

TO: CITY MANAGER **DATE:** 2020 September 21

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING **FILE:** 16000 20
DIRECTOR PARKS, RECREATION AND *Reference:* Homelessness Response
CULTURAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE: WINTER 2020/2021

PURPOSE: To seek Council approval of the proposed response for the 2020/2021 winter season.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council receive this report for information.
2. **THAT** in response to proposals by BC Housing to open an Emergency Response Centre and expand the number of units of supportive housing at Norland Place, that the interim service of the warming centres be discontinued.
3. **THAT** BC Housing, Fraser Health Authority, Progressive Housing Society, and the Burnaby Task Force to End Homelessness be advised of the City's approach to homelessness services for Winter 2020/2021, as outlined in this report.
4. **THAT** a copy of this report be forwarded to the Social Planning Committee and the Public Safety Committee for information.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

In 2018, the City initiated its homeless response, which included working with BC Housing to open a temporary shelter (Douglas Shelter) and a new supportive housing development (Norland Place). The City also opened four City-operated warming centres as an interim service until the Douglas Shelter and Norland Place opened. The warming centre operations model provided safe, overnight shelter from the elements for those experiencing homelessness. By the fall of 2019, the two BC Housing facilities were fully occupied and the City decided to continue the interim operation of the warming centres for an additional winter season (2019/2020).

Three warming centres, located at Swangard Stadium (Kingsway and Boundary Road), Kensington (5889 Curtis Street), and Beresford (5970 Beresford Street), opened on 2019

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November 15, two weeks ahead of the scheduled opening of 2019 December 01 due to a colder than usual November. In 2020 January, during a period of significant snowfall, operations were extended to 22 hours per day for a week to ensure that patrons had a warm place to stay during the extreme weather. The three warming centres were scheduled to close on 2020 March 31, however, with the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis, operations in some form continued until 2020 June 30.

Changes were made to the warming centre operations in response to COVID-19. The Kensington and Swangard warming centres were closed early due to inadequate space to allow for physical distancing among patrons and staff. Space at the Beresford centre was expanded into the warehouse area for physical distancing purposes and three new warming centres were set up at the Burnaby Lake Arena/Bill Copeland Sports Complex. The Beresford centre closed on 2020 May 31, the Bill Copeland Sport Complex lobby centre closed on 2020 June 01, and the Burnaby Lake Arena centre continued operating until 2020 June 30, with funding from BC Housing.

This report sets out an approach for services for the season ahead.

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

This report aligns with the following goals and sub-goals of the *Corporate Strategic Plan*:

- ***A Safe Community***
 - Emergency preparedness – Enhance plans, procedures and services so that we are better prepared to respond to emergencies and are able to maintain City services
 - Community amenity safety – Maintain a high level of safety in City buildings and facilities for the public and City staff
- ***A Connected Community***
 - Partnership – Work collaboratively with businesses, educational institutions, associations, other communities and governments
- ***An Inclusive Community***
 - Serve a diverse community – Ensure City services fully meet the needs of our dynamic community

3.0 PROPOSED HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE 2020/2021 SEASON

As for the previous year, the Douglas Shelter and Norland supportive housing will continue to operate. While meant to be an interim measure, the warming centres have continued filling a community need by providing a drop-in style service during the night for those experiencing homelessness. However, the warming centre model is a challenging form of shelter to operate, especially during a pandemic. It is difficult to maintain physical distancing and isolation for those experiencing symptoms or who have contracted the virus. Higher staffing levels must be maintained and PPE must be obtained, leading to higher operating costs. The absence of an intake process within the warming centres makes it difficult to track patrons once they leave the centre in the morning. Therefore, a twenty-four hour shelter, such as that provided in an Emergency Response Centre (ERC) or temporary shelter, is a preferred model. An ERC/temporary shelter is a

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transitional housing form for those moving to more supportive housing, as provided at the existing Norland facility. The components of the 2020/2021 homelessness response are outlined below, and include a combination of ERC spaces, an increase in supportive housing units and hotel beds to fill gaps that may arise.

3.1 Proposed Emergency Response Centre

Beyond the main goal of providing shelter for those experiencing homelessness during the winter months, there are other benefits to establishing an Emergency Response Centre. Compared to warming centres, the ERC will provide shelter space where patrons can safely socially distance, and isolate should they become ill. Unlike the warming centres, the ERC employs an intake process, which provides for better tracking of patrons. The benefits of tracking are two-fold: should patrons become ill, contact tracing can be more successfully undertaken; and the housing operator is better able to connect patrons to services, supports and long term housing options. The ERC permits patrons to remain in the shelter 24/7, and this would reduce some of the neighbourhood disturbances observed at the warming centres (loitering, litter, etc.), which require patrons to leave during the day. The ERC model is also more cost effective than the warming centres. And ultimately, patrons of the ERC, as opposed to a warming centre, would be more likely to better transition to permanent housing, as they will have connected with the Progressive Housing (the Norland Place and Douglas Shelter operator), health providers and have experience living indoors.

At its 2020 July 6 Council meeting, Council approved the use of a portion of the parking lot at 3860 Sperling Avenue, for the purposes of erecting a temporary shelter until 2020 December 31. The ERC temporary shelter is proposed to be located on a portion of the east parking lot at the Burnaby Lake Sports Complex at 3860 Sperling Avenue. BC Housing would be required to enter into a licence agreement with the City to permit the ERC to occupy a portion of the subject parking lot. Progressive Housing Society is the operator that has been chosen to run the housing. The proposed development would consist of an approximately 7,500 sq. ft. single-storey, temporary modular building. The building would consist of approximately 49 individual rooms and provide shared washroom and shower facilities with the intention of accommodating approximately 45 individuals. The remaining rooms are intended to be used for office space for staff and health supports.

The intent is for the ERC to be operational in October. BC Housing originally proposed a term for the ERC ending on 2020 December 31. Staff supported the proposed term because it would align with the construction schedule for the new Burnaby Lake Aquatic and Arena facility when the parking lot is needed. Since that request was made, BC Housing has now requested that the term of the agreement be extended to 2021 June 30. BC Housing has indicated that it is costly to erect the ERC for a short term and indicated it was not feasible for them to proceed if the term ending remained 2020 December 31. As BC Housing's request still does not conflict with the construction of the Burnaby Lake Aquatic and Arena facility, Council, at its Closed meeting on 2020 September 14, authorized the term of the licence agreement to be extended to 2021 June 30.

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3.2 Additional Supportive Housing Units

On 2020 July 27, Council received an initial report outlining a proposal for BC Housing to construct an additional 45 units of supportive housing at 3986 Norland Avenue. Staff are working with BC Housing to bring forward a suitable plan of development, and it is anticipated that the units will be constructed by 2021 June. The intention is that the new units would be ready for occupancy at a time when the ERC is scheduled to close, allowing for a transition of ERC patrons to the new supportive housing project.

3.3 Hotel Rooms/Isolation Centre

In the past months, the demand for shelter space has grown, and at the same time the need to socially distance has meant that existing space at the Douglas Shelter and at the warming centres was insufficient. BC Housing secured hotels to accommodate those who needed to be relocated from the Douglas Shelter when its capacity was reduced to maintain physical distancing and to enable sick or immunocompromised people to isolate. The proposed ERC is a welcome resource, however, at 45 beds, it is anticipated that there could still be a potential need for additional beds. If this need emerges, staff will request BC Housing secure hotel space again this winter to meet extra demand.

3.4 Planning for Homelessness

This report presents an approach for the provision of homelessness services for the 2020/2021 winter season (and beyond). In the meantime, staff are now engaging community partners in a process to develop longer term strategies as part of the HOME: Burnaby's Housing and Homelessness Strategy project. These strategies will guide the City's future actions in supporting those experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness for the next ten years.

Essential to the success of the provision of housing for the homeless is an appropriate level of supports in order to lead people to a pathway out of homelessness. Severe mental illness coupled with addictions and an overdose crisis are challenges faced by many shelter and supportive housing residents, and more supports are needed for these populations. In this regard, to adequately provide the supports needed by these residents, staff wish to work with our partners, BC Housing, Fraser Health Authority and others to ensure an appropriate level of service is available to those who need them. Staff will continue to engage our partners in the provision of these services when opening new facilities, and will seek longer term approaches that marry the provision of housing with appropriate services through the development of HOME: Burnaby's Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Homelessness services provided during the 2019/2020 season were successful in providing shelter to patrons during the coldest winter months. However, the COVID-19 crisis stretched the housing resources available for those experiencing homelessness, wherein new warming centres were

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established mid-season, at considerable cost, and BC Housing provided additional space in hotel beds.

To plan for the 2020/2021 season, it is recommended that the City support BC Housing's request to erect an ERC/temporary shelter until 2021 June 30. The presence of an ERC/temporary shelter will be a more effective service delivery model alternative to the City-operated warming centres, especially in the context of COVID-19, and it is recommended that the City discontinue the operation of the warming centres in the coming season. Finally, it is recommended that BC Housing, Fraser Health Authority, Progressive Housing Society, and the Burnaby Task Force to End Homelessness be advised of the City's approach for the 2020/2021 season, and that a copy of this report be forwarded to the Social Planning Committee and the Public Safety Committee for information.



E.W. Kozak, Director
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Dave Ellenwood, Director
PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL
SERVICES

LG/MM/CS:sa

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