



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: General Purposes Committee
From: Lani Schultz
Director, Corporate & Intergovernmental Relations
Re: **Improving Communications with Vancouver Coastal Health and Richmond Health Services**
Date: January 8, 2004
File:

Staff Recommendation

1. That the formation of a dedicated Committee of Council to review activities related to Health Care in Richmond not be set up at this time.
2. That staff be directed to meet with Richmond Health Services staff on an ongoing basis, to share information of mutual interest, and to ensure Council is not "surprised" by actions and announcements that affect the Richmond community.
3. That staff be directed to arrange a presentation from Richmond Health Services, on a bi-annual basis, to keep Council up to date on the plans and actions that will affect the Richmond Community.
4. That staff be directed to prepare a regular "Intergovernmental Relations" newsletter, to keep Council informed of the related programs, issues, and initiatives.

Lani Schultz
Director, Corporate & Intergovernmental Relations
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Staff Report

Origin

At the November 17th, 2003 General Purposes meeting, and at the request of Council, Committee received a presentation from Vancouver Coastal Health regarding their plans and actions affecting health care service delivery in Richmond. In response to the presentation, Council expressed their concern regarding lack of communication and consultation on health matters affecting the Richmond Community, and their desire to ensure that Richmond Health needs were not lost in the bigger umbrella of the Vancouver Coast Health region issues. As a result of this discussion, the following staff referral was made:

“That the matter of the delivery of health services within Richmond be referred to staff for discussion on (i) the possible formation of a health liaison committee, and (ii) other arrangements which may be approved for better communication with Vancouver Coastal Health.”

Analysis

Presently, Richmond Health Care Services falls under the jurisdiction of the Vancouver Coastal Health Region. Health Care in this region, as with other regions, is undergoing significant changes in order to respond to changing health care needs, and significant budgetary restraints. These changes have had, or will have impact on all aspects of health operations, and as a result, have not gone without the scrutiny and attention of various stakeholders of the health care system. As the local governance body, City Council is often called upon to comment, react, or otherwise influence health care decisions which impact the Richmond Community, even though Health Services are not a core service of the City. As well, the decisions and actions of the Health Region can and do have significant impact on the residents and taxpayers of Richmond. Therefore, the need for Council to be kept abreast of plans and actions in the Health Services area is important. To facilitate effective communications between Council and Health, a number of options have been considered:

1. The formation of a Health Liaison

The formation of a Health Liaison Committee, as a formal committee of Council, was considered, as one means of improving communications between the City and Richmond Health. This option would ensure that Council stayed abreast of the various activities, issues and decisions regarding community health matters, through regular committee meetings. These meetings would provide a regular forum through which presentations from the local health officials could be received, and feedback could be given. The difficulty with this option is that health care is clearly defined as a provincial service, and as such the committee (and Council itself) would have no real authority to make decisions or otherwise direct actions to be taken by Richmond Health or the Vancouver Coastal Health Region. Therefore, although these meetings would be informative with the opportunity for input and discussion, it would be unlikely they would result in concrete actions and direction. As well, as a member of the Vancouver Coastal Health Region, Richmond Health has formed a “Local Governance Liaison Committee” for the purposes of keeping all of the key government agencies abreast of issues, plans, decisions, etc. affecting health care in Richmond. The formation of this committee is fairly recent, having met

only a couple of times since its formation. In discussions with Richmond Health, they are hopeful that this forum will go a long way to improving the communication needs between themselves, the region, and local government agencies. The meeting is attended by RCMP/community safety reps, Provincial MLA's, senior staff from Health, and City representatives. Council has appointed Councillor Barnes as the Council representative on this Committee. It is staff's view that once this committee is up and running it will be an effective communication tool to share issues, concerns and ideas through discussions with all agencies affected. Although the original intent of this committee was to meet twice a year, Richmond Health is now seriously considering a more frequent meeting schedule. Given the lack of formal authority that Council has over Health decisions, Council's existing heavy committee meeting schedule, and the existence of the Local Governance Liaison Committee, the formation of a Council Committee to deal with Health issues is not being recommended at this time.

2. Increasing the frequency with which City Staff are meeting with Health staff, to improve communications:

Staff from both agencies have explored a number of options to improve communications at the staff level, that will help to ensure City objectives are considered and that any negative impacts are minimized with regards to health decisions. Staff have agreed to regular monthly meetings with senior health staff, in order to share information of mutual interest for discussion. Where information arises in these meetings that would have impact on City services, staff will ensure Council is informed and that the matter is discussed as appropriate. As well, staff have agreed to hold a preliminary management "working session" to be attended by staff from both agencies, to help create a mutual understanding of each others mandates, initiatives and sensitivities for services. Finally, Richmond Health staff have agreed to provide the City with "heads-up" information pertaining to difficult issues or matters as early as possible in a process, to try and minimize any surprises for Council regarding health care decisions and actions

3. Presentations to Council twice yearly, on Health Plans Initiatives and Issues.

Health staff have volunteered to make presentations to Council twice per calendar year, or more frequently if necessary, as a means of ensuring some dedicated time for Council to review Health matters impacting the Richmond community, and to comment and provide input on these matters.

4. Intergovernmental information report

Given the City's new Intergovernmental Relations focus, staff are recommending the development of an Intergovernmental Information Newsletter as a means of keeping Council and staff regularly updated on intergovernmental matters. The content would include updated information regarding events, programs and issues related to Health, Senior Government, First Nations, and other government agencies. The intent would be to distribute these newsletters on a bi-monthly basis as a start. This newsletter would summarize pertinent information and provide a means for Council members to identify areas where further follow-up may be desired.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact to this report

Conclusion

Staff were asked to explore a number of ways to improve communications between the City and Vancouver Coastal Health, including the formation of a Health Liaison Committee of Council. Given the existence and mandate of Richmond Health's Local Governance Liaison Committee, Council's already heavy meeting schedule, and the City's lack of jurisdiction over health matters, staff believe the formation of a Council Health Liaison Committee should not be pursued at this time. The following initiatives are being recommended to try and enhance communications between the City and Health Services in Richmond:

1. Increase the frequency with which senior City Staff are meeting with Health staff, to improve communications, with the onus on City staff to ensure Council is kept abreast of matters arising from these meetings.
2. Production of an Intergovernmental Relations Newsletter, to provide Council and Staff with regularly updated information on Intergovernmental matters, and to provide the opportunity for Council to request further work to be conducted on these matters.
3. Provision by Richmond Health staff of timely "pre-announcement" information wherever possible for difficult issues, to try and minimize any surprises for Council regarding health care decisions and actions
4. Presentations to Council twice yearly, on Health Plans, Initiatives and Issues.

Staff suggest that these initiatives will go a long way to improving communications regarding Health Care in Richmond, and should be tried for the following year. If after establishing these new lines of communication further improvements are needed, the idea of a formal committee of Council can be revisited.



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