

SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

SUBJECT: BURNABY CONVERSATION ON HEALTH CARE PUBLIC FORUM

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT the Mayor, on behalf of Council, write a letter to the Minister of Health advising that the City of Burnaby, while acknowledging the significant pressures facing the health system, strongly supports publicly funded health care which is universally accessible and in compliance with the principles of the Canada Health Act.

REPORT

The Social Issues Committee, at its Open meeting held on 2007 May 17, received and adopted the attached report providing an overview of the "Conversation on Health" public forum held in Burnaby on 2007 March 24. Although many interested people could not gain access to the forum, the Committee noted that a broad array of topics were covered including pressures on the health care system, health care delivery, emergency departments, mental health and addictions and problematic substance abuse. Notwithstanding the merits of the forum or the broader conversation on health initiative, the Committee noted that the key will be to see what the Province ultimately does with the information generated through the process.

Arising from discussion, the Committee requested that the Mayor, on behalf of Council write to the Minister of Health advising that the City of Burnaby, while acknowledging the significant pressures facing the health system, strongly supports publicly funded health care which is universally accessible and in compliance with Canada Health Act.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Sav Dhaliwal
Chair

Councillor Dan Johnston
Vice Chair

Councillor Garth Evans
Member

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| COPY – CITY MANAGER DIRECTOR FINANCE DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING |
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TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

DATE: 2007 May 10

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING

FILE: PL 2160 - 10
Reference: Fraser Health Authority

SUBJECT: BURNABY CONVERSATION ON HEALTH PUBLIC FORUM

PURPOSE: To provide an overview of the Conversation on Health public forum held in Burnaby on 2007 March 24.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** this report be received for information purposes.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

At its meeting of 2006 March 15, the Social Issues Committee considered a letter from the Minister of Health, referred from City Council, regarding the Provincial Conversation on Health process. A Planning Department staff member informed the Committee that he would be attending the Conversation on Health public forum being scheduled in Burnaby for 2007 March 24. The Fraser Health Authority representative also indicated that she would be attending the consultation session for health professionals scheduled for the previous evening.

Arising from the discussion, the Committee expressed interest in receiving a report on the proceedings from the March 24 public forum. The Committee also asked that staff convey its concerns about the limited opportunity for public participation provided through the forum.

This report provides background on the Conversation on Health initiative, an overview of proceedings from the March 24 forum, and concluding comments.

2.0 PROVINCIAL CONVERSATION ON HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Provincial Government launched Conversation on Health process in 2006 September. The process was intended to elicit views and suggestions from the public, providing a forum for discussing the challenges and options for strengthening BC's health care system.

The chief impetus for the Conversation on Health process was financial. The Province noted, on the one hand, that new technologies, new treatments, and new equipment and facilities are

improving health care delivery. It also noted, on the other hand, that the costs of meeting the new demands and enhancements are rising at an unsustainable rate. Further, the financial pressures are expected to increase as the population ages. To back up its concerns, the Province notes the following:

- Health care is the largest and fastest growing part of the Provincial Budget Health expenditures across government, which were \$9.5 billion in 2000, increased to \$12.8 billion in 2006
- By 2017, health spending could account for more than 70% of the total Provincial Budget
- Every year, new technology, programs, treatments, and services are added to the system, and demand for services continues to increase in BC (e.g., MRI exams increased by 50% and CT exams increased by 28% between 2002 and 2006; weekly emergency room visits increased by 13% between 2001 and 2005 while the population grew by 5%; PharmaCare costs grew by 25% between 2001 and 2006)
- 13.9% of BC's population was aged 65 and over in 2005; by 2031, the 65+ year group is expected to comprise 24.4% of the population. In terms of costs, people in their 50s currently use an average of \$2,100 per year on health care services. People in their 90s use about ten times that amount – an average of \$22,000 per year.

In launching the Conversation on Health, the Province indicated its intention to make BC the first province in Canada to define the five principles of the Canada Health Act in Provincial law. It also proposed to introduce a new principle on sustainability.

The Province is eliciting public comment for the Conversation on Health process through five channels:

- Regional forums – The Province is hosting 16 public forums throughout BC, including the one held in Burnaby.
- Website – The Province established a dedicated website for the Conversation on Health initiative (www.bcconsersationonhealth.ca). The website contains a range of background information on the initiative, as well as summaries of comments received through written submissions and regional forums.
- Toll free telephone line – The Province has established a toll free telephone line which members of the public can call to ask questions or express their views concerning the Conversation on Health initiative.
- E-mail and regular mail – The Province is inviting members of the public to provide written submissions to the Conversation on Health through e-mail (ConversationonHealth@Victoria1.gov.bc.ca.) or regular mail:
Conversation on Health
5 – 3 1515 Blanshard Street
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3C8
- MLAs – Members of the public are also encouraged to contact their MLA with questions, comments or suggestions regarding the Conversation on Health.

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Re: Burnaby Conversation on Health Public Forum
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The Province is proposing to conclude the Conversation on Health in the fall, after which time it will prepare a public report which will summarize the key messages and conclusions from the process. The report is expected to help the Government in determining appropriate next steps regarding health policy and legislation.

3.0 BURNABY PUBLIC FORUM

The Burnaby public forum was held on 2007 March 24 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Executive Inn. It was the eighth of 16 such forums planned for BC.

Roughly 100 people attended the Burnaby forum, randomly selected from a list of 450 who had expressed interest in attending. At the start of the forum, in a plenary session, participants were asked to identify health-related concerns that they would like to have discussed during the day. A list of 95 items was generated. Each participant then selected three topics from the list which they were able to discuss in further detail in small groups (ranging from two to eight people per group). The small groups were asked to identify what worked, what did not work, and what solutions or ideas they had about the particular issue under discussion. The morning consisted of three such small group sessions of 20 minutes each.

After lunch, each participant was able to choose two topics from the "Conversation Starters" materials distributed in advance with the forum agenda package. The conversation starter topics were as follows:

- Pressures on the health care system
- Health care delivery
- The Canada Health Act
- Primary health care
- Seniors and aging
- Chronic disease prevention and management
- Health human resources
- End of life care
- Emergency departments
- Mental health and addictions
- Problematic substance abuse

Participants discussed their two issues in back to back small group sessions which were facilitated by Provincial staff. At the conclusion of the small group discussions, the facilitators summarized the key issues and ideas emerging from their groups' discussion. Further detail on the key points emerging from the morning and afternoon discussions can be found on the Conversation on Health website: http://www.bccconversationonhealth.ca/EN/burnaby_rpf_results/burnaby_regional_publicforum/#.

Before concluding this section, it should be noted that staff conveyed the Social Issues Committee's concerns regarding the limited opportunity for people to participate in the forum (i.e., only 22% of interested people were selected to participate). We did so verbally to

Provincial officials at the forum, as well as in writing through a comment form faxed to organizers the following week. The concerns are posted on the Conversation on Health website.

4.0 DISCUSSION

In reflecting on the Conversation on Health forum, staff would make the following observations:

- 1) *Forum Organization and Facilitation* – Several groups have expressed concern about the Conversation on Health (e.g., BC Health Coalition, Seniors on Guard for Medicare), claiming that the Province has exaggerated the cost pressures facing health care and has already made up its mind to increasingly move towards privatization of the system. Indeed, representatives of such groups were outside the Executive Inn on May 24 distributing brochures. Focusing strictly on the Burnaby forum, however, staff believe that it was organized and facilitated in a professional, effective manner. Participants were able to identify and discuss a plethora of health-related issues and, except for maintaining order in the proceedings, no effort was made to stifle discussion or limit topics being considered. Also, with the small group format, all participants had ample opportunity to express their views and have their ideas captured for the public record.
- 2) *Diversity amongst participants* – As noted, roughly 350 people expressing interest in attending the forum were denied access. The Province indicated that the 100 participants who were chosen to participate were randomly selected from the broader list of those interested in attending. Judging from the diversity of participants, this would seem to be the case. People of varying ages, socio-economic status, and ethnicity were present. And a variety of viewpoints were represented – including those adamantly opposed to any privatization of the system and those in favour of increased private care options. The one common element was that they all participants seemed to care passionately about the future viability of the health care system.
- 3) *Breadth of topics*- As noted forum participants were able to generate a list of topics that they would like to see addressed during the day. Topics ranged from the broad (e.g., determinants of health, individual responsibility for health) to the narrow (e.g., naturopathic care, cost of prescription drugs). By having such a broad range of topics, there was a danger that the discussion could have become too diffuse; however, the approach had two distinct advantages: 1) from a content perspective, it reflected the complexity and inter-relationship of factors affecting the health system; and 2) from a process perspective, it helped set the stage for a lively and engaged exchange of ideas, as participants were able to explore topics of particular interest to them.
- 4) *Strong support for & commitment to public health system* – As indicated, participants at the forum represented a diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints. And while some spoke in favour of private health clinics and other privatization options, most of the people staff encountered spoke of the need to bolster and enhance our existing public health system. While acknowledging the challenges to be confronted, people generally

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expressed strong concern that Canada not move towards a two tier system or a privatized U.S.-type model.

5) *Follow up* – As noted, the organization and facilitation of the Burnaby forum were impressive. Staff spoke with several participants who had been cynical before coming to the session, but felt positive about the proceedings by the end of the day. Nonetheless, the ultimate test of the process' success will be what is done with the results. In short, unless the public's comments are reflected in the Province's follow up actions, any good will generated through the Burnaby forum or other channels of the Conversation on Health initiative will be for naught.

5.0 CONCLUSION

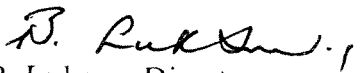
The Conversation on Health is the most comprehensive discussion on health ever undertaken in BC. The topic being examined through the Conversation – the future of BC's public health care system - is complex, and one that the public feels passionately about.

The Conversation on Health public forum held in Burnaby on 2007 March 24 was one of 16 such forums being held throughout BC. As discussed in this report, although many interested people could not gain access to the forum, the experience generally seemed positive for those present. The forum was characterized by an open and inclusive process, a diversity of participants, and a broad array of topics covered. However, notwithstanding the merits of the forum – or, indeed, the broader Conversation on Health initiative – the key will be to see what the Province ultimately does with the information generated through the process.

Ministry of Health officials are committing to prepare a report on the Conversation on Health process by the end of 2007. The report will be available to the public. In turn, the Province will review the report and determine follow up actions regarding health funding and legislation.

Staff will review the Ministry of Health's report on the outcomes of the Conversation on Health when it becomes available and will apprise the Social Issues Committee accordingly.

This report is for the Committee's information.


B. Luksun, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JF:jc/tn

cc: City Manager