

REPORT

Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: November 25, 2024

From: Jackie Teed, Director,
Planning and Development
File: 13.2630.01
#2521221

Item #: 2024-671

Subject: **Update to the Social Planning Work Program, 2025-2026**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse in principle the proposed Social Planning Work Program for 2025 and 2026.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement in principle for the Social Planning Work Program for 2025 and 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Social Planning Work Program describes all ongoing and upcoming deliverables that the Social Planning section is engaged in, either in a coordinating or leadership capacity, or in a supportive role. In the summer of 2024, the Social Planning section engaged in a strategic planning session to prepare a proposed Work Program for 2025 and 2026. The proposed Work Program responds to a new team structure; continues to align with Council's Strategic Priorities Plan; and accommodates the additions of: a large-scale initiative in the Crises Response Pilot Project, new work directed through Council motions, and other emergent issues.

The proposed Work Program includes topic areas ranging from child care, to food security, to healthy aging, to homelessness prevention, to social connectedness, to settlement and integration. It is strategically aligned with two of Council's strategic priorities as outlined in [Council's Strategic Priorities Plan: Homes and Housing Options and Connecting and Belonging](#). By using an equity-focused lens and maintaining reciprocal relationships with community partners; the deliverables outlined in the Work Program contribute to positive health, livability and wellbeing in New Westminster.

The Social Planning Work Program is ambitious but achievable through effective allocation of the small team of 5.5 FTE, plus 1.5 FTE working solely on the Crises Response Pilot Project. Any additions to the proposed Work Program would require further discussion with Council to pause or remove current identified deliverables.

BACKGROUND

Social planning involves the development of plans, policies and strategies that aim to address social issues; improve the quality of life within communities, including for the most vulnerable; and promote equity and social inclusion. The proposed Work Program acts as an internal roadmap to guide the Social Planning section, outlining all current and upcoming deliverables, as well as anticipated timelines. The proposed Work Program, including anticipated timelines for all deliverables, is detailed in Attachment 1.

Highlights of Recent Work

The Social Planning section's previous Work Program covered the period from April 2023 through 2026. Some highlights of Work Program deliverables that have been initiated or completed include:

- amplifying the voices of people with lived and living experience who are underrepresented in civic spaces through the Community Action Network;
- coordinating the Refugee Response Working Group;
- coordinating and hosting the "New to New West" Intercultural Festival and Information Fair;
- facilitating the implementation of the Homelessness Action Strategy;
- hosting the Mental Health Roundtable, which involved over 20 organizations and teams with a mandate to address mental health and substance use;
- managing the Age-Friendly Grant and the Connect and Prepare Pilot to support climate resiliency in congregate and seniors independent housing settings;
- supporting Homelessness Action Week activities in partnership with the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society;
- supporting the establishment and launch of the Crises Response Pilot Project, including related to communications, engagement and evaluation activities.

Grants Received

Since 2020, the Social Planning section has applied for and been successful in receiving more than \$5.1 million in grant funding. This funding has supported a high number of initiatives, including assisting persons with disabilities, seniors and the unhoused during the COVID-19 pandemic; building community emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities and seniors; developing new child care spaces; facilitating collaboration and coordination among organizations and teams mandated to address mental health and substance use issues; and updating strategic documents such as the Age-Friendly Community Strategy and the Food Security Action Plan. The grants applied for and received between 2020 and 2024 are listed in Attachment 2.

Social Planning Section Restructure

To better align department resources with [Council's Strategic Priority Plan](#) and the Province's Homes for People Action Plan and Belonging in BC homelessness plan, the Planning and Development Department reframed its internal organization around delivery of all types of shelter and housing as a core service. This included restructuring the Social Planning section into two groups: 1) focusing on child care, food security, inclusion, poverty reduction, settlement and integration, and social connectedness; and 2) under a Supervisor of Social Planning and Homelessness Prevention, focusing on homelessness prevention and support. The latter includes implementing the Homelessness Action Strategy; supporting the Crises Response Pilot Project; and realizing emergency shelter beds and supportive housing and complex care units to address the needs of the unhoused and those living with mental health and substance use issues.

In the summer of 2024, the Social Planning section engaged in a strategic planning session to prepare a new Work Program. It responds to the new team structure; continues to align with Council's Strategic Priorities Plan; and accommodates the additions of: a large-scale initiative in the Crises Response Pilot Project, new work directed through Council motions, and other emergent issues.

PROPOSED WORK PROGRAM

The work of the Social Planning section falls under two Council Strategic Priorities Plan Focus Areas: Homes and Housing Options, and Community Belonging and Connecting. The work includes development and implementation of policies, strategies and bylaws; resource and information provision; realizing resources through advocacy and collaboration; planning for supports for the most vulnerable; and, relational community work that underpins the Social Planning section's ability to carry out their role.

The list below provides examples of the proposed Work Program deliverables that fall under each Focus Area. The full proposed Work Program and estimated timelines is included in Attachment 1:

1. Homes and Housing Options:

- Developing a Social Benefits Zoning Policy and Bylaw
- Developing a Tenant Protection Policy and Bylaw
- Hosting tenant information and resource sessions
- Implementing the Homelessness Action Strategy
- Updating the Homelessness Needs Assessment
- Publishing and regularly updating the Survival Guide
- Assisting with Crises Response Pilot Project implementation, advocacy and evaluation
- Realizing new emergency shelter beds and supportive housing and complex care units
- Supporting and reviewing affordable housing development

- Participating on community-based committees, including but not limited to:
 - New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society
 - New Westminster Overdoes Community Action Team

2. Community Belonging and Connecting:

- Developing and Implementing a Food Security Action Plan
- Developing and implementing an Age-Friendly Community Strategy
- Developing and Implementing a Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy
- Implementing the Sanctuary City Policy
- Conducting Community Action Network intakes and training
- Planning for emergency management response for vulnerable community members
- Participating on community-based committees, councils and collectives including but not limited to:
 - Welcoming and Inclusive New Westminster Local Immigration Partnership Council (chair)
 - Hey Neighbour Collective
 - Kids New West
 - Time for Change Group

In addition to the above areas, the Social Planning section: provides cross-departmental support to other staff teams, through statistical analysis, or by providing an equity-focused lens; responds to child care inquiries and requests from faith-based and non-profit partners for data analysis, statistical information and support letters; and applies for and manages grants.

Emergent Issues

The Social Planning section also spend about 15% of resources responding to emergent issues. This work cannot be anticipated, and responds to newly developing issues that pose a potential risk to the organization and residents, particularly those who are vulnerable. Previous examples include major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the heat dome and the opioid epidemic, or more localized disruptions such as an act of racism, the potential closure of a child care or food security program, or a tenant displacement situation.

A case study outlining several emergent child care challenges that arose and were addressed by the Social Planning section over the past year is detailed in Attachment 3. This case study illustrates a typical example of an emergent issue, shows how staff prioritized their work and collaborated with community-serving organizations to respond. This demonstrates the broader importance of Social Planning on community health, livability and wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

Work Program Community-Level Impact

By taking a comprehensive and equity-focused approach to social issues, the deliverables outlined in the proposed Social Planning Work Program for 2025 and 2026 would contribute to broader population-level objectives that aim to enhance community health, livability and wellbeing. Drawing from the Strategic Priorities Plan, the proposed Social Planning Work Program contributes to the following outcomes:

- **Belonging and Connectedness:** Community development and social connection initiatives, engagement processes, settlement and integration services, and welcoming spaces foster social cohesion and enable residents to feel a sense of belonging, community and connection. These initiatives contribute to a resilient, engaged, and involved community.
- **City Services Alignment and Support:** By championing diversity, age- and ability-friendly planning, and adaptive strategies and technologies in City services and processes, residents are able to live more healthy and independent lives and to remain in their homes and neighbourhood of choice. These initiatives contribute to an inclusive and welcoming community.
- **Resilient Economy:** Child care, mental health, settlement, and substance use services and supports improve economic wellbeing by enabling full social and economic participation, allow residents to work, maintain their employment, and contribute to their communities. These initiatives contribute to a diverse and vibrant economy for all.
- **Addressing Homelessness:** Housing, hygiene and shelter, and tenant protections enable residents to lead dignified, healthy, and fulfilling lives, while food security and poverty reduction initiatives mitigate some of the root causes of homelessness. These initiatives improve public health and contribute to community resiliency, safety and wellbeing for all residents.

Attachment 4 includes a diagram mapping the Work Program to the above outcomes.

NEXT STEPS

Achieving all deliverables as outlined in the proposed Work Program is dependent on staff’s ability to effectively balance existing work and relationship building with emergent priorities. Any additions to the proposed Work Program would require further discussion with Council to pause or remove current identified deliverables as outlined in Attachment 1.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The work in the proposed 2025 and 2026 Social Planning Work Program is primarily funded through existing resources in the Department’s Operating and Capital Budgets, including \$20,000 for the Social Benefits Zoning Policy and Bylaw in the proposed 2025 Capital Budget. In support of restructuring the Social Planning section into two focused teams, including supporting the Policy and Advocacy (Collaboration) component of the Crises Response Pilot Project (CRPP), an Operating Budget enhancement is requested in 2025, which is included in the “Implementing Housing Legislation and Expediting Unit Approvals” report elsewhere on this agenda. This enhancement is necessary to continue to advance the City’s work around homelessness prevention and support; emergency shelter and supportive housing development; and CRPP implementation, advocacy, engagement. and evaluation.

The Social Planning section has historically been successful in securing external grants in support of the City’s work, and will continue to seek such funds as opportunities arise.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council’s consideration:

- 1. That Council endorse in principle the proposed Social Planning Work Program for 2025 and 2026
- 2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Updated Social Planning Work Program (June 2024 to September 2026)
- Attachment 2: Grants Applied for and Received by Social Planning between 2020 and 2024
- Attachment 3: City Assistance in Retaining Child Care Spaces and Facilities
- Attachment 4: Updated Social Planning Work Program Diagram

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Annie Sudeyko, Supervisor, Social Planning and Homelessness Prevention
John Stark, Manager, Community Planning

This report was reviewed by:
Rupinder Basi, Deputy Director, Planning

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