

Attachment 3

*Seniors Connections, Integrated
Supports and Emergency
Preparedness Overview for
Winter / Spring 2022*

Seniors Connections, Integrated Supports and Emergency Preparedness

Overview of Initiatives Winter/Spring 2022

British Columbians are increasingly susceptible to emergency situations caused by numerous risk factors, including a changing climate and severe weather events; the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; and the ever-present risk of earthquakes. There is evidence that seniors independent living residences, particularly those serving frail and low-income seniors, are particularly vulnerable to these emergency situations. This was made evident during the June 2021 extreme heat event, which claimed the lives of many seniors in the region.

Seniors independent living residences are not staffed like assisted living or long-term care facilities; often only have an on-site manager who is responsible for the building but not necessarily the wellbeing of its tenants; and are occupied by those requiring ongoing assistance to maintain their independence. In most cases, the residences have not developed and operationalized emergency preparedness plans and procedures. And one crucial factor underlies all of these challenges: the more socially isolated the senior residents, the more vulnerable they are in such situations.

The Hey Neighbour Collective



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent extreme heat events, Council recognized the importance of finding ways to increase social connectedness, community engagement, and resilience, with the latter focusing on emergency preparedness, in multi-unit buildings. On February 25, 2020, Council approved the City becoming a partnering organization in the Hey Neighbour Collective (HNC), which aims to facilitate all three outcomes in such buildings.

In 2021, HNC identified Ross Tower as a pilot project site in which to undertake resilience preparedness, social programming, and other interventions. This preferred project site is managed by BC Housing, includes 101 units of subsidized housing, and serves a highly vulnerable population, including a high proportion of frail and live-alone seniors with observed low levels of social connectedness and interaction.

The Ross Tower Seniors Integrated Support Pilot Project

In the spring of 2021, the City's Community Planning staff joined the Senior Services Society of BC (SSSBC) on a two-year Seniors Integrated Support Pilot Project, also located at Ross Tower (the Ross Tower Pilot Project). This pilot, which is funded through the United Way, is delivering: light housekeeping services; navigation assistance (e.g., form filling, housing support, information and referrals etc.); meal deliveries; and, shuttle services to a number of vulnerable seniors within the building.



In summer 2021, Council directed staff to reallocate \$15,000 from the 2021 COVID-19 At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force budget to support the Ross Tower Pilot Project, specifically related to social connectedness initiatives and emergency preparedness as described below.

Social Connectedness

In winter 2021, the City entered a three-way partnership with the HNC and SSSBC to deliver on the social connectedness component at Ross Tower. Partners are working in corporation to support interventions that offer integrated supports and build social connectedness between neighbours, and strengthen community and resilience with residents. Through the HNC, SSSBC and City staff are also participating in monthly stakeholder and public dialogues around social connectedness and resilience in multi-unit housing contexts.

Emergency Preparedness

The City's Emergency Management Office (Emergency Management) is adopting a community development approach to emergency preparedness and management, including extreme heat, and is engaging faith-based and non-profit organizations in informing planning, and implementing actions related to at-risk and vulnerable populations. The City's Community Planning Section and Emergency Management Office are directly supporting emergency preparedness planning at Ross Tower, which has become more critical given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and extreme heat events. To date, staff has attended two information fairs at Ross Tower to directly engage residents onsite with outreach on emergency preparedness, digital inclusion, and information on other social support and services available in the community.



Connect and Prepare



Recognizing that emergency preparedness work correlates to the social connectedness component, Emergency Management, along with SSSBC, have stated interest in joining the Connect and Prepare Program, which is an innovative approach to building community emergency preparedness and resilience by strengthening social connections between neighbours. The program was developed in 2018 by Building Resilient Neighbourhoods Society (BRN), also a member of the HNC, and is currently co-delivered in Victoria through a partnership with the City of Victoria's Emergency Management Office, Victoria Ready.

Emergency Management and SSSBC will become part of a learning cohort that will pilot and test the Connect and Prepare approach at Ross Tower over the next year. Partners will disseminate knowledge about promising Connect and Prepare programs and support established practices to scale. Connect and Prepare staff are currently working to finalize the program delivery and funding model.

Although the initial focus of the pilot project, including related to social connectedness and emergency preparedness, is on Ross Tower, there are scaling opportunities to include the adjacent Rotary Tower, and over time, other seniors' independent living residences, and older purpose-built market rental buildings.

The Senior Housing Collaborative

In fall 2021 the Seniors Housing Collaborative (SHC) was launched. Funded by the Vancouver Foundation and hosted by SSSBC, the SHC brings together seniors and organizations in Metro Vancouver to collaboratively develop policy recommendations to support aging in the right place for low-income seniors living in rental housing. The City's Community Planning Section is an active member of the SHC.

Emergency preparedness has been identified as key policy focus of SHC, recognizing that older adults are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather events, including extreme heat, and have limited influence and/or resources to address events and barriers to safety.

In March 2022, SHC was pleased to launch its first podcast as part of the SSSBC's Fridays with Seniors Series hosted by Peter Legge. Presented by the City's Community Planning Section and Emergency Management Office, the first episode focused on emergency preparedness, particularly related to extreme heat. Staff communicated that advance preparation is key and described how connecting with neighbours and developing a support network strengthens our whole community.



The podcast, which is being widely distributed in the community, can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0S7z7ZZkAa8>