



Attachment 1
Staff Memo

MEMO

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Emilie K. Adin, Director, Climate Action,
Planning and Development **Date:** June 13, 2022

From: John Stark, Supervisor of Community
Planning **File:** 13.2630.08

Item #: [Report Number]

Subject: **Att 1 - Staff Memo.docx**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to submit an application under the Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program, as outlined in this report, and that the City accept overall grant management of the project and related activities.

PURPOSE

This report is to seek Council direction for staff to submit an application under the Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program for the proposed project and related activities as outlined in this report, and for the City to accept overall grant management of the project and related activities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 16th 2022, BC Healthy Communities announced a new round of grant funding opportunities under the Age-friendly Communities Grant Program. This grant program provides funding, resources and capacity-building supports to help Indigenous and local governments support older adults to age-in-place, and live active, socially engaged, and independent lives. There are two grant streams under the current grant program: the Planning stream for communities developing Age-Friendly Plans (up to \$25,000); and, the Projects stream for communities to carry out previously identified Age-Friendly

Actions (\$15,000). As the City has already developed its Age-Friendly Community Strategy, staff are seeking Council direction to applying for funding under the Project stream.

The COVID 19 pandemic, the heat dome and wildfire season of summer 2021, and the catastrophic flooding that followed, has been a wake-up call for many BC communities. Directly related to aging in place, these events provided evidence that seniors independent living residences, particularly those serving frail and low-income seniors, are particularly vulnerable. One crucial factor has underlined all of these challenges: the more socially isolated the senior residents, the more vulnerable they are in such emergency situations. These events have also highlighted that an Age-Friendly community must foster strong social networks as a vital component for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of senior residents, and has underscored the importance of local collective action to strengthen community connections and resilience.

Recognizing the correlation between emergency preparedness and social connectedness, the City's Community Planning section and Emergency Management Office, along with the Senior Services Society of BC, have identified an interest in piloting the Connect and Prepare approach at BC Housing's Ross Tower building. Ross Tower, which includes 96 units of subsidized housing, serves a highly vulnerable population, including a high proportion of frail and live-alone seniors with observed low levels of social connectedness and interaction. Connect and Prepare presents an innovative approach to building community emergency preparedness and resilience by strengthening social connections between neighbors.

The Connect and Prepare Pilot Project at Ross Tower would meet several domains of an Age-Friendly community, and, as such, would be eligible for funding under the Projects stream of the Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program. If directed by Council, staff would seek the full \$15,000 to support this initiative. The project would introduce innovative strategies to meet climate and emergency management needs for vulnerable seniors in independent living residences. Tenants would be guided to develop their skills to build stronger social networks as a foundation of community resilience, and take collaborative action to prepare for acute emergencies and chronic stresses, especially related to climate change. This project would also pilot an emergent Age-Friendly planning priority for vulnerable seniors that is centred on equity, sustainability, and the creation of multi-sectoral partnerships.

BACKGROUND

The Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program is an initiative under the Age-Friendly BC Program, which is funded by the BC Ministry of Health (MoH) and delivered by BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) in partnership with the MoH. It provides funding, resources and capacity-building supports to help Indigenous and local governments support older adults to age-in-place, and live active, socially engaged, and independent lives.

Age-Friendly Recognition Program

As part of the Age-Friendly BC Program, the MoH administers the Age-Friendly Recognition Program, which recognizes local governments that have committed to making their communities more age-friendly. The City of New Westminster was officially recognized as an Age-Friendly British Columbia (AFBC) community in 2018. Ahead of its successful application to become an AFBC community, the City developed an Age-Friendly Community Strategy. This strategy proactively addresses present and future needs associated with an aging population and supports a vision of the City as a welcoming, inclusive and accessible community in which older adults and seniors can continue to lead fulfilling, involved and meaningful lives.

Age-Friendly Communities Grants Program

As part of the Age-Friendly BC Program, the BCHC Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) Grants Program offers financial support to Indigenous and local governments to complete age-friendly assessments, planning, and projects. There are two grant streams: the Planning stream for communities developing Age-Friendly Plans (up to \$25,000); and, the Projects stream for communities to carry out previously identified Age-Friendly Actions (\$15,000). As the City has already developed its Age-Friendly Community Strategy, staff would be applying for funding under the Project stream.

To be eligible for funding, applications must demonstrate that proposed activities focus on one or more of the eight domains of an age-friendly community, which align with the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Cities and the Canadian Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities projects. These domains include: Communications and Information; Community Engagement and Employment; Community Support and Health and Wellness Services; Housing; Outdoor Spaces and Buildings; Respect, Social Inclusion, and Cultural Safety; Social Wellbeing and Participation; and, Transportation, including Traffic Safety.

DISCUSSION

Documented Need for Grant Funding

Following adoption of the City's Age-Friendly Community Strategy in 2017, and its official recognition as an Age-Friendly British Columbia community in 2018, staff began to implement actions in support of a welcoming, inclusive, active and involved Age-Friendly community. However, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this work was paused as staff resources were redirected to support the immediate needs of at-risk and vulnerable populations, including older adults and seniors.

In addition to the COVID 19 pandemic, the heat dome and wildfire season of summer 2021, and the catastrophic flooding that followed, has been a wake-up call for many BC communities. Directly related to aging in place, these events provided evidence that seniors independent living residences, particularly those serving frail and low-income

seniors, are particularly vulnerable. These residences are understaffed compared to assisted living or long-term care facilities and often only have one on-site manager who is responsible for the building. In most cases, the residences have not developed and operationalized emergency preparedness plans and procedures and the tenants often require ongoing assistance to maintain their independence, which is often beyond the scope of the building manager.

One crucial factor has underlined all of these challenges: the more socially isolated the senior residents, the more vulnerable they are in such situations. These events have highlighted that an Age-Friendly community must foster strong social networks as a vital component for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of senior residents. The events also underscored the importance of local collective action to strengthen community connections and resilience.

Existing Initiatives Underway

Hey Neighbour Collective

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent extreme weather 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, the 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 96 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 spring 2021, the City, through Community Planning, 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, delivers 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 and Emergency Preparedness

In winter 2021, the City entered a three-way partnership with the HNC and the SSSBC to deliver on the social connectedness component at Ross Tower. Partners are working in collaboration to facilitate interventions that offer integrated supports and build social connectedness between neighbours and foster community building and resilience. The City, the HNC and the SSSBC also participate in monthly stakeholder and public dialogues around social connectedness and resilience in multi-unit housing contexts.

Additionally, 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 the extreme heat events. To date, staff has attended two information fairs to directly engage tenants through onsite outreach on emergency preparedness, digital inclusion, and information sharing on other community services and supports. The City's Emergency Management Office is adopting a community development approach to emergency preparedness and management; engaging faith-based and non-profit organizations in informing planning; and, implementing actions related to at-risk and vulnerable populations, including older adults and seniors.

Eligible Activity and Projects

Connect and Prepare

Recognizing that emergency preparedness work correlates to social connectedness, the Community Planning section and the Emergency Management Office, along with the SSSBC, have a stated interest in piloting the Connect and Prepare approach at Ross Tower. Connect and Prepare presents an innovative approach to building community emergency preparedness and resilience by strengthening social connections between neighbors. The program was developed in 2018 by the Building Resilient Neighborhoods Society (BRN), which is 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.

The Age-Friendly Communities Grant, under the Projects stream, presents an opportunity to pilot the Connect and Prepare approach at Ross Tower, and to eventually scale up to other multi-unit buildings with large concentrations of seniors.

ANALYSIS

A Connect and Prepare Pilot Project at Ross Tower would meet several of the eight domains of an Age-Friendly community, and, as such, would be eligible for funding under the Projects stream of the Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program. If directed by Council, staff would seek the full \$15,000 to support this initiative.

Project Overview

The project would introduce innovative strategies to meet climate and emergency management needs for vulnerable seniors in independent living residences. It would also strengthen and build on Age-Friendly community domains, including: communications and information, community engagement and support, health and wellness, and social inclusion and wellbeing.

The project would pilot a protective social infrastructure approach, which engages neighbours in a multi-unit buildings setting. Tenants would be guided to develop their skills to build stronger social networks as a foundation of community resilience, and take collaborative action to prepare for acute emergencies and chronic stresses, especially related to climate change. This project would also pilot an emergent Age-Friendly planning priority for vulnerable seniors that is centred on equity, sustainability, and the creation of multi-sectoral partnerships.

Project Activities

Project funding would be used to support Connect and Prepare initiatives at Ross Tower, including but not limited to:

- developing and implementing a train the trainer program for community delivery partners within Ross Tower;
- adapting program materials and approaches to the local context and housing communities;
- building on learning from last year's heat dome and its impacts, particularly on seniors, to develop new program content specific to extreme heat that includes inter-generational neighbourly support for senior tenants;
- facilitating coaching, mentorship, learning and adaptive action through a community of practice for participating community delivery partners; and,
- supporting project evaluation so that the program can be further refined and scaled more broadly in the future.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Climate Action, Planning and Development Department, through Community Planning, is working closely with the City of New Westminster Emergency Management Office. Collaboration is occurring on issues related to emergency preparedness and management.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs to manage the grant application relate to staff time within the Community Planning section of the Climate Action, Planning and Development Department, and invoice processing and grant reporting related to the Finance Department.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented to Council for consideration:

1. That Council direct staff to submit an application to the Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program as outlined in this report, and that the City accept overall grant management of the project and related activities.
2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends option 1.

APPROVALS

This memo was prepared by:

Anur Mehdic, Housing and Child Care Planning Analyst

This memo was approved by:

John Stark, Supervisor of Community Planning