

# REPORT

## *Planning and Development*

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** November 4, 2024

**From:** Jackie Teed, Director,  
Planning and Development  
**File:** TUP00032  
Doc#2558689

**Item #:** 2024-597

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

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **THAT** Council provide notice that it will consider the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP00032) for an emergency shelter use at 502 Columbia Street as outlined in this report.
  2. **THAT** Council waive the application fee for the Temporary Use Permit in the amount of \$1,120.30 which would be reflected in a comparable decrease in projected 2024 planning permit revenues.
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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is for Council to consider the issuance of a new Temporary Use Permit for an emergency shelter use, either nightly or 24/7, on the lower floor of the former Army and Navy Department Store at 502 Columbia Street, and to request Council waive the application fee.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Lower Mainland Purpose Society has applied for a new Temporary Use Permit (TUP) to operate an emergency shelter use, either nightly or 24/7, on the lower floor of the former Army and Navy Department Store at 502 Columbia Street. The emergency shelter use would have 50 beds and serve both men and women. A TUP is necessary as an emergency shelter use is not permitted under the property's C-8 (Columbia Street Historic Comprehensive Development Districts) Zone.

The existing TUP was issued for an extreme weather response program shelter or an emergency response centre shelter, with the latter shelter type intended to protect the unhoused during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BC Housing has conducted a code analysis towards establishing a temporary 24/7 emergency shelter with support services at 502 Columbia Street but did not proceed as the building lease concluded in November 2025 and there was some reluctance on behalf of the property owner related to such a shelter.

Purpose Society has recently negotiated a lease extension for the building, which now concludes in November 2028, and BC Housing is working on a response plan to address potential externalities associated with the emergency shelter use. This plan, which will address aspects related to cleanliness, maintenance, safety and security, including in proximity to the emergency shelter use, will be shared with the property owner. It will also help address identified community concerns regarding the existing emergency shelter use such as poor building maintenance, presence of discarded belongings and graffiti, and concerns related to personal safety. Additionally, staff, as a condition of the proposed TUP, is recommending the establishment of a community advisory committee, which will engage business and community members in a proactive process should concerns or issues arise.

The emergency shelter use, either nightly or 24/7, will potentially be in place until the renegotiated lease concludes, or until a permanent 24/7 shelter with support services is established on the periphery or outside the Downtown.

## **BACKGROUND**

The emergency shelter use at 502 Columbia Street, which is accessed off Front Street, has been in operation since late-December 2021.

Previous to this location, the emergency shelter use, in the form of an emergency response centre, was housed at the Massey Gymnasium and accommodated up to 40 men and women. This shelter was a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for physical distancing to protect those who were unhoused and to prevent the spread of this infectious disease. With the resumption of in-person learning at New Westminster Secondary School, the School District, who owned the facility, did not renew the license agreement.

BC Housing, in consultation with the City and Lookout Housing and Health Society, explored a number of locations for an emergency shelter use; however, for a variety of reasons, including inability to negotiate a suitable lease agreement, limited floor area, poor configuration and the lack of outdoor space, it was not successful.

For the unhoused, there were few options, if any, for emergency shelter, and this led to an increase in unsheltered homelessness. The unhoused were placed at greater risk of infection, and exposed to extreme weather and other hazards which increased the

potential for death, illness or injury. The lack of emergency shelter also impacted businesses and residents as overnight sheltering in parks and public spaces became more commonplace; setting fires to keep warm or to cook became more prevalent; and taking refuge in alcoves and doorways became more widespread. Additionally, human waste in the public realm and in private spaces became a significant issue.

With Purpose Society leasing the former Army and Navy Department Store at 502 Columbia Street, this provided an opportunity for an emergency shelter use on the lower floor. In late-December 2021, an extreme weather response program shelter, which was permitted through a Temporary Use Permit (TUP), was opened with 50 beds and operated until March 31, 2022.

After a five-month closure, the emergency shelter use was reopened as the nightly emergency shelter, which has 50 beds and operates between 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. At this time, BC Housing undertook a code analysis in support of a temporary 24/7 emergency shelter with support services. Based on this analysis, it was determined that there was a need for fire separations, sprinkler maintenance and electrical upgrades. A significant challenge to justifying the cost of the upgrades was the lease agreement, which concluded in November 2025, as well as some reluctance on behalf of the property owner to permit such a shelter.

**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 Purpose Society, and houses the New Westminster Youth Hub and Purpose Independent Secondary School on the third and fourth floors, which are accessed off of Columbia Street. The emergency shelter use is housed on the lower floor, which is about one-quarter of the total floor space, and is accessed off 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.

<b>Transit Facility</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Distance</b>
SkyTrain station	SkyTrain: 2-3 minutes (peak hours) Buses: approximately 15 minutes	30 metres (90 feet) to Columbia Street SkyTrain station



Figure 1: Site Context Map and Street View

*Land Use Designation and Zone*

The Official Community Plan designates the property as Columbia Street Historic Mixed Use, which allows for mixed-use (commercial and/or residential) along Columbia Street, with office, restaurant, retail, service, arts and culture, entertainment 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 emergency shelter use is not permitted in the property’s C-8 (Columbia Street Historic Comprehensive Development) zoning district, so it requires a Temporary Use Permit (TUP). The TUP would allow this use to operate for three years, with an option to renew for an additional three years subject to Council consideration and approval. For more information on land use policies and TUPs, refer to attachment 1.

**ANALYSIS**

*Homelessness Situation*

The city is facing increasing homelessness. The March 2023 Point-in-Time Homeless Count found 57 unsheltered and 146 sheltered homeless people in New Westminster. Combined, there were 203 unsheltered and sheltered homeless people, which represented a 65% increase between 2020 and 2023. Regarding the sheltered homeless number, it is misleading as it is significantly bolstered by the nightly shelter. Of importance, those using the nightly shelter are unsheltered between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. On the night of the count, 63 people were using the nightly shelter. As such, the daytime unsheltered homeless number is 120 people.

### *Crises Response Pilot Project*

The City has launched a Crises Response Pilot Project, which addresses the three crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use. The pilot project includes a number of initiatives to better address the needs of those directly impacted, while containing or limiting the associated externalities. This includes enhanced extreme weather and winter emergency shelter capacity; a temporary and a permanent 24/7 emergency shelter; additional supportive housing, and a drop-in centre or a hub. The first three initiatives will ensure that guests or residents can meet their diverse needs on-site and the fourth initiative will ensure that the unhoused have a place to go, meet their needs and spend time. Collectively, these initiatives will significantly reduce the daytime unhoused population when businesses are operating and residents are circulating in the community.

### *Emergency Nightly Shelter*

The Purpose Nightly Shelter at 502 Columbia Street, which is accessed off of Front Street, has been in operation since late-December 2021. The emergency nightly shelter has made a significant difference in addressing the needs of the unhoused, and has reduced suffering and saved lives during extreme weather events.

Given that the emergency nightly shelter operates from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m., it does not address externalities related to the three crises during the day, when businesses are operating and residents are circulating in the community. On the night of the Metro Vancouver Point-in-Time Homeless Count in March 2023, there were 63 people staying at the nightly shelter and there were 47 people who were defined as unsheltered homeless in New Westminster. As such, the daytime unhoused/unsheltered population was at least 120 people.

Regarding the daytime unhoused/unsheltered population, they must move their belongings from place to place as they try to meet their basic needs in the community, including related to food, hygiene and shelter. This includes accessing food security programs; availing themselves of bathrooms, including those located in businesses; setting fires to keep warm or to cook; taking refuge in alcoves and recessed areas to keep dry; and using substances in public. This population also spends the majority of their time trying to meet their basic needs and not accessing services and supports to address the underlying issues which may be contributing to their homelessness or mental health and substance use issues. Regarding the emergency nightly shelter, services and supports are not available as they typically operate during the day.

### *Possible Temporary 24/7 Emergency Shelter with Support Services*

Purpose Society has negotiated a three-year extension to its existing lease for the former Army and Navy Department Store at 502 Columbia Street, which now concludes in November 2028. Purpose Society is interested in transitioning the emergency nightly shelter to a temporary 24/7 emergency shelter with support services. A lease extension

is necessary for BC Housing to justify the cost of building retrofits, including fire separations, sprinkler maintenance and electrical upgrades. The property owner has expressed some reluctance in transitioning the emergency nightly shelter to a temporary 24/7 emergency shelter, and Purpose Society and BC Housing will work with the property owner to address their concerns.

Currently, BC Housing is working on a response plan to address potential externalities associated with the emergency shelter use. This plan, which will address aspects related to cleanliness, maintenance, safety and security, including in proximity to the emergency shelter use, will be shared with the property owner. It will also help address identified community concerns regarding the existing emergency shelter use such as poor building maintenance, presence of discarded belonging and graffiti, and issues related personal safety. Additionally, staff, as a condition of the proposed Temporary Use Permit, is recommending the establishment of a community advisory committee, which will engage business and community members in a proactive process should concerns or issues arise.

Based on consultation events related to the Crises Response Pilot Project, which included the Downtown Residents’ Association, the Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Association and the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce, there were participants who expressed concerns about the emergency nightly shelter. These concerns included the lack of support services and the limited hours of operation, as well as the inability to address daytime homelessness, which contributes to sheltering and taking refuge in doorways and recessed areas; open burning; and the presence of discarded belongings and human waste. A number of participants felt that it would be beneficial to transition the emergency nightly shelter to a temporary 24/7 emergency with support services for the following reasons:

- reducing the daytime unhoused/unsheltered population by about half;
- demonstrating that the city is a compassionate community and cares about its most vulnerable;
- enhancing access to care, services and supports for the unhoused/unsheltered;
- limiting externalities related to homelessness, including sheltering, discarded belongings or needles, human waste, open burning, public illicit drug use, etc.;
- reducing adverse health outcomes for the unhoused/unsheltered associated with exposure to extreme daytime weather conditions.

Participants were supportive of the City working with BC Housing on a permanent 24/7 shelter and additional supportive housing on the periphery or outside the Downtown.

**DISCUSSION**

The application has been evaluated using the evaluation criteria for Temporary Use Permits (TUPs), per Section 190.46 of the Zoning Bylaw. For more information, refer to attachment 2. The application would provide a community benefit in regard to providing emergency shelter and support services for unhoused/unsheltered people, would be

temporary in nature (given that the lease extension concludes in November 2028) and would reduce externalities related to homelessness for businesses and residents. The applicant and funder have indicated that they will have the proper measures in place to address potential externalities, including the development of a response plan. The proposed TUP will include conditions relating to operational requirements and the establishment of a community advisory committee. For more information, refer to attachment 3.

**APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS AND NEXT STEPS**

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 the Temporary Use Permit (TUP). **(we are here)**
- 2. Notification to be provided to properties within 100 metres of the proposal, with feedback on the application to be provided to the City by e-mail or mail. In accordance with City practice, there will be no opportunity to be heard.
- 3. Council to receive a summary of feedback and consider issuance of a motion to issue the TUP on November 18, 2024.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The applicant has requested that the fee be waived for the Temporary Use Permit application given that the emergency shelter use 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, it would be reflected in a comparable decrease in projected 2024 planning permit revenues.

**OPTIONS**

There are three options for Council’s consideration:

- 1. That Council provide notice that it will consider the issuance of a new Temporary Use Permit (TUP00032) for an emergency shelter use at 502 Columbia Street as outlined in this report.
- 2. That Council waive the application fee for the Temporary Use Permit in the amount of \$1,120.30 which would be reflected in a comparable decrease in projected 2024 planning permit revenues.
- 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  
Attachment 3 – Terms and Conditions

## **APPROVALS**

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

This report was reviewed by:  
Annie Sudeyko, Supervisor, Social Planning and Homelessness Prevention  
Demian Rueter, Manager, Development Planning

This report was approved by:  
Jackie Teed, Director, Planning and Development  
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Office



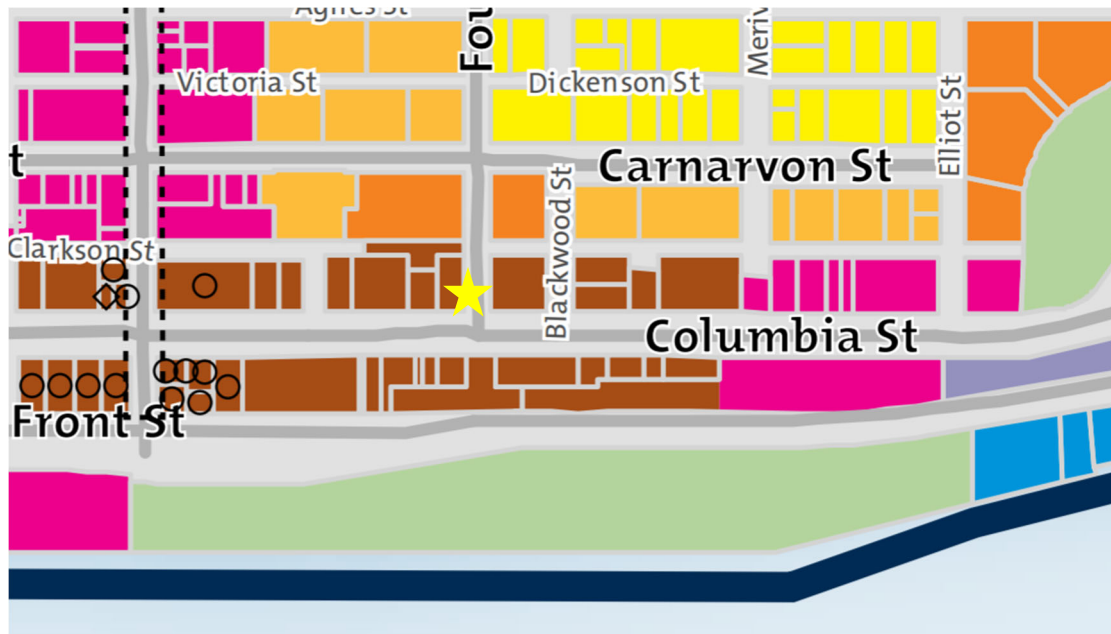
## Attachment 1

### *Land Use Policy and Temporary Use Permits*

## **ATTACHMENT 1 – LAND USE POLICIES AND TEMPORARY USE PERMITS**

### **Official Community Plan**

The Official Community Plan (OCP) designates the land as Columbia Street Historic Mixed Use which allows for mixed-use (commercial and/or residential) along Columbia Street, with office, restaurant, retail, service, arts and culture, entertainment and recreation at street level. The retention of heritage buildings is expected. Neighbouring properties have the same land use designation. The proposed use is consistent with the Downtown Community Plan, and no OCP amendment would be required.



*Figure 1 - Excerpt from Official Community Plan Land Use Map*

### **Zoning Designation**

The site is zoned C-8 (Columbia Street Historic Comprehensive Development Districts). The proposed emergency shelter use is not permitted in this zoning district. Therefore, a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) would be required.

### **Temporary Use Permits**

The Local Government Act authorizes municipalities to issue TUPs, which allow uses that would not normally be permitted to operate on a temporary basis. The permits can be issued for a maximum of three years. After that time, they may be extended once by application for an additional three years. Council may attach conditions to the issuance of the permit to ensure mitigation of the impacts of the temporary use on existing businesses and properties. Section 190.46 of the Zoning Bylaw sets out evaluation criteria for TUPs, which is included in attachment 2.

## Attachment 2

### *Evaluation Criteria for Temporary Use Permits*

## **ATTACHMENT 2 – EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR TEMPORARY USE PERMITS**

Section 190.46 of the Zoning Bylaw sets out the following evaluation criteria for Temporary Use Permits (TUPs):

- a) *Whether the proposed use is consistent with the Official Community Plan designation for the land?*

The Official Community Plan (OCP) designates the land as Columbia Street Historic Mixed Use which allows for mixed-use (commercial and/or residential) along Columbia Street, with office, restaurant, retail, service, arts and culture, entertainment and recreation at street level. The retention of heritage buildings or adaptive reuse of existing buildings is expected. The proposed residential use is consistent with the Downtown Community Plan, and no OCP amendment would be required. The impact of the proposed emergency shelter use would be consistent with the mix of uses expected in an urban Downtown

- b) *Whether the proposed use is consistent with any neighbourhood plan applying to the land?*

N/A

- c) *Whether the proposed use is consistent with relevant policies adopted by the Council?*

The proposed emergency shelter use is consistent with the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities Plan and City policies related to homelessness. Regarding the former, one of the five strategic areas is “Homes and Housing Options.” Under this strategic area, it includes the following objective: “Implement policies and procedures to further support the delivery and maintenance of homes that meet the community’s diverse needs.” As for City policies, the proposed use is referenced in the 2023 Crises Response Pilot Project, which is an initiative to address the three related crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use, and is consistent with the City’s 2022 Homelessness Action Strategy. More specifically, it relates to the following action: “That the City advocate that BC Housing continue to fund existing extreme weather and emergency shelter beds and that it monitor and respond to the need for such beds, including related to specific population groups of the unsheltered.”

- d) *In the case of any proposed use that is not consistent with any such plan or Council policy, the nature and extent of any community benefit from the use?*

N/A

- e) *Whether the proposed use is of a temporary nature or whether it would be more appropriate for the City to consider permitting the use by rezoning?*

The proposed emergency shelter use is of a temporary nature in terms of providing emergency shelter to unhoused/unsheltered persons. Purpose Society, the leasee, has signed a lease extension for the building housing the proposed use which concludes in November 2028. The City and BC Housing are actively exploring sites for a permanent 24/7 shelter with support services, which, when it receives occupancy, will result in the closure of the current nightly or temporary 24/7 emergency shelter.

f) *The suitability and compatibility of the proposed use with the surrounding area, including its operation, function, appearance and intensity of use?*

*Operation, Function and Intensity of Use:*

The function of the proposed emergency shelter use is to temporarily accommodate up to 50 unhoused/unsheltered homeless people. These would include persons that would be adversely impacted by extreme weather events, including during the daytime.

The majority of the changes are carried out in the interior of the building. The parking access would also be located at the current location. The appearance of the site would be similar to the existing appearance.

g) *The impact of the proposed use on the operation of adjacent uses, including future land uses permitted by the Zoning Bylaw and designated by the Official Community Plan?*

The site's adjacent properties consist of commercial buildings and high rise residential uses. The impact of the proposed emergency shelter use would be consistent with the mix of uses expected in an urban Downtown.

BC Housing will work with Purpose Society with regard to building maintenance and repairs, operational practices, staffing, and security to reduce externalities associated with the emergency shelter use on neighbouring properties.

Regarding other uses in the building, the New Westminster Youth Hub and Purpose Independent Secondary School occupy the third and fourth floors of the building and are accessed off of Columbia Street. The proposed emergency shelter use would be located on the lower floor of the building and accessed off of Front Street. There would be no interior connection between the uses, and there is limited access and a steep gradient between Columbia and Front Streets.

## Attachment 3

### *Terms and Conditions*

### **ATTACHMENT 3 – TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

The following conditions apply to the Temporary Use:

1. The Permittee must cease all operation of the Temporary Use before the expiry of this Temporary Use Permit (TUP), unless the TUP has been renewed after consideration by Council, or the zoning applicable to the Site has been amended to allow the land use herein permitted;
2. The Permittee shall operate as an Emergency Shelter Use only on the lower floor and accessed off of Front Street;
3. The Emergency Shelter Use shall not provide accommodation to more than fifty (50) persons at any given time;
4. The Emergency Shelter Use shall be permitted to operate on a nightly or a 24/7 basis subject to the approval of the property owner and funding and oversight through BC Housing;
5. The Permittee will operationalize and abide by the BC Housing Response Plan, which is intended to reduce externalities associated with the Emergency Shelter Use.
6. The Permittee will establish a Neighbourhood Advisory Committee to address concerns related to externalities associated with the Emergency Shelter Use.
7. The Permittee must apply for all required permits to complete any necessary renovations and upgrades. This TUP is not a Building Permit.