
TO: ACTING CITY MANAGER **DATE:** 2021 April 7

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING **FILE:** 16000 20
Reference: Homelessness Response

SUBJECT: APPLICATION TO THE UBCM – STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES’ SERVICES GRANT PROGRAM

PURPOSE: To seek Council authorization to submit a funding application to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) for temporary, one-time funding to support community responses to the increasing and urgent needs of unsheltered homeless people in Burnaby resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** Council authorize staff to submit an application to the Union of BC Municipalities’ Strengthening Communities’ Services Grant Program, as outlined in *Section 3.0* of this report.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

The federal and provincial governments are providing \$540 million in shared funding to local governments under the Safe Restart Agreement to manage the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the Safe Restart funding, \$100 million is being delivered through the Strengthening Communities’ Services Program, a one-time, temporary funding opportunity which aims to support unsheltered homeless populations and address related community impacts through an application-based program. The goal of this program is to support local governments and Treaty First Nations to take action to address unsheltered homelessness that will complement parallel provincial efforts. This funding opportunity is being administered by the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) on behalf of the provincial and federal governments.

This report seeks Council’s support to apply for a UBCM Strengthening Communities’ Services grant for \$1,337,800 to fund a community response to unsheltered homelessness in Burnaby through the provision of cooling stations for extreme heat events during the summer, a shower program at a local church, a Homeless Hub drop-in centre and an additional Housing Support Worker to assist women and children fleeing violence to secure housing. The proposed priority activities and lead agencies were identified through a community workshop facilitated by a consultant.

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2.0 POLICY FRAMEWORK

This report aligns with the following City policies: Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Final Report (2019), Corporate Strategic Plan (2017), Community Safety Plan (2020), Social Sustainability Strategy (2011), Economic Development Strategy (2007) and the Official Community Plan (1998).

3.0 UBCM STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES' SERVICES GRANT PROGRAM

The Strengthening Communities' program is meant to bridge the period between the COVID-19 outbreak and the post-COVID-19 recovery period. The intended outcome of the program is to assist local governments and Treaty First Nations with one or more of the following:

- improved health and safety of unsheltered homeless people living in public or private spaces, including reduced risk of COVID-19 or other disease transmission;
- reduced community concerns about public health and safety in neighbourhoods where unsheltered homeless populations are seeking temporary shelter and services;
- improved coordination among local government, health/social service providers, Indigenous organizations and others working on housing, homelessness and service provision; and
- increased capacity of local government to work with homeless people and Indigenous organizations towards culturally safe and trauma-informed responses.

Communities in BC with a population between 200,000 and 500,000 (e.g. Burnaby) are eligible for up to \$3.5 million in funding. Proposed projects are required to:

- demonstrate evidence of need in the community and provide a rationale for how these issues have been exacerbated by COVID-19;
- provide temporary solutions that address increased urgent and immediate needs related to unsheltered homelessness and do not create ongoing long-term financial obligations that will not be supported by the local government;
- include new activities or expansion of existing activities with costs incurred after 2020 September 17; and
- be capable of completion within one year of the date of the grant approval.

Successful applicants will be awarded grants in two payments: 50 percent at the approval of the project and 50 percent when the project is complete and the UBCM has approved the applicant's final report and financial summary.

4.0 PROPOSED APPROACH TO THE FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

The City has limited direct involvement with outreach and service provision to Burnaby's homeless population. When the Strengthening Communities program was announced by the UBCM in late February, Planning staff consulted UBCM staff to determine if projects led by Burnaby-based community service providers would be eligible for the funding. UBCM staff

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confirmed that these types of projects would be eligible provided that the City assumes overall responsibility for the financial management and reporting requirements of the grant, if awarded. The Strengthening Communities' Services funding cannot be accessed directly by service providers; only local governments and Treaty First Nations may apply. As such, staff have worked with Burnaby community agencies to identify a set of projects that would provide significant support to unsheltered homeless people during the pandemic.

To facilitate these projects, it is proposed that individual project-based grants be provided to the Burnaby-based community service providers, as identified in detail in *Section 5.0* below. These providers would be awarded 50 percent of their identified funding needs at the beginning of their projects based on approval and receipt of the UBCM funding and the remaining 50 percent upon the successful completion. However, it should be noted that for some non-profit entities, funding may not be readily available to complete the project on their own and hence some of the agencies may require a grant advance for the second half of their projects.

Where a grant advance is required, the following process is proposed:

- Staff will work with the agencies and advance the grant on an as-needed basis to assist them with cash flow requirements to finish their projects.
- Advancing the grant will be based on the condition that the agency is clearly indicating they are successfully implementing their project at the mid-point check and is on track for completion.
- The City's Operating Housing Reserve will be used to advance grants.
- Upon completion of the project, the City would first replenish the Operating Housing Reserve for any grants advanced from the second 50 percent of the UBCM grant received before providing the remaining funds to the non-profit entities/agencies.
- In the event that the value of the grant advanced is greater than the funding for eligible expenditures from UBCM, then the non-profit entities would have to reimburse the City. Therefore, staff would work closely with the non-profit entities to ensure all expenditures meet all the eligible expenditure criteria.

If the agency were not succeeding in the respective project at the mid-point check, that agency's project would terminate and the remaining funding for the project would not be sought from the UBCM. Any unexpended funds received from UBCM for terminated projects will then need to be reimbursed back to UBCM from the agency through the City.

5.0 PROPOSED PROJECT

5.1 Context

The 2020 Homeless Count recorded an 80% increase in the number of homeless people counted in Burnaby since the 2017 Count. With the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges for those experiencing homelessness have been exacerbated. Across the province, reduced capacities at shelters, the shutting down of services, and the closure of public buildings limited access to drinking water, washrooms and showers, as well as access to clinical services for people

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experiencing homelessness. In response to the pandemic, the Burnaby Primary Care Network (comprised of Burnaby Division of Family Practice, Fraser Health and the community) formed a working group on homelessness to find solutions to the unique challenges arising from COVID-19. In response to identified needs, BC Housing funded an additional 65 temporary shelter spaces (40 bed Emergency Response Centre on a City site and a 25 bed temporary winter shelter at a local church) and leased a number of hotel rooms to shelter people during the pandemic. The Primary Care Network working group was also instrumental in improving access to health services at many of the sheltering locations.

The temporary winter shelter and the Extreme Weather Response Shelter closed on March 31, 2021 and the Emergency Response Centre will close on June 30, 2021. With the exception of those who will transition into a new 43 unit supportive housing development to be constructed by BC Housing at 3986 Norland Drive (the site of Burnaby's existing supportive housing building), the majority of those currently sheltered will become unsheltered this summer. The activities proposed as part of this grant application will focus on providing safe, welcoming and stigma-free spaces for unsheltered homeless individuals to access services, clinical supports, outreach, washrooms, showers and laundry during daytime hours.

5.2 Project Description

The following priority activities were identified by Burnaby based community service providers during a facilitated discussion organized by City staff. Each proposed activity has an identified lead agency who would undertake that activity and coordinate partnerships with other local agencies.

Activity #1 – Cooling Stations

Lead Agency: The Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby

Project Funding Request: \$39,600

This activity would involve implementing two outdoor cooling station locations for unsheltered people to attend during extreme heat events over the summer months. The stations would be located in the parking lots of two local churches and would operate from 11am to 5pm when daytime temperatures put people at high health risk. Services would include the provision of:

- shady "hang out" cooling space with tables and chairs, activities and free Wi-Fi following COVID-19 health directives;
- free supplies such as water, refillable water bottles, juices, food, sunscreen, hats, cooling cloths, summer gently use clothing;
- free harm reduction and COVID-19 related supplies (masks, sanitizers, hand washing, etc.); and
- connection to housing and health service providers.

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The program would also include an education and awareness campaign about the risks and symptoms of heat related illnesses towards prevention and to support unsheltered people.

The Society proposes to use the UBCM grant funding to develop a program that could be implemented in future years by its pool of volunteers. The activity requires hiring two Site Coordinators to develop communications, coordinate the logistics of the program, and develop guides, policies, task lists etc. to be used as a manual for implementing this activity in future years.

Activity #2 – Mobile Shower Program

Lead Agency: The Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby

Project Funding Request: \$106,000

This activity proposes to establish a mobile shower program for people experiencing homelessness. It proposes to purchase a two-stall mobile shower unit that will initially be located at Southside Community Church. The shower program proposes to operate one morning per week, initially, as part of the established Outreach Resource Centre service that currently operates at the church every Thursday morning. Additional locations and days of operation will be considered based on demand for the service. The Society would provide a towel service, as well as hygiene and comfort kits to those who use the service.

Activity #3 – Homeless Hub

Lead Agency: Progressive Housing Society

Project Funding Request: \$1,087,900

This activity proposes to establish a centralized Homeless Hub drop-in centre to reduce barriers and increase access to services and provide a "one-stop shop" of care and support for unsheltered people in a leased space. The Homeless Hub hours of operation are proposed to be 8am-8pm to provide a bridge between the hours that the overnight winter shelter and the Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelter close and reopen. The Hub would provide an opportunity to create a comprehensive and coordinated community response to address the needs of unsheltered individuals during the pandemic. Individuals would have a safe and person-centered physical space to seek resources, receive care and assistance in a culturally focused environment with low barriers to accessing care. The UBCM funding proposal would allow for the initial costs of establishing the Hub site. A one year project would provide enough time to establish a foundation of collaboration, and coordination between health and social service organizations, as well as important partners such as RCMP and protective services.

The Homeless Hub is proposed to provide:

- a safe space to respond to the needs of unsheltered people in Burnaby;
- onsite housing and outreach workers to engage with the homeless population;

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- a city liaison coordinator to work with the City of Burnaby's Parks and Bylaw staff to improve Progressive Housing's ability to engage and connect with homeless camps and collaborate on solutions to community concerns;
- an Indigenous cultural connection advisor to support the increase in Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Burnaby;
- a refugee support and cultural liaison for refugee claimants experiencing homelessness;
- a peer training program and peer-led activities in partnership with the Burnaby Community Action Team on the overdose crisis to promote harm reduction activities, reduce stigma and prevent overdoses among the homeless population; and
- joint training opportunities for outreach workers, front line staff, first responders, bylaw and protective services staff, and RCMP to learn best practices in responding to the needs of homeless individuals, including topics such as trauma informed approaches, Indigenous cultural safety, mental health first aid, LGBTQI2S+ needs, harm reduction and overdose response, and needs of people with disabilities.

The intent would be that the Hub would become self-sustaining beyond the initial start up phase through the direct partnerships of the non profit organizations, the Primary Care Network, and by seeking alternative funding options such as Reaching Home (next call for proposals anticipated in early 2022), and other funding opportunities as they arise.

Activity #4 – Housing Support Worker for Women and Children Fleeing Violence

Lead Agency: Dixon Transition Society

Project Funding Request: \$104,300

This activity proposes to increase outreach capacity to women and children fleeing violence to prevent homelessness among this population. The Society proposes to hire an additional Housing Support Worker in order to ease the increased workload of its current staff that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This new temporary position would enable the Society to provide thorough and quick assistance to current and past clients that may be experiencing financial and/or emotional and psychological hardship due to the pandemic. The increased workload is anticipated to ease over the next year as immunization and COVID restrictions ease. The Housing Support Worker would:

- maintain close relationships with affordable housing providers for tenanting women and children;
- secure donations for basic household items and furniture to set up women in their new homes;
- accompany women to housing appointments and help them organize their move from Dixon's facilities to their new housing; and
- provide clients with resources that they may need in their new communities, such as referrals to services.

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6.0 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The UBCM has announced Strengthening Communities' Services grants of up to \$3.5 million to assist local governments and Treaty First Nations in responding to the needs of unsheltered homeless and related community concerns that have worsened due to COVID-19. The grants are intended to bridge the period between now and the post-COVID-19 recovery period.

It is recommended that Council indicate its support for the four proposed activities outlined in *Section 5.0* of this report and authorize staff to apply for \$1,337,800 in funding from the UBCM to distribute to the identified lead agencies for each activity.

If funding is awarded, staff would initiate the process for awarding grants to the lead agencies as outlined in *Section 4.0* of this report. As required in the UBCM grant criteria, staff would also undertake the overall grant management including financial accounting, project evaluation and progress and final reports to UBCM.



E. W. Kozak, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

CS/MM:sa

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Director Finance
Director Public Safety and Community Services
Director Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services

Chief Librarian
OIC-RCMP
Chief Licence Inspector
City Clerk