

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: CREELMAN HOUSE

RECOMMENDATION:

1. *THAT* Council forward a copy of the attached report to:
  - a) the residents who signed the petition concerning Creelman House
  - b) Joan Sawicki, MLA, Burnaby-Willingdon, 4732 Imperial Street, Burnaby, B.C. V5J 1C2
  - c) Executive Director, St. Leonard's Youth & Family Services  
P.O. Box 80156, Burnaby, B.C. V5H 3X5
  - d) Regional Operating Officer, Burnaby Region, Ministry for Children and Families, 101 - 3705 Willingdon Avenue, Burnaby, B.C. V5G 3H3
  - e) Regional Operating Officer, Fraser Valley Region, Ministry for Children and Families, 400 - 906 Roderick Avenue, Coquitlam, B.C. V3K 1R1

REPORT

The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee members were forwarded a copy of the attached report for review and comments. The Committee concurs with the report which provides background information about Creelman House group home, discusses community concerns surrounding the home and identifies plans to address those concerns.

The Committee forwards the recommendation for Council's approval.

Respectfully submitted,

: COPY - CITY MANAGER  
- DIR. PLNG. & BLDG.  
- OFFICER-IN-CHARGE, R.C.M.P.  
- MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICER  
- ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER

Councillor C. Redman  
Chair

Councillor N. Volkow  
Vice Chair

TO: COMMUNITY ISSUES &  
SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

1997 JULY 31

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

OUR FILE: 17.918.1  
X Ref: 17.455

SUBJECT: CREELMAN HOUSE

PURPOSE: To provide background information about Creelman House group home, discuss community concerns surrounding the home, and identify plans to address those concerns.

---

## RECOMMENDATION:

- I. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to
  - a) the residents who signed the petition concerning Creelman House
  - b) Joan Sawicki  
MLA, Burnaby-Willingdon  
4732 Imperial Street  
Burnaby, B.C. V5J 1C2
  - c) Executive Director  
St. Leonard's Youth  
and Family Services  
P.O. Box 80156  
Burnaby, B.C. V5H 3X5
  - d) Regional Operating Officer  
Burnaby Region  
Ministry for Children and Families  
101-3705 Willingdon Avenue  
Burnaby, B.C. V5G 3H3
  - e) Regional Operating Officer  
Fraser Valley Region  
Ministry for Children and Families  
400 - 906 Roderick Avenue  
Coquitlam, B.C. V3K 1R1

## REPORT

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 1997 April, the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee received a petition signed by 163 South Slope area residents calling for the closure of Creelman House group home. To determine an appropriate response to the petition, the Committee scheduled two "in camera" fact finding meetings. The first, held on 1997 April 30, involved representatives from St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services (operators of Creelman House) and the Ministry for Children and Families (funders of the home). The second meeting, held on 1997 May 20, involved the person who initiated the petition, along with nine area residents she invited to accompany her.

This report provides pertinent information about Burnaby's group home situation and Creelman House, discusses neighbourhood concerns surrounding Creelman House, and identifies an action plan geared towards improving future relations between the home and neighbouring community.

## 2.0 GROUP HOMES: BURNABY CONTEXT

### 2.1 Group Home Policy

In the Burnaby Zoning Bylaw, a group home is defined as "a residential care facility for not more than six people in care that is operated in a private dwelling house and licensed under the *Community Care Facility Act*." The homes serve people of various ages who need care and support for such reasons as physical and mental disabilities, mental health problems, and family breakdown.

Provided that a group home serves six or fewer residents and meets other requirements for dwellings in a residential area, it can be licensed without regard to municipal zoning regulations. Medical Health Officers are granted this authority through the *Community Care Facility Act*.

While recognizing the value and need for group homes, Burnaby is concerned that the homes be planned in a coordinated, sensitive manner. To this end, City Council adopted a Group Home Policy for Burnaby in 1993. One of the policies explicitly states that "the City expects Provincial ministries and group home operators to ensure that adequate supervision is provided for group home residents and appropriate measures are taken if the residents create disturbances in the community."

### 2.2 Previous Review

A few years ago, a group of citizens raised concerns about the impact of youth group homes on Burnaby's South Slope area. In response to these concerns, the Minister of Social Services initiated an independent review of youth group homes in the area in 1994.

The consultant's report provided various recommendations for improving existing group home services. It concluded, however, that the youth group homes in the South Slope were generally well managed and that Burnaby families and youth were well served by the homes.

## 3.0 BACKGROUND ON CREELMAN HOUSE

Creelman House is a group home, licensed under the *Community Care Facilities Act*, serving up to four youths aged from 13 to 18 years. It is operated by St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services and funded by the Ministry for Children and Families. The home, located in Burnaby's South Slope area, was opened in 1985.

Youths are placed in Creelman House because of family breakdown. Reasons for the breakdown include abuse, neglect, abandonment, poverty, inability of parents to cope, and various matters relating to child rearing. Although some residents have encountered trouble with the law, *that is not the reason they are placed in care*. Further, it must be stressed that the petition concerning Creelman House was incorrect in referring to the home as a "halfway house."

Given their troubled backgrounds, youths at Creelman House can have emotional, behavioral and sometimes psychological difficulties. The youths are also often angry, hard to reach, and resistant to the help and support offered by staff. Despite the challenges, the group home provides various opportunities (e.g., counselling, education, and recreation) aimed at helping the youths improve their self esteem and develop in a positive manner. Group home employees establish behavioral expectations for the youths. They encourage and praise positive efforts, but also hold the youths accountable when trouble occurs.

Youths typically stay at Creelman House from six months to a year, with the maximum stay being a year. After leaving Creelman House, the youths return to their families, a foster home, another group home, or alternate living arrangement.

Between 1992 and 1997, 31 youths have lived at Creelman House. Of these youths, the majority have been 13 and 14 year olds. In 1997 May, the home's residents were aged 13, 14, and 15 (2 youths).

#### 4.0 NEIGHBOURHOOD CONCERNS

At the Committee's May 20 "in camera" meeting, neighbourhood residents identified various concerns regarding Creelman House. The concerns can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ *intimidating and nuisance behaviors* - e.g., reports of group home residents harassing students who walk by the home; also, actions and language from residents which can annoy or intimidate neighbours, making it uncomfortable for them to quietly enjoy their properties.
- ▶ *vandalism and graffiti* - i.e., allegations that group home residents have been responsible for some vandalism and graffiti in the neighbourhood
- ▶ *lack of information* - i.e., questions about the ages and backgrounds of people placed at the home, how they differ from residents of other group homes and what, if any, risks are placed on the community
- ▶ *location* - i.e., concerns that the home may be situated too close to a local elementary school
- ▶ *supervision and responsiveness* - i.e., questions about the ability or authority of group home staff to satisfactorily supervise, "control," or discipline the residents; also, concerns that neighbours' calls to the RCMP do not always receive prompt responses and that the Liaison Constable for the Creelman House area is not made aware of all calls made to the Detachment regarding the home
- ▶ *police presence* - i.e., observation that RCMP officers are often seen visiting the home and the assumption that these visits usually involve specific problem incidents.

## 5.0 FOLLOW UP MEETING AND ACTION PLAN

At the conclusion of the May 20 Community Issues & Social Planning Committee meeting, it was agreed that the RCMP Liaison Constable for the area around Creelman House would arrange a meeting to explore the neighbourhood concerns in greater depth. The meeting occurred on 1997 June 18 at the offices of St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services. Those attending included

- ▶ four community residents,
- ▶ two representatives from St. Leonard's
- ▶ two RCMP officers
- ▶ a representative from the Ministry for Children & Families
- ▶ a representative from the Community Care Facilities Licensing Division of the Health Department
- ▶ the Senior Social Planner, attending on behalf of the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee.

In the first part of the meeting, community residents raised questions and voiced concerns regarding Creelman House. In general, the questions and concerns echoed those identified at the May 20 Committee meeting. The community members present expressed anxiety about the potential impacts of Creelman House on the neighbourhood - particularly given its proximity to a nearby elementary school. Nonetheless, they appreciated the fact that the youths had come from difficult family backgrounds and acknowledged the need to have residential resources available for them.

Through the discussions, some misconceptions about Creelman House were cleared up. For example, the RCMP officers were able to report that they frequently visit Creelman House just to "stay in touch." Indeed, only a minority of their visits relate to specific problem incidents. Also, St. Leonard's representatives were able to clarify various points about the home, such as

- ▶ it accommodates a *maximum* of four residents at a given time
- ▶ the residents are placed in Creelman House because of family breakdown, not because of criminal activity
- ▶ the home serves people aged 13 to 18 years, with most residents being in the younger age groups
- ▶ counselling, programs, and resources are available to the youths
- ▶ group home staff encourage the youths to succeed; however, if the youths get into trouble, the staff cooperate with the authorities and do not try to shield the youths from the consequences of their actions.

In the second part of the meeting, the focus shifted to examining approaches for improving relations between the group home and community. There was consensus that the following actions would be pursued:

- 1) The neighbourhood Block Watch representative at the meeting offered to write a letter to local Block Watch Captains and Co-Captains which would
  - ▶ provide the recipients with the names and telephone number of senior group home staff
  - ▶ urge them to contact the group home if they see a young person getting into trouble whom they believe to be a resident of Creelman House, noting as many details as possible about the youths
  - ▶ ask them to advise the letter's author about any reported incidents confirmed to have involved Creelman House residents
  - ▶ stress that the group home staff are not intended to assume the RCMP's role and that, in the event of serious or criminal activity, the police should be contacted directly.

The reason for asking recipients to note details about any youths causing trouble is that group home employees know the general appearance of the residents, keeping records of what they wear each day. If a description matches that of a Creelman House resident, the employees will give the information to the RCMP. If the description does not match that of any resident, the employees would be able to rule out the residents' involvement.

- 2) Creelman House employees will notify the RCMP Liaison Constable for the area when they receive complaints about residents of the home from Block Watch Captains or others. Employees will also notify the Liaison Constable when they receive complaints about youths who are not from Creelman House.
- 3) The supervisor of Creelman House will arrange a meeting with the incoming principal of the nearby elementary school in September. She will invite the principal to visit the home and encourage her to telephone the home whenever questions or concerns arise.
- 4) Creelman House staff will speak with residents about the need to make efforts to be "good neighbours" and respect community values. The staff will make a particular point of conveying this message to new residents.

- 5) The RCMP, Creelman House staff, and representatives from Block Watch will explore the possibility of establishing a pilot "neighbourhood patrol" program. Group home staff will also consult with residents from the home to get their ideas on the proposal. If implemented, the pilot program would involve group home youths joining other community members in conducting walking patrols of the neighbourhood. Given the stakes involved, the program will only be launched if all involved have a high degree of confidence that it will succeed.
- 6) Those attending the meeting wanted assurance that the plans would lead to action. To this end, they agreed to reconvene in the early fall to assess what actions have been taken to date, how successful the actions have been, what still needs to be done, and what adjustments are required to make the action plan more effective.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

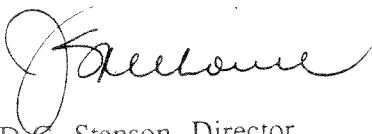
This report has provided background on Burnaby's group home situation and Creelman House. It has also identified concerns that neighbourhood residents have regarding Creelman House and plans that have been developed to address those concerns. To summarize, the report has revealed that

- ▶ Burnaby has limited authority regarding approval of group homes for six or fewer people; nonetheless, the City has adopted a Group Home Policy which seeks to ensure that the homes are planned and operated in a manner which balances the needs of group home residents with those of the broader community
- ▶ given their backgrounds, Creelman House residents have a high degree of need and may present challenging behaviours
- ▶ St. Leonard's staff aim to support the youths and help them develop in a positive manner; they also try to establish appropriate consequences when the youths get into trouble
- ▶ neighbourhood residents have considerable anxiety about the home and its potential impacts on the community; however, some of the anxiety appears to be based on inaccurate information (e.g., number and ages of the youths, reasons for placement, frequency of police response to problem incidents)
- ▶ representatives from St. Leonard's, the Ministry for Children and Families, and RCMP have been candid and cooperative in providing information about Creelman House
- ▶ an action plan has been developed which aims to improve the relationship between the group home and community.

It is too early to determine how effective the action plan will be. Nonetheless, it is encouraging that members of the community, St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services, and other appropriate parties have begun communicating with one another. These groups have improved their understanding about Creelman House and neighbourhood concerns. They have also agreed to cooperate in the future, working in concert to improve future relations between the group home and community.

In closing, it is recommended that a copy of this report be sent to the residents who signed the petition concerning Creelman House, the MLA for Burnaby-Willingdon, the Executive Director of St. Leonard's Youth and Family Services, and the Regional Operating Officers for the Burnaby and Fraser Valley Region Offices of the Ministry for Children and Families.

Staff will provide further information on the Creelman House situation as warranted in the future.

  
D.G. Stenson, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JF\db

cc: City Manager  
Medical Health Officer  
OIC RCMP  
Chief Environmental Health Officer