

REPORT

Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: May 26, 2025

From: Jackie Teed, Director,
Planning and Development
File: TUP00038
#2704887v2

Item #: 2025-151

Subject: Temporary Use Permit: 40 Begbie Street – Health Contact Centre

RECOMMENDATION

1. *THAT notice be provided that Council will consider the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP00038) for overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre at 40 Begbie Street for a maximum of 18 months, or until an interim mobile overdose prevention service is operational, whichever is less time.*
 2. *THAT the application fee be waived for the Temporary Use Permit in the amount of \$1,153.00, which would be reflected in a comparable decrease in projected 2025 planning permit revenues.*
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to request that Council provide notice that it will consider the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP00038) for overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre at 40 Begbie Street, and to also request that Council waive the applicable fee.

SUMMARY

The Health Contact Centre, located at 40 Begbie Street, was established based on two key objectives: (1) to decrease the number of toxic drug overdose deaths; and (2) to reduce public drug consumption and related externalities. Given that overdose prevention services are not a permitted use under the zoning district for this property, Purpose Society, the operator and property owner, applied for a Temporary Use Permit,

which was approved by Council on March 29, 2021. This Permit enabled the use to operate for three years, with the ability to extend for an additional three years subject to Council approval.

City staff recently confirmed that the Temporary Use Permit for the Health Contact Centre has lapsed. In the absence of a Temporary Use Permit or a Zoning Amendment, this use is not permitted. In such situations, the City's practice is to provide an opportunity for an operator or a property owner to bring the use into compliance by way of a Temporary Use Permit or a Zoning Amendment application.

The Health Contact Centre has been successful in decreasing toxic drug overdose deaths for people utilizing indoor injection overdose prevention services, as there have been no recorded deaths. The Centre has been less successful in meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of people who use inhalants and in reducing public drug consumption and related externalities given the lack of indoor inhalation overdose prevention services.

Despite the efforts of City staff over a two-year period, including considerable advocacy with senior health officials at both Fraser Health and the former Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, little progress has been made in realizing indoor inhalation overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre. In recent discussions, Fraser Health has stated that there are operating funds but no capital funds for renovations to facilitate indoor inhalation overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre. Moreover, the City was informed that Fraser Health would only make such an investment in a Fraser Health owned or leased site.

Given that indoor inhalation overdose prevention services cannot be incorporated at the Health Contact Centre, and given the significant shift in consumption from injection to inhalation and the associated major service gap, City staff do not recommend that 40 Begbie Street be rezoned to permit overdose prevention services. City staff recommend that Council considers the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit for a maximum of 18 months, or until an interim mobile overdose prevention service is operational, whichever is less time. This recommendation is consistent with the position of both Fraser Health and Purpose Society.

A time limited Temporary Use Permit would enable for the orderly wind down of the Health Contact Centre and provide time to transition to an alternate overdose prevention service delivery model both in the interim and in the longer-term. To this end, Fraser Health has submitted a letter (attachment 1). This letter states that Fraser Health is working closely with the City, the Ministry of Health and Purpose Society to identify a suitable location for overdose prevention services that would be both accessible to clients and be acceptable to the broader community.

BACKGROUND

Declaration of State of Emergency related to the Toxic Drug Overdose Crisis

On April 14, 2016, the Province of British Columbia declared a state of emergency related to the toxic drug overdose crisis. In New Westminster, overdose deaths increased from nine in 2016 to 35 in 2018 or by 288%. In response, Council, as part of its 2019 *Strategic Plan*, included the following direction: “Take a lead role in responding to the opioid epidemic, including coordinating City action.”

Establishment of a Health Contact Centre

In July 2020, Council directed staff to work with Fraser Health to explore an overdose prevention site in New Westminster. City staff and Fraser Health officials held several meetings to discuss an overdose prevention site, with Fraser Health circulating a request for proposals for a non-profit operator. With an operator selected, and a potential location identified at 40 Begbie Street, Purpose Society, the operator and property owner, applied for a Temporary Use Permit for the overdose prevention site, which later became known as the Health Contact Centre, as the proposed use was not permitted under the existing zoning. Council approved the Permit on March 29, 2021, which enabled the use to operate for three years, with the ability to extend for an additional three years subject to Council approval.

Existing Temporary Use Permit

City staff recently confirmed that the Temporary Use Permit for the Health Contact Centre has lapsed. As the operator, it is Purpose Society’s responsibility to ensure that all permits – including a Temporary Use Permit – are compliant; and that appropriate steps are taken to address any pending issues that would place them out of compliance. In the absence of a permit or zoning, the current land use is not permitted. In such situations, the City’s practice is to provide an opportunity for an operator or a property owner to bring the use into compliance by way of a Temporary Use Permit or a Zoning Amendment application.

SITE CONTEXT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The site is approximately 808 square metres (8,694 square feet) and is surrounded by mixed use buildings with commercial at grade, often with residential units above. On the neighbouring properties to the north of the site are the Arundel Mansion and the Russell Housing Centre, and on the neighbouring property to the south is the Anvil Centre. The Russell Housing Centre includes 16 emergency shelter beds and 40 supportive housing units, and also accommodates the Seniors Services Society. Alexander Street, at the rear of the property, acts as a lane for the site and neighbouring properties.

Figure 1: Site Context Map



Proximity to Transit Services and Other Sustainable Transportation Options

The location is in close proximity to the New Westminister SkyTrain Station, thereby providing for access to rapid transit, frequent transit, and a number of other bus routes. In addition, the site is 50 metres (164 feet) from Columbia Street, which is part of the City’s bike network.

Transit Facility	Frequency	Distance
SkyTrain Station	SkyTrain: 2 to 5 minutes Buses: approximately 15 minutes	220 metres (722 feet) to New Westminister Station and bus loop

Land Use Policy and Regulations

The proposed use is consistent with the Official Community Plan but is not permitted in the property’s zoning district, so would require a Temporary Use Permit or a Zoning Amendment application. For more information on Land Use Policy and Temporary Use Permits, refer to attachment 2.

DISCUSSION

Application for a New Temporary Use Permit

The Temporary Use Permit for the Health Contact Centre at 40 Begbie Street has lapsed and the current use is not in compliance with the property’s zoning district. The

City's practice is to provide an opportunity for an operator or a property owner to bring the use into compliance by way of a Temporary Use Permit or a Zoning Amendment application. Purpose Society, the operator of the Health Contact Centre, has applied for a Temporary Use Permit, which would be subject to the proposed terms and conditions as specified in attachment 3.

Evaluation of Current Service Model

Based on discussions between the City and Fraser Health in 2020, two key objectives of the Health Contact Centre were: (1) to decrease the number of toxic drug overdose deaths; and (2) to reduce public drug consumption and related externalities such as discarded needles, sharps and other drug paraphernalia. Additionally, a key rationale for the Temporary Use Permit was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Centre in meeting these two key objectives.

The Health Contact Centre has been successful in decreasing toxic drug overdose deaths for people utilizing indoor injection overdose prevention services, as there have been no recorded deaths. The Centre has been less successful in meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of people who use inhalants and in reducing public drug consumption and related externalities given the lack of indoor inhalation overdose prevention services.

Based on statistics from February 2025, a daily average of eight people utilized indoor injection overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre, while far higher numbers of people congregated and used inhalants outside the Centre. While the latter are being afforded some level of protection, as Centre staff can monitor their activities and respond to overdoses as needed, this was not part of the original scope of services for the Centre, and does not meet one of the key objectives in establishing the Centre of bringing people inside and reducing public drug consumption and related externalities.

Advocacy Regarding Indoor Inhalation Overdose Prevention Services

Despite the efforts of City staff over a two-year period, including considerable advocacy with senior health officials at both Fraser Health and the former Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, little progress has been made in realizing indoor inhalation overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre.

In recent discussions, Fraser Health has stated that there are operating funds but no capital funds for renovations to facilitate indoor inhalation overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre. Moreover, the City was informed that Fraser Health would only make such an investment in a Fraser Health owned or leased site.

This new information is a departure from Fraser Health's previous position and means that the Health Contact Centre at 40 Begbie Street is not eligible for Fraser Health funding to incorporate indoor inhalation overdose prevention services.

Implications for Temporary Use Permit

Given that indoor inhalation overdose prevention services cannot be incorporated at the Health Contact Centre for the above cited reasons, and given the significant shift in consumption from injection to inhalation and the associated major service gap, City staff do not recommend that 40 Begbie Street be rezoned to permit overdose prevention services. City staff recommend that Council considers the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit for a maximum of 18 months, or until an interim mobile overdose prevention service is operational, whichever is less time. This recommendation is consistent with the position of both Fraser Health and Purpose Society.

A time limited Temporary Use Permit would enable for the orderly wind down of operations at the Health Contact Centre and provide time to transition to an alternate overdose prevention service delivery model both in the interim and in the longer-term.

ANALYSIS***Overdose Prevention Services Transition Plan***

In conjunction with the wind down of operations at the Health Contact Centre, Fraser Health has submitted a letter which cites the transition to an alternate overdose prevention service delivery model accommodating people who both inject and inhale their drugs (attachment 1). This letter states that Fraser Health is working closely with the City, the Ministry of Health and Purpose Society to identify a suitable location for overdose prevention services that would be both accessible to clients and acceptable to the broader community.

In discussions with Fraser Health, they proposed, as an interim or transitional measure, a mobile overdose prevention service which would address the needs of people who both inject and inhale their drugs.

This mobile service could comprise a trailer/container and/or a mobile van. The mobile service would be screened to ensure privacy for clients and to address community concerns about public drug consumption. It would provide for the proper disposal of drug paraphernalia, including in the immediate area; and it would be located outside the Downtown. It would also be staffed, programmed and operated to meet client needs, while addressing externalities such as congregating or sheltering in its vicinity. Depending on the location, consideration would be given to addressing any identified transportation barriers or needs.

Overdose Prevention Services New Location Plan

Fraser Health is working on a New Location Plan, which would identify a permanent location for overdose prevention services outside the Downtown. This would be in a building owned or under long-term lease by Fraser Health and would incorporate both injection and inhalation overdose prevention services, with the latter being indoors or

fully screened to ensure privacy for clients and to address community concerns about public drug consumption.

Related Initiatives in the Short- and Longer-Term

There are a number of related initiatives that would address the needs of people who use substances:

- the City is enhancing collaboration, coordination and case management related to mental health and substance use service providers, including working on the establishment of an adult situation table;
- the City, with funding support from Health Canada's Emergency Treatment Fund, is in the process of contracting a non-profit organization to provide substance use outreach services during evenings, statutory holidays and weekends;
- the City is continuing to work with non-profit organizations and societies to increase the availability of substance use treatment and supportive recovery services.

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS AND NEXT STEPS

The application would provide a health benefit in regard to providing overdose prevention services, primarily for the unhoused population. It would reduce harm, suffering and death associated with the toxic drug supply and would be temporary in nature given the transition to an alternate overdose prevention service delivery model.

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. **(we are here)**
2. Notification to be provided to properties within 100 metres of the applicant, 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 Temporary Use Permit on June 23, 2025.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The applicant has requested that the fee be waived for the Temporary Use Permit application given that the overdose prevention services are meeting an identified and urgent health need. In the past, the City has waived this fee for non-profit organizations addressing an identified and urgent community or health need. Should Council wish to waive the application fee for this project, it would be reflected in a comparable decrease in projected 2025 planning permit revenues.

OPTIONS

There are three options for Council's consideration:

1. That notice be provided that Council will consider the issuance of a Temporary Use Permit (TUP00038) for overdose prevention services at the Health Contact Centre at 40 Begbie Street for a maximum of 18 months, or until an interim mobile overdose prevention service is operational, whichever is less time.
2. That the application fee be waived for the Temporary Use Permit in the amount of \$1,153.00, which would be reflected in a comparable decrease in projected 2025 planning permit revenues.
3. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends options 1 and 2.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Letter from Fraser Health

Attachment 2 – Land Use Policy and Temporary Use Permits

Attachment 3 – Terms and Conditions of the Proposed Temporary Use Permit

APPROVALS

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