report is to provide Council with an update on the progress and key developments of the Crises Response Pilot Project.

**BACKGROUND**

New Westminster, similar to other municipalities in Metro Vancouver and the Province, is facing the three crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use. These crises are complex, inter-related and fall under the jurisdiction of the senior levels of government. They are also impacting the community, including through the suffering of those directly affected, and those who are dealing with the associated externalities. The crises are straining City resources, impacting staff health and safety.

In response, the City launched its Crises Response Pilot Project in September 2024 to advance proactive, responsive and strategic organizational approaches to addressing the three crises. The City has historically been active in working to address these crises; however, it has become apparent that a new approach is needed to make real progress. The Pilot Project was launched in September 2024, and builds on and expands across the city, the Downtown Livability Strategy which was developed in 2022. The role of the Pilot Project is to:

- Provide direct “in the field” help for those with living experience of the three crises to connect with needed support services and daily needs;
- Work to identify a path for establishing a culturally-appropriate and trauma-informed approach to supporting Indigenous people with living experience in New Westminster;
- Collaborate with senior government to realize funding, resources and services to better and more sustainably address the three crises, and decentralize these services from Downtown;
- Improve communication and engagement with businesses, residents, faith-based and non-profit organizations and other community partners;
- Improve staff safety;
- Improve staff and the public’s awareness and understanding of the City’s people-centric policies and response procedures;
- Continue enhanced hygiene and sanitation initiatives in key areas;
- Continue the City’s compassionate enforcement approach;
- Activate public space animation such as street activations and events; and
- Establish metrics and external evaluation, and take a nimble approach of continuous improvement throughout the Pilot Project.

The Pilot Project includes three inter-departmental teams: Crises Response Team, Policy and Advocacy Team, and Operations Support Team. Updates on the activities of each are summarized below.

### **A. CRISES RESPONSE TEAM UPDATE**

The Crises Response Team is a non-clinical outreach team who are in the field to directly assist those with living experience of the three crises in connecting to provincial and community-based support services (e.g. housing/shelter, health care), as well as other basic daily needs. Given the significant over-representation of Indigenous persons with living experience of the three crises, which is a legacy of colonialism and residential schools, this team champions the needs of Indigenous people with living experience and works to identify how the City could provide a culturally-appropriate and trauma-informed response; this work is advised by the City’s Indigenous Relations Manager, and Indigenous planning and facilitation consultant.

A detailed update on the work of this team is included in Attachment 1. In summary, this team has been in place and working in the field since spring, as well as working to understand how to identify a different approach to supporting Indigenous people with living experience in New Westminster.

## **B. POLICY AND ADVOCACY TEAM UPDATE**

The Policy and Advocacy Team focuses on longer-term and sustainable strategies to address the three crises, including permanent supportive housing; and ensures that facilities, services and supports are equitably distributed throughout the city and not focused on any one neighbourhood. It also works to ensure that facilities, services and supports are purpose-designed and self-contained, and that measures are in place to minimize externalities. This team collaborates with senior government for the required funding, resources and services, and communicates with and engages the community, including related to advocacy. This team also fosters strategic partnerships, and has developed staff liaisons to work closely with resident, business, faith-based, non-profit, and provincial interests.

A detailed update on the work of this team is included in Attachment 2. In summary, in preparation for the launch of the Pilot Project, this team has been meeting with senior government and external agencies, meeting with the Downtown BIA and Residents Association, and establishing working groups necessary to guide the work; advancing a Memorandum of Understanding with a post-secondary institution to complete independent evaluation; and undertaken internal and external communications using multiple media.

## **C. OPERATIONS SUPPORT TEAM UPDATE**

The Operations Support Team includes Fire, Police, Engineering Operations, Civic Buildings, Community Services, Parks and Recreation, and Bylaws staff, who respond to issues related to emergency, life safety, fire prevention, cleanliness, compliance with bylaws, and public space activation and animation such as street activations and events. Given the impact of the three crises on staff, this team is also responsible for assessing and monitoring staff needs, ensuring compliance with the City's obligations under collective agreements and WorkSafeBC, and providing compassionate response training for City staff.

A detailed update on the work of this team is included in Attachment 3. In summary, this team is comprised of City staff whose core function is to deliver core City services, while also responding to the additional operational needs arising as a result of the three crises. Their work includes a range of services, including supporting the full realization of the BC Housing funded sanitation trailer with attendant services adjacent to the Purpose Nightly Shelter, and ongoing work on a city-wide public washroom strategy. Toward addressing staff needs, industry experts were engaged to complete a health and safety review, and implementation of recommendations is advancing. Activations in Downtown have continued, and hiring of the compliance and liaison team is underway.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

The Crises Response Pilot Project is a high priority corporate initiative. Several City departments are involved in this Pilot Project: Community Services, Engineering Services, Fire and Rescue Services, Human Resources, Library Services, Office of the CAO, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development and Police Services.

**NEXT STEPS**

On April 8, 2024, staff presented an update report on the Pilot Project to Council, which is included in Attachment 4. A further update would be provided to Council in Q2 2025.

**OPTIONS**

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That staff provide a further update in Q2 2025.
2. That Council provide other direction.

Staff recommends option 1.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Crises Response Team Update

Attachment 2: Policy and Advocacy Team Update

Attachment 3: Operations Support Team Update

Attachment 4: Council Report April 8, 2024: Crises Response Pilot Project Update

**APPROVALS**

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