



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Community Safety Committee

Date: October 20, 2009

From: Phyllis L. Carlyle
General Manager, Law & Community Safety

File: 09-5125-03-07/Vol 01

Re: **Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless**

Staff Recommendation

That the revised Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless dated October 15, 2009 be approved.

Phyllis L. Carlyle
General Manager, Law & Community Safety
(604-276-4104)

Att.

FOR ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT USE ONLY

ROUTED TO:		CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER		
Social Planning.....	Y <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N <input type="checkbox"/>			
Affordable Housing.....	Y <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	N <input type="checkbox"/>			
REVIEWED BY TAG	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	REVIEWED BY CAO	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

Staff Report

Origin

Each fall the Richmond Extreme Weather Response Committee convenes to review and amend the Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless as required. This report presents the revised Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless for approval.

Analysis

The Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless was last revised in 2007. In October of 2009, the Extreme Weather Planning Committee met to review last winter's extreme weather activations and the Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless. Last year there were significant improvements made to the notification process to include more individuals, retail locations and agencies. As a result of the extraordinary weather of last winter and the increased notifications, the activations and usage of the shelter space increased significantly. Between December 12, 2008 and March 15, 2009, Salvation Army Richmond House and St. Alban's Church shelter sites were each open for 43 nights. Regular usage per night at Richmond House is 10 men and during the extreme weather nights the average usage was 3 additional men. Average usage during extreme weather activations at St. Alban's Church site was 8 men and 2 women per night. The total usage at both shelter sites from December 12, 2008 to March 15, 2009 was 509 uses, 82 of which were by women, many of these uses by the same individuals over multiple nights.

Upon consultation and review with stakeholders, significant changes to the plan for this winter are recommended.

The existing criteria defining "extreme weather" as:

- Conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons; OR
- Any snow accumulation; OR
- Temperatures at or below -4 degrees Celsius (-2 with a wind chill).

The recommendation is to define extreme weather as:

- Conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons; OR
- Any snow accumulation; OR
- Temperatures at or below -2 degrees Celsius (0 to -2 with a wind chill); OR
- Temperatures near 0 degrees Celsius with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for homeless persons to remain dry.

These changes to the criteria defining "extreme weather" acknowledge the unique weather patterns in the Lower Mainland that make the homeless people more vulnerable to the cold and damp. By reducing the severity of the criteria, the shelters are open more often for extreme winter weather, providing the homeless people with greater access to shelter.

The Richmond Emergency Management Office will determine the criteria earlier for extreme weather by 10 am on the first day of an extreme weather event and on Friday for the upcoming weekend, if possible. This earlier determination will permit greater time for shelters to mobilize.

Financial Impact

No financial impact is anticipated

Conclusion

These changes to the Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless recognize that it is difficult for homeless people to stay warm and dry when it is cold and damp. The changes will improve service delivery for these people and will result in the extreme weather shelters being open more often during the winter.



Deborah Procter
Manager, Emergency Programs
(604-244-1211)

DP:ds

Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless

Introduction

The Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless sets the framework for expanding resources for homeless persons during the winter months to prevent hardships due to extreme winter weather conditions.

The Richmond Extreme Weather Response Planning Committee consists of representatives from the following organizations and agencies:

Community Organizations:

- Salvation Army Richmond House
- Richmond Youth Service Agency
- St. Alban's Anglican Church

City of Richmond:

- Community Services Department
 - Affordable Housing
 - Social Planning
- Emergency Programs

Regional Representation:

- Regional Extreme Weather Coordinator, Metro Vancouver Shelter Strategy

The Current Homelessness Situation

The Metro Vancouver 24 Hour Homelessness Snapshot is conducted once every two years. In March 2008, this Snapshot estimated that there are 56 homeless people in Richmond. Of those 56 people, 19 were in a shelter and 37 were on the street. This number is generally accepted as a conservative estimate. However, the number does provide a starting point for planning an adequate response for the homeless when an extreme weather alert is called. It is anticipated that any data collected through the Extreme Weather Response Program will build the knowledge of homelessness in Richmond.

Regular Shelter Capacity

There are a total of 10 permanent shelter beds in Richmond for men. In addition, Nova House, a 10-bed transition house, provides shelter for women and their children fleeing abuse.

The Broader Homeless Population

There are those in the homeless population who do not seek admission into shelters. It is common knowledge that there are some areas in the City where the homeless will congregate outdoors. These areas are outlined in this Plan. In addition, the Airport Chaplaincy reports that there are a significant number of homeless people, primarily women who often have children or are pregnant, who end up at the airport. They arrive from flights into the City or they come to the airport from the surrounding communities for a warm dry place to stay where they can go unnoticed for a few days. While there is no clear estimation of the size of this broader homeless population, the Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless takes their needs into account as well.

The Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless

The Richmond Extreme Weather Response Plan for the Homeless meets the needs of a wide range of homeless people (e.g. men, women, seniors, and families) in the community. It is also flexible enough to meet the shelter needs of groups of various sizes (as few as five to as many as twenty-five or more). To meet these criteria, the Richmond alert involves a range of options and levels of response.

Extreme Weather Alert

Extreme weather can include significant snow accumulations, severe winds or cold temperatures. For the purposes of a Richmond Extreme Weather alert, extreme weather is defined as:

- Conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless persons; OR
- Any snow accumulation; OR
- Temperatures at or below -2°C (0°C with a wind chill); OR
- Temperatures near 0°C with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for homeless persons to remain dry.

Activation

The Richmond Emergency Management Office will initiate an extreme weather alert by 10 am on the first day of an extreme weather event and on Friday for the upcoming weekend, if possible. This allows adequate time to mobilize for the activation while minimizing the potential for staff overtime costs. This determination will be based on the definition of extreme weather as outlined above, Environment Canada weather reports, information from the City's contracted meteorologist, weather alert notifications, and the perceived need for additional shelter space in the community. Activation of an extreme weather response will activate the St. Alban's Anglican Church shelter and increase the capacity of Richmond House.

Upon activation of the plan, St. Alban's may contact Richmond House to arrange for staffing at their site.

Notification

Multiple agencies and locations will be notified in the event of an Extreme Weather activation. The purpose of the notification is to raise awareness of the severity of the weather and the potential impacts to the homeless and to provide information about the additional shelter that is being offered during the alert. A poster indicating the location of the activated shelter will be faxed or emailed to those agencies and businesses on the list. The poster can then be placed on display for the public to view. The poster will contain the phone number for the Salvation Army Richmond House as a point of contact for extreme weather shelters for questions and to arrange for transportation to the shelter sites. The following is a list of the notification recipients:

- BC Ambulance Services
- BC Housing
- Broadmoor Baptist Church
- Chimo Crisis Services
- City of Richmond:
 - Affordable Housing
 - Community Bylaws
 - Community Services
 - Corporate Communications
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Parks Caretakers
 - Public Works Dispatch
 - Social Planning
 - Stores
- Emergency Mental Health Services
- Gilmore Park United Church
- Ministry of Housing and Social Development
- Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance
- RCMP
- Regional Extreme Weather Response Coordinator
- Return It Bottle Depots
- Richmond Addiction Services
- Richmond Bethel Church
- Richmond Centre Mall Security
- Richmond Community Advisory Committee
- Richmond Food Bank
- Richmond Hospital Emergency Room

Richmond Hospital Social Workers
Richmond Public Library
Richmond Women's Resource Centre
Richmond Youth Service Agency
Salvation Army Community Church
Salvation Army Richmond House
St. Alban's Anglican Church
Touchstone Family Association
Vancouver Airport Chaplaincy
Vancouver International Airport Authority, Airport Operations
Volunteer Richmond Information Services

The Response

Additional Temporary Emergency Shelter

When an extreme weather alert is called, the following shelter facilities are activated:

- The Salvation Army's Richmond House Men's Shelter, 3111 Shell Road, will be expanded by 6 spaces to a maximum of 16 spaces for men only.
- St. Alban's Anglican Church, 7260 St. Alban's Road, will provide up to 16 shelter spaces.

Activation plans for each of the sites have been developed. Each facility director will continue to manage their own site, but may call upon other agencies for assistance.

Outreach

Agencies that have been notified of the activated temporary emergency shelters that have staff that interact with the homeless can alert them to the dangers of hypothermia presented by the weather conditions and encourage them to seek shelter.

The following locations have been identified as potential outreach target areas:

- At Steveston Highway and Shell Road, south of Ironwood, in the adjacent wooded area
- Behind Park Road and Cooney Road, in the parkade
- Behind the former Legends Pub, across from Lansdowne Shopping Centre at Cooney and Lansdowne Road
- In Minoru Park
- In the Cultural Centre parkade (the Aquatic Centre is used as a place to keep warm)
- The Boy Scout Camp at Woodward's Landing
- Alexandra Road (boarded up houses)

- Lang Park (Saba Road and Buswell Street)
- Capstan Way Marina
- Park area surrounding Nature Park

The Airport Chaplaincy will continue to monitor the airport for homeless people during the Extreme Weather Alert.

Time Frame

The extreme weather response usually occurs:

- Between November 1 and March 31
- Intermittently during this five-month period, as weather conditions and need dictates.

Hours of Operation

Nighttime shelters are available generally between 9:00 pm and 7:00 am. BC Housing encourages Extreme Weather shelters to be open long enough for clients to obtain at least 8 hours of sleep per night.

Evaluation and Plan Revision

In the fall of each year, the Richmond Extreme Weather Planning Committee will reconvene in consultation with the Regional Extreme Weather Coordinator with the Metro Vancouver Shelter Strategy to review and amend the plan as required. As part of the evaluation procedure, data collected by the organizations involved in the response will be collated and distributed by BC Housing.

Prepared by:
Emergency Programs
City of Richmond
October 15, 2009