

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** April 11, 2022

From: Emilie K. Adin, MCIP **File:** 13.2630.09
Director, Climate Action, Planning and
Development

Item #: 2022-261

Subject: **Council Resolution in Support of the City of New Westminister's
Application under the COVID-19 Restart Funding for Local
Governments, Strengthening Communities' Services Program**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to submit an application under the COVID-19 Restart Funding for Local Governments, Strengthening Communities' Services Program, for the proposed activities and projects as outlined in this report and that the City accept overall grant management of the activities and projects.

PURPOSE

This report is to seek Council direction for staff to submit an application under the COVID-19 Restart Funding for Local Governments, Strengthening Communities' Services Program, for the proposed activities and projects as outlined in this report, and for the City to accept overall grant management of the activities and projects.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 Restart Funding for Local Governments includes \$100 million for the Strengthening Communities' Services Program, which aims to support unsheltered homeless populations and address community impacts through an application-based process. All local governments are eligible and the program can contribute up to 100% of the cost of eligible activities and projects. The approximate timing that the funding must be used is within one year of grant approval.

The City previously received \$446,083 from the Union of BC Municipalities under the 2021/22 Strengthening Communities' Services Program, which funded ten activities and projects between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022. These activities and projects not only responded to the basic or essential needs of the unsheltered but also addressed business and resident concerns regarding homelessness and its associated impacts.

To be eligible for funding, applications must demonstrate that proposed activities and projects meet one or more of the intended outcomes of the program:

- that demonstrate evidence of need in the community;
- that provide temporary solutions that address increased urgent and immediate needs related to unsheltered homelessness and do not create ongoing long-term financial obligations;
- that include new activities or projects, or expansion of existing ones; and,
- that are capable of completion by the applicant within one year of the date of grant approval.

DISCUSSION

Documented Need for Grant Funding

Based on the 2020 Regional Homeless Count, 52 unsheltered and 71 sheltered homeless people were identified in New Westminster, for a total of 123 homeless people. In September 2021, City staff reached out to local service providers that have a mandate to address homelessness and asked them to provide an update on the estimated number of unsheltered homeless people in New Westminster. Based on the responses received, it is estimated that the unsheltered homeless population, including those who are couch surfing, is now in the hundreds, and likely three to four times the pre-pandemic number.

The reasons for the increase in unsheltered homelessness are many, with several being tied to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These include but are not limited to: reductions in existing emergency shelter capacity due to pandemic-related physical distancing requirements; reluctance on behalf of family and friends to accept unsheltered people into their homes out of fear of virus transmission; and the ongoing housing affordability crisis and opioid epidemic.

Businesses and residents are raising concerns about visible homelessness, and associated public health and safety concerns, including: carelessly disposed needles and other drug paraphernalia; discarded containers and food, the result of takeaway meals for the unsheltered and food insecure; and the presence of human waste associated with limited access to toilet facilities. These concerns and others are taxing City services, and likely contributing to opposition to longer-term solutions to address homelessness, including new supportive and non-market housing projects.

Solicitation and Evaluation of Eligible Activities and Projects

Staff notified local faith-based and non-profit organizations of this potential funding opportunity through the City's COVID-19 At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations and Seniors and Persons Living with Disabilities Task Forces and through direct e-mail and other correspondence.

Given the limited timeframe between grant program launch and application submission, it was not possible to circulate a request for proposals in response to this potential funding opportunity. In its place, staff identified City priorities related to responding to the basic or essential needs of the unsheltered and addressing homelessness and its associated impacts (i.e., purchase of free-standing, pre-fabricated toilet and lease of two sanitation trailers to facilitate the opening of a new 24/7 Emergency Response Centre shelter for 12-months), and previously funded activities and projects under the 2021/22 Strengthening Communities' Services Program that were not "one-offs" and required additional time to diversify funding streams and realize financial sustainability.

Resulting from the solicitation and the review and evaluation process, seven activities and projects are proposed, which involve the City and four non-profit organizations with a total funding request of \$623,775.26.

ANALYSIS

The following activities and projects are organized according to the areas of eligibility under the Strengthening Communities' Services Program:

1. To improve the health and safety of persons who are experiencing homelessness.

Sanitation Trailers - City (\$91,200)

The City and BC Housing have reached an agreement to transition the existing Extreme Weather Response Program shelter at 502 Columbia Street, which is activated during extreme weather events and operates between November 1 and March 31, to a 24/7 Emergency Response Centre (ERC) shelter with 50 beds for a 12-month period. To facilitate the transition, there is a need for additional sinks and toilets, as well as access to shower facilities.

The City will assist in funding two sanitation trailers, each with three sinks, three toilets and two showers. Under ERC funding guidelines, municipalities are expected to provide civic facilities at no cost; however, given the lifting of most pandemic related restrictions, civic facilities have resumed full programming. As such, BC Housing must provide a lease payment for the facility/space in question and is requesting City funding with regard to covering a portion (32.4%) of the total lease and attendant staffing cost for the two sanitation trailers.

Free-Standing, Pre-Fabricated Toilet - City (\$200,000)

On October 18, 2021, Council endorsed the Downtown Livability Strategy. The strategy identifies five categories of issues to address the needs of the unsheltered and to improve livability in the Downtown, including the “need to improve general cleanliness and the provision for 24 hour, public toilets in the Downtown.” More specifically, it states: “prepare to purchase and install a free-standing, pre-fabricated toilet in the Downtown and report back to Council.”

The estimated cost to purchase a free-standing, pre-fabricated toilet is about \$200,000, which is only a portion of the total project cost. The total project cost includes: consulting services, site preparation, construction and installation costs (including connection to water and sewer services), and ongoing operational costs for cleaning and maintenance. This funding request would help offset the total project cost.

Initial planning work required to install a free-standing, pre-fabricated toilet is underway with anticipation of the toilet being installed and ready for use in late-2022 or early-2023.

Maida Duncan Drop-In Centre - Enhanced Social Support, Advocacy and Case Management Interventions - Elizabeth Fry Society (\$50,000)

The Maida Duncan Drop-In received \$50,000 in funding under the 2021/22 intake of the Strengthening Communities' Services Program.

Operating since 1997, the Maida Duncan Drop-In Centre offers a variety of services to sheltered and unsheltered women. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, and the housing affordability crisis, they have seen significantly increased demand for drop-in services.

The program meets basic needs, including free clothing, food security, income boosting and taxfiler support, laundry and shower access, and resource information and referral. Student nurses from Douglas College provide health care support and referral to mental health counselling. Dental hygienists from UBC provide free dental care. Additionally Dress for Success assists women seeking employment.

The Maida Duncan Drop-in serves over 3,720 women and 240 children on an annual basis. The Elizabeth Fry Society will use this funding request to address significantly increased demand for this service, as it continues to work towards financial sustainability, including diversifying funding streams..

Newcomer Feeding the Homeless Project - MOSAIC (\$50,000)

The Newcomer Feeding the Homeless Project started in September 2021 and received \$50,000 in funding under the 2021/22 intake of the Strengthening Communities' Services Program.

The project provides hot meals to the unsheltered, while connecting newcomers who are experiencing social isolation and providing them with training and work experience. More specifically, newcomer volunteers gain valuable skills related to food preparation, including Food Safe certification, while the unsheltered receive culturally-appropriate, healthy and nutritious meals.

From September 2021 to February 2022, the project has involved 68 newcomer volunteers who have prepared about 1,000 meals for the unsheltered. MOSAIC is actively seeking partnerships and exploring sponsorships, and will use this funding request to continue to feed the unsheltered while it works towards project financial sustainability.

Personal Identification Bank - Purpose Society (\$50,000)

The Personal Identification Bank at the Purpose Society opened in December 2021 with funding support from the City, and partial funding through the Reaching Home Program. The initiative was in response to large numbers of unsheltered who have no or incomplete personal identification, which limits their ability to access financial assistance and government benefits, including related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The service is located at 40 Begbie Street, which is also the home of the Health Contact Centre and the New Westminster Rent Bank Program. Through this service, individuals receive assistance in accessing or replacing personal identification at no cost, as well as referral to other community services, including income boosting and taxfiler clinics.

Since becoming operational, the service has received 66 referrals, and has 35 active files, with 13 sets of identification in process or received. It has also made referrals to other community services.

This funding request would enable the service to expand access, including hours of operation, and provide related assistance, while accessing more diverse funding streams while it works towards financial sustainability.

2. To reduce community concerns about public health and safety in neighbourhoods related to homelessness.

Health Contact Centre Liaison and Outreach Initiative - Purpose Society (\$43,839.26)

The Health Contact Centre received \$50,465 in funding under the 2021/22 intake of the Strengthening Communities' Services Program.

The Health Contact Centre incorporates an overdose prevention site and other harm reduction services, including drug testing and take-home naloxone kits. Guests can also access an on-site medical clinic and receive referrals to health and treatment services.

Currently the Health Contact Centre operates from 3:00 to 11:00 p.m. daily, with outreach workers active between 6:00 and 11:00 p.m. Purpose Society is proposing to retain an outreach worker who will work 25 hours per week from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (noon). The worker will distribute harm reduction supplies, administer naloxone, distribute food, make referrals, provide education, and supply information. The worker will also liaise with local businesses, and assist with the safe disposal of discarded needles and other drug paraphernalia.

From September 1, 2021 to February 28, 2022, the Health Contact Centre had 721 guest visits and no overdose deaths. The City is advocating to Fraser Health to fund morning and early afternoon outreach for the Health Contact Centre, and this funding request will provide valuable evidence as to the demand for expanded services, while addressing the needs of illicit drug users, many of whom are unsheltered.

I's on the Street Micro Street Cleaning Program - New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society (\$138,736)

The I's on the Street Micro Street Cleaning Program received \$127,811 in funding under the 2021/22 intake of the Strengthening Communities' Services Program.

I's on the Street (IOTS) is an award winning micro street cleaning program. It is designed to serve the community while acting as a stepping stone to regular employment for individuals who may be unsheltered, at risk of being unsheltered, and/or are living with a history of addiction or mental illness. The program empowers people to be self-reliant again and supports the belief that there is inherent dignity in any useful work that contributes to the betterment of the community. Participants are case managed and connected to support services, including training and employment, when they are ready to take the next step.

IOTS operates in three New Westminster neighbourhoods (i.e., Downtown, Sapperton and the Uptown) in partnership with Elizabeth Fry Society, Fraserside Community Services Society and Lookout Housing and Health Society, and is supported by an IOTS Coordinator from the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society.

Between December 2021 and February 2022, the workers at this program collected 216.5 large disposal bags of garbage and litter, including from private property, which is not served by the City's Engineering Operations Division.

The funding received under the 2021/22 intake of the Strengthening Communities' Services Program enabled the IOTS Coordinator to formalize processes and procedures, support recruitment, training, partnership development, and engage with the local businesses and residents. Now that this work is well underway, there is a need to keep the program operating while supporting the development of a plan that will lead to financial sustainability.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Climate Action, Planning and Development Department is working closely with the City of New Westminster Inter-Departmental Working Group on Homelessness, which includes representation from most City Departments, on issues related to homelessness, including general cleanliness of business and residential areas.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs to manage the grant application relate to staff time within the Community Services section of the Climate Action, Planning and Development Department and the Finance Department. If successful, the grant, through the realization of \$200,000 for a free-standing, pre-fabricated toilet and \$91,200 towards two sanitation trailers for the 24/7 Emergency Response Centre shelter, will offset allocated costs for these items in the 2022/23 and 2022 City Operating Budget, potentially saving the City \$291,200.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented to Council for consideration:

1. That Council direct staff to submit an application under the COVID-19 Restart Funding for Local Governments, Strengthening Communities' Services Program, for the proposed activities and projects as outlined in this report and that the City accept overall grant management of the activities and projects.
2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends option 1.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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