

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS*

**RE: HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES IN GREATER VANCOUVER**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **THAT** Council forward a copy of this report to the Community Planning and Housing Committee.

**REPORT**

The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee, at its Open meeting held on 2002 November 27, received and adopted the *attached* report in response to an inquiry from the Community Issues and Social Planning Committee regarding homelessness in Greater Vancouver.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Johnston,  
Chair

Councillor N. Harris,  
Vice Chair

COPY: - CITY MANAGER  
- DIR. PLNG. & BLDG.

**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
COMMUNITY ISSUES AND  
SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

2002 November 6

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

OUR FILE: 12.800.1

**SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES IN GREATER VANCOUVER**

**PURPOSE:** To respond to an inquiry from the Community Issues and Social Planning Committee regarding homelessness in Greater Vancouver.

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to the Community Planning and Housing Committee.

**REPORT**

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

At the September 25, 2002 meeting of the Community Issues and Social Planning Committee, questions were raised about homelessness in Greater Vancouver. In addition to a broad overview of the topic, the Committee wished to learn where the emergency shelters in Burnaby are located, and the number of people staying in those shelters.

This report responds to the Committee's request.

**2.0 CONTEXT FOR HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVES IN THE GREATER VANCOUVER AREA**

Many people are living homeless on the streets and parks in the Greater Vancouver area, or are "at risk" of becoming homeless for a variety of reasons. For more than a decade, local groups have been developing an array of services and facilities to support people who are homeless, and to prevent homelessness for those at risk. Examples include full service shelters, temporary cold/wet weather shelters, new affordable housing, and community outreach. However, until the year 2000, there has not been a co-ordinated strategy to provide solutions to homelessness across the region.

In December of 1999, the federal government announced new funding to address homelessness across Canada. The announcement included a commitment of \$305 million over a three year period for the Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives (SCPI), a new program, administered by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Provinces were required to match the federal funding commitment.

Approximately \$25.1 million has been allocated for Greater Vancouver over the three-year period. Under the terms of SCPI, each candidate region was required to develop a plan that would provide a framework to evaluate requests for funding of projects. In September 2002, the Speech from the Throne indicated that the 3-year SCPI program will be extended. Additional funding has also been committed for Youth and Aboriginal projects in the Greater Vancouver area.

### 3.0 THE REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS PLAN FOR GREATER VANCOUVER

The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness was formed in March 2000. It consists of emergency shelter operators, regional health boards, service and housing providers, urban aboriginal organizations, the provincial and federal governments and a number of municipalities in the region, including Burnaby. The Regional Steering Committee represents the first time that these service providers, shelter operators and funders have come together to develop a regional strategy on homelessness. The immediate task of the Steering Committee was to begin work on developing a regional plan to alleviate and prevent homelessness in Greater Vancouver. The administration of the Steering Committee was funded by HRDC and facilitated by the GVRD. After an extensive public consultation process, the *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* was formally approved in May 2001 by the national Secretariat on Homelessness and by the federal Minister responsible for co-ordinating homelessness programs.

The Plan has provided the framework for evaluating proposals and projects that were submitted in response to three Request for Proposals under the SCPI Program. In the longer term, the Plan is intended to guide future actions of major stakeholders such as community groups, service providers, federal, provincial and municipal governments and health authorities in the creation, funding, facilitation or evaluation of programs or services designed to alleviate homelessness.

The *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* strives to address homelessness at a regional level. The guiding principles of the Plan state that homeless people with their diversity of needs should have access to all components of the continuum of housing and support within their home communities. At the same time, a regional approach to the homelessness issue is required as service providers recognize that the varying and specialized needs of their homeless clients cannot realistically be met in every municipality.

The governance of the regional plan on homelessness and administrative work for the Regional Steering Committee was recently turned over to the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC). SPARC BC will support the activities of stakeholders and will work towards the effective integration of the Regional Homelessness Plan into current and future community development initiatives across the Greater Vancouver region.

The Guiding Principles of the *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* (Appendix 1 *attached*) were supported in principle by Burnaby City Council in September of 2001. The following summarizes the definition of homelessness, the continuum of housing and support model and goals that are the cornerstone of the Plan:

### **3.1 Regional Plan Definition of Homelessness and “At Risk” of Homelessness**

The Plan defines homelessness as “living with no physical shelter; on the street, in doorways, in parkades, in parks and on beaches as well as people living temporarily in emergency shelters or transition houses for women fleeing violence”.

“At risk” of homelessness includes people living in spaces or situations that do not meet basic health and safety standards, do not provide for security of tenure or personal safety and are not affordable. This includes people considered as the invisible homeless, such as individuals who are “couch surfing” or staying temporarily with family and friends.

### **3.2 Continuum of Housing and Support Model**

The Plan proposes solutions to the complex root causes of homelessness in the framework of a continuum that includes housing, income and support services as its three primary components. The continuum advocates a strong prevention approach by focusing on housing and income as solutions to homelessness, while recognizing the importance of support services.

### **3.3 Plan Goals**

The specific goals of the plan are:

- to enhance the continuum of housing and support;
- to create and maintain a continuum of housing;
- to ensure households have an adequate income;
- to deliver support services; and
- support sub-regions to meet local needs.

#### 4.0 REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH INITIATIVE

As a concurrent initiative to the development of the Plan, the Greater Vancouver Regional District recently commenced research to provide a profile of the homeless and “at-risk” population in the Greater Vancouver area, as well as the creation of a data-base that will allow the monitoring of such populations over time. The study has produced the first demographic profile and estimate of the homeless and the “at risk” of homelessness populations in the Greater Vancouver area. The research project had two major components: an estimate and detailed profile of the “at-risk” population using 1996 Census data; and a 24 hour homeless survey on January 14 and 15, 2002 involving 28 permanent and cold/wet weather emergency shelters, 2 safe houses, 10 transition houses and homeless people found outside without shelter. A Burnaby Planning staff representative has served on the Advisory Committee for this research project.

#### 4.1 Research Findings

The findings of the research initiative, including a detailed profile of those who are homeless and those who are “at risk” of homelessness, are thoroughly presented on a special GVRD website at [GVRD.bc.ca/homelessness](http://GVRD.bc.ca/homelessness). Homeless people were found in virtually every surveyed municipality in the GVRD. The following provides a summary of the research findings that are specifically of significance to Burnaby:

**Table 1: Households at Risk of Homelessness\***  
 (Source: GVRD Homelessness Research Study, 2002)

Municipality	1996			1991		
	At-risk house holds 1996	At-risk households as a percentage of all households	At-risk renter house holds	At-risk house holds as a percentage of all renter households	At-risk households 1991	At-risk households as a percentage of all households
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Burnaby	5,915	8.7	4,155	13.6	3,845	6.1
GVRD	57,685	8.4	40,025	14.4	39,005	6.4

\* at risk defined as being in core need (income limit and housing suitability criteria) and spending greater than 50% of gross household income for housing.

The above statistics indicate that just under 15% of tenant households were experiencing severe affordability problems that put them at risk of homelessness. Between 1991 and 1996, “at risk” households as a percentage of all households in Burnaby increased from 6.1% to 8.7%.

**Table 2: Homeless Population Found by Municipality**  
 (Source: GVRD Survey, January 14, 15, 2001)

Municipality	Sheltered homelessness adults	Street homelessness adults	Total homelessness adults
Burnaby	7	10	17
GVRD	719	331	1 050

**Table 3: Homeless Population by Last Permanent Home**  
 (Source: GVRD Survey, January 14, 15, 2001)

Municipality	Sheltered homelessness adults	Street homelessness adults	Total homelessness adults
Burnaby	16	13	29
GVRD	719	331	1 050

The results of the 24 hour survey held on January 14/15, 2002, indicate that there were 17 homeless individuals found in Burnaby, seven of which were found in emergency shelters. As well, there were 29 homeless people who identified their last permanent address as Burnaby, which indicates that some people were obtaining shelter services in other municipalities.

It is important to note that, while the January homeless count was the first time such an extensive exercise has been undertaken in the Greater Vancouver region, it cannot be considered exhaustive. Heavy reliance was placed on existing service providers and volunteers to undertake the count and, as such, areas where there are few existing services were left out of the process. For example, in Burnaby, the Edmonds and Metrotown were included in the count, but most of North Burnaby was not. The researchers who undertook the study have made recommendations to improve the process should another count occur in the future.

## 5.0 FACILITIES AND SERVICES FOR THE HOMELESS

As part of the creation of the *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver*, an inventory of facilities, including permanent shelters and temporary cold/wet weather shelters, outreach services, support services and housing assistance, was created. Analysis of the inventory helped identify the gaps in services and facilities, both in terms of the services

themselves and regional distribution. Arising from this analysis, it was realized that there was a need to have a better distribution of facilities and services in the region, according to need. Therefore, regional distribution became a prime criteria in evaluating proposals for funding. Some of the larger projects funded through SCPI include:

- New permanent shelter facilities in Surrey, Maple Ridge, New Westminister, North Shore (still under negotiation), Vancouver-outside of Downtown area.
- Renovation and upgrading of shelter facilities in Downtown Eastside and New Westminister.
- Securing, through purchase, facilities that are currently being rented for services in Surrey and New Westminister.

Many of the larger projects are currently in the construction and renovation process, and should become operational this winter. The SCPI program also contributed to a wide range of services and programs for homeless people, including outreach, support services, meal services and community needs analysis studies.

### **5.1 Facilities and Services for the Homeless in Burnaby**

Over the years, Burnaby Council had devoted resources such as City owned land and introduced policy measures to enhance the supply of affordable housing in the City. These actions support the position that the best method to prevent homelessness is to ensure that the community has a sufficient supply of affordable housing.

People in Burnaby who are seeking emergency shelters tend to use facilities in New Westminister or Vancouver. Indeed, the outreach service located at the Lookout Society's Cliff Block Emergency Shelter in New Westminister include Burnaby in their service area.

However, there are a number of facilities and services in Burnaby that explicitly serve the homeless including:

- 12 bed emergency shelter for the mentally ill (capital funding through SCPI)
- 10 bed transition house for women fleeing violent situations (City owned house)
- 3 bed safe house for youth fleeing sexual exploitation (City owned house)
- outreach services for homeless youth through Purpose Society (SCPI funded)
- food bank and meal programs through local faith communities

During the three year SCPI process, the City was not approached by a proponent having a firm proposal for establishing a permanent shelter for homeless people in Burnaby. Staff believe that those groups who submitted projects for funding such

facilities in the region did so in areas where they already had a strong foundation of services to work from (such as New Westminster), or in areas where groups had been providing services in an ad hoc basis in response to needs for some time (such as Options Society in Surrey and the Salvation Army in Maple Ridge). In these cases, SCPI afforded the opportunity to either establish services that filled the need in a more appropriate manner or to expand on existing services.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

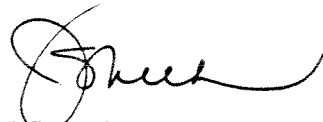
Since 1999, a number of initiatives have taken place in the region that are working towards the goal of preventing and eliminating homelessness. The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness developed a regional plan through a year long process that involved collaboration with an array of stakeholders, including homeless people.

The same Committee was responsible for distributing about \$25 million dollars of federal government funding under the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) program. As well, a regional homelessness research initiative was recently completed, which, for the first time, prepared a detailed profile of those who are homeless, and those who are at-risk of homelessness. A staff member from the Burnaby Planning Department has served as an active member on the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness and has acted as an advisor to the research team.

Through SCPI and the rental of City owned houses for a nominal fee, there are a number of facilities and programs in Burnaby aimed at the homelessness.

Recently, anecdotal evidence has indicated that the number of people who are homeless and living on the street may be increasing. In response, some of the Cold/Wet weather shelter facilities have approached the Provincial Government to obtain funding in order to open the beds earlier to meet the needs. The Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness is undertaking to determine the underlying reasons for, and scope of the apparent increased level of homelessness in order to formulate a response.

It is recommended that a copy of this report be sent to the Community Planning and Housing Committee.



J.S. Belhouse, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

*BWJ.*  
BG\sla\sa  
Attachment

cc: City Manager



Guiding Principles Of The *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver*

The guiding principles of the *Regional Homelessness Plan* state:

1. Solutions to homelessness require a co-ordinated and inclusive community response. The plan will be implemented through collective efforts by homeless people, housing groups, advocacy groups, service providers, community organisations, labour, the private sector, local governments within the GVRD, and provincial and federal governments.
2. The plan addresses the needs of people who are living with no physical shelter - on the street, in doorways, parkades, in parks, on beaches - or people living in emergency shelters or safe houses. It also addresses the needs of individuals at risk of homelessness living in spaces or situations that do not meet basic health and safety standards, provide security of tenure or personal safety, and are not affordable.
3. Preventing and alleviating homelessness requires flexible and co-ordinated responses that recognise the diversity of homeless people and their needs. The plan is inclusive and is intended to be sensitive to the diverse social, economic, cultural, religious, and language needs of all people including different target populations such as women and men, families, children, youth, seniors, Aboriginal people, new immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants, gay, lesbian and transgendered individuals as well as people with special needs including those with mental illness, disabilities, substance misuse, multiple diagnosis, fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effect, brain injuries, HIV/AIDS, criminal justice system involvement and victims of abuse.
4. A "continuum of housing and support" that consists of the following components best serves the needs of people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.

Housing continuum

- emergency shelters
- transition houses
- supportive and second stage housing
- independent housing

Adequate income

- employment
- employment insurance
- income assistance

Support services

- outreach
- drop-in centres
- health services
- mental health services
- substance misuse services
- prevention services
- Aboriginal/holistic services

5. Homeless people must have access to all components of the "continuum of housing and support" according to community need and distributed throughout Greater Vancouver.
6. The plan identifies actions (including education and communication) that can be initiated or implemented to address homelessness over the long term, beginning in year 2001, and updated as necessary.

