

CITY OF BURNABY

HOUSING COMMITTEE

HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS

RE: CITY OF VANCOUVER HOMELESS ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** Council send a letter to Mayor Larry Campbell advising him that the City of Burnaby will continue to work with the City of Vancouver, through the forum of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, to develop strategies to address concerns regarding homelessness.

R E P O R T

The Housing Committee, at its Open meeting held on 2005 October 12, received and adopted the attached report outlining key elements of the Vancouver Homeless Action Plan and current initiatives in the region related to homelessness. Given that there are already initiatives underway to combat homelessness on a regional level, the Committee requested that a letter be forwarded to Mayor Larry Campbell advising that the City of Burnaby will continue to work with the City of Vancouver, through the forum of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, to develop strategies to address concerns regarding homelessness.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor C. Redman
Chair

Councillor D. Johnston
Vice Chair

Councillor C. Jordan
Member

COPY: CITY MANAGER
DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
HOUSING COMMITTEE

DATE: 2005 October 6

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

FILE: 16000 20
Reference: Homelessness

SUBJECT: CITY OF VANCOUVER HOMELESS ACTION PLAN

PURPOSE: To provide information on and a proposed response to the City of Vancouver Homeless Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** the Committee recommend to Council that a letter be sent to Mayor Larry Campbell advising him that the City of Burnaby will continue to work with the City of Vancouver, through the forum of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, to develop strategies to address concerns regarding homelessness.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

By letter dated 2005 July 15, Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell has referred his City's Homeless Action Plan to the City of Burnaby. The letter of referral asks other municipalities in the region to work with Vancouver to help implement the Plan. The Housing Committee had a preliminary discussion on the request at its meeting of 2005 September 20. In turn, the Committee asked staff to provide further information on the Plan, along with a recommended response. This report responds to that request.

2.0 DISCUSSION**2.1 Vancouver Homeless Action Plan**

The City of Vancouver has prepared a Homeless Action Plan which was approved by Vancouver City Council on 2005 June 14. The Plan is a comprehensive document which outlines 87 actions that can be taken by all levels of government and the community to respond to the issue of homelessness.

The Plan is modelled on the Greater Vancouver Regional Homelessness Plan which identifies three components as essential to alleviating homelessness: income, housing, and support services. The Plan addresses concerns relating to the absolute homeless – those living on the street or in shelters – and people at risk of homelessness – those who are living in places that are not safe, secure, or affordable.

While noting that there are many reasons for homelessness, the Plan highlights three key factors behind the problem: decisions to deinstitutionalize the chronically mentally ill without adequate community resources, reductions in funding for new social housing development and decreases to social assistance. The Plan notes that there are three simple reasons to end homelessness: to eliminate the human suffering and waste of potential lives; to reduce the drain on public and private supports; and to avoid the negative effects on communities, businesses and civil society. A profile of homeless people including age, sex, Aboriginal identity, mental health, addictions, and income is included.

The goals of the Plan are to:

- Ensure that all individuals in Vancouver have an adequate income to afford appropriate food, housing, and other basic necessities.
- Provide more affordable and supportive housing to prevent homelessness and help households exit homelessness as quickly as possible.
- Ensure that the shelter system has sufficient capacity to meet emergency housing needs while at the same time minimizing the need for emergency shelter by providing enough appropriate affordable and supportive housing.
- Provide and ensure access to programs that are essential to preventing homelessness and helping households exit homelessness as quickly as possible.

The Plan identifies three strategic priorities:

- Income – Reduce barriers to accessing welfare by the homeless and creating jobs for the homeless.
- Housing – Develop 3,200 units of supportive housing.
- Service – Increase addiction and mental health services.

The Plan notes that any response to homelessness must involve all levels of government, community, business, and individuals. It stresses, however, that the Federal and Provincial Governments have jurisdiction over the key tools for addressing homelessness (e.g., social assistance, mental health and addiction services, and housing funding). There are 87 actions listed in the Plan, with 73 involving the Provincial Government, and 25 involving the Federal Government. Many of the actions involve more than one organization.

Ultimately, the Plan provides Vancouver's perspective of what needs to be done to reduce and prevent homelessness in that city. The Plan notes that Vancouver has a legacy of involvement in responding to social and housing issues. The City's past and current initiatives include:

- Providing capital grants for housing development;
- Owning and managing rental housing;
- Buying single room occupancy rooming houses and hotels and contracting with a non-profit society for management;
- Purchasing and leasing City land to non-profits for the development of non-market housing;
- Establishing a City tenant assistance program; and
- Providing community grants to non-profit organizations.

Most of the City's successes have been the result of partnerships and it is the expectation that this will continue to be the primary approach in the future. That said, the following actions are identified for implementation specifically by the City. They include:

- Purchasing at least one single room occupancy rooming house or hotel per year, subject to available funding, and in partnership with senior governments. The buildings would, in turn, be upgraded and operated on the City's behalf by a non-profit housing society.
- Developing a cohesive rental housing strategy that includes recommendations to a) encourage the private sector to create more rental housing (e.g., through zoning for higher density and density bonusing), and b) preserve the existing stock of rental housing.
- Conducting further research on how a living wage policy might work and determine the potential impact of a living wage on the City's budget and labour contracts and on the ability of qualified contractors to bid on work.
- Considering reduction of the minimum suite size from 400 sq.ft. to 320 sq.ft.

A key point in the Plan is that it costs more for society to leave people homeless than to provide them with income, housing, and support services. The Plan recommends that emphasis be placed on the root causes of homelessness – providing adequate income and appropriate housing – rather than developing more temporary accommodation such as emergency shelters.

2.2 Current Initiatives Related to Homelessness

With regards to the City of Vancouver's request to work together to implement the Plan, it should be noted that there are already several initiatives in place which bring organizations together to combat homelessness.

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From: Director Planning and Building
Re: City of Vancouver Homeless Action Plan
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In the region, the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness serves as a forum for the coordination of research and strategies. The Steering Committee was established in 2001 and is composed of representatives from all levels of government, shelter operators and other service providers. The first task of the Committee was to oversee the preparation of the Regional Homelessness Plan in 2001. The Steering Committee was also responsible for reviewing and awarding the Federal Government Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) funding for projects in the region. Burnaby staff have served on the Steering Committee since its inception. The Regional Steering Committee is considered to be an effective means by which the City of Burnaby can work with the City of Vancouver and other municipal partners in efforts to combat homelessness.

Locally, the Fraser Health Authority established the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness in early 2005 to identify and address issues contributing to homelessness in Burnaby. The Task Force has completed an outreach study, the results of which are expected to be available sometime this month.

The Housing Committee is presently exploring what appropriate roles Burnaby may play in responding to the broader issue of homelessness. The Committee's recommendations on Extreme Weather Shelters appear elsewhere in this Agenda.

3.0 CONCLUSION

This report has presented the key elements of the Vancouver Homeless Action Plan and discussed current initiatives in the region related to homelessness. Given that there are already initiatives underway to combat homelessness on a regional level, it is recommended that the City send a letter to Mayor Larry Campbell advising that the City of Burnaby will continue to work with the City of Vancouver, through the forum of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, to develop strategies to address concerns regarding homelessness.



J.S. Belhouse
DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

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cc: City Manager

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