



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: General Purposes Committee
From: Cathryn Volkering Carlile
General Manager, Community Services
Re: **Council Referral – Analysis of Homelessness Situation and Needs in Richmond**

Date: September 13, 2016
File: 08-4057-01/2016

Staff Recommendation

That the following actions be implemented to address the homelessness situation and needs in Richmond:

1. Allocate up to a maximum of \$30,000 from the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund to fund the Homelessness Liaison pilot contract to support coordinated homelessness outreach efforts in the community;
2. Allocate up to a maximum of \$20,000 from the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund to fund the creation of a centralized housing database to be contracted to a qualified non-profit organization to manage;
3. Continue to advocate and work with senior levels of government to identify joint opportunities to address the homelessness situation; and
4. That the Five-Year Financial Plan (2016-2020) Bylaw be amended to include an additional \$50,000 (from the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund) for the City's contribution towards the Homelessness Liaison pilot contract and centralized housing database program.

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REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Finance Intergovernmental Relations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: DW	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

The purpose of this report is to respond to the referral from the September 12, 2016 Council meeting for staff to:

Analyze the issue of homelessness and at risk population in Richmond and report back to Committee as soon as possible.

This report supports Council's 2014-2018 Term Goal #2 A Vibrant, Active and Connected City:

Continue the development and implementation of an excellent and accessible system of programs, services, and public spaces that reflect Richmond's demographics, rich heritage, diverse needs, and unique opportunities, and that facilitate active, caring, and connected communities.

2.2. Effective social service networks.

This report supports Council's 2014-2018 Term Goal #5 Partnerships and Collaboration:

Continue development and utilization of collaborative approaches and partnerships with intergovernmental and other agencies to help meet the needs of the Richmond community.

5.2. Strengthened strategic partnerships that help advance City priorities.

This report supports the 2007 Affordable Housing Strategy Priority #1: Subsidized Rental Housing.

Access to housing and supportive services for individuals experiencing homelessness is an important element in facilitating movement along the housing continuum into permanent and stable housing.

Analysis

Homelessness in Richmond

According to local service providers and the RCMP, the number of absolutely homeless in Richmond is greater than 100. Outreach workers have estimated around 120 active client files receiving some form of outreach. Outreach workers and first responders also report homeless individuals in Richmond having more complex needs, such as mental and physical health challenges. These challenges are further exacerbated by the current lack of an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team presence in Richmond, which would have the capacity to respond to complex needs of specific clients.

The Metro Vancouver Homeless Count has been conducted regionally every three years since 2002. Homeless Counts are anticipated to be underestimations since they are 24-hour surveys that cannot locate all homeless persons throughout a city. The 2014 Homeless Count found in Richmond:

- 38 homeless people in total
- 16 adults and unaccompanied youth who were sheltered; 5 of which had no fixed address
- 22 adults and unaccompanied youth unsheltered

Research across Canada indicates that households may be at risk of homelessness if they are in core housing need, which is defined as “current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.” According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 17.4% of Richmond households are in core housing need and fall below affordability standards and therefore may be at risk of homelessness.

With respect to accessing rental housing, vacancy rates in Richmond were lower than 1% in 2015, except for 1 bedroom apartments (1.4%). This is much lower than a healthy vacancy rate of 3% and is indicative of a constrained rental market adding pressure for higher rents and difficulty to find adequate housing. Affordable Housing staff have experienced an increased volume of inquiries from households in crisis. Many of these renter households report facing eviction due to a property sale or redevelopment (renoviction) and are not able to find alternative accommodation that is affordable or suitable for their family in Richmond.

Current Situation in Richmond

Emergency Shelters

Currently, the Salvation Army operates the only year-round emergency shelter in Richmond (Richmond House located at 3111 Shell Road). The shelter has 10 men-only beds and one (1) additional bed reserved for Richmond Hospital discharged clients, which is always in use. The length of shelter stay varies, as the Salvation Army has a policy not to discharge clients to the street. Shelter staff work with clients to find stable and transitional housing options. The shelter is always at capacity and turns away approximately 133 visits per month (equating to approximately 60 individual clients). The landlord has sold the Salvation Army emergency shelter site, and ownership will be transferred to the new buyer in September 2016. While the new landlord has agreed to extend the lease for one year until September 2017, the Salvation Army is pursuing a permanent site for the shelter.

With respect to emergency shelters for women and children, there are currently no beds for homeless women with children in Richmond. Chimo Community Services operates Nova Transition House, where there are 10 emergency beds for women fleeing violence with a maximum stay of 30 days. Chimo is currently turning away approximately 30 women every month seeking shelter.

Extreme Weather Response Shelter Program

For the past three years, St. Alban Outreach and Advocacy operated 16 extreme weather shelter beds for men, women, and children. In the 2015/16 winter (November to March) season, the shelter

was open for 40 nights and offered accommodation to 617 clients, including 70 females. On average, the shelter was at 97% capacity. St. Albans has not renewed its Extreme Weather Response (EWR) contract with BC Housing. Chimo Community Services will operate the EWR shelter for the 2016/2017 season out of the St. Albans facility, but the future of the EWR shelter is uncertain after that point. In addition, the Salvation Army's Richmond House operates 6 extreme weather beds for men only (in addition to the 10 permanent beds). The Salvation Army may not have the same extreme weather shelter capacity moving forward due to the uncertainty of Richmond House.

Drop-in Centre

The Drop-In Centre located at St. Albans Anglican Church closed on July 29, 2016 because the Parish of St. Alban was unable to continue operating the Drop-in Centre, as they did not have the resources to serve the increasingly complex needs of the individuals accessing the space. The Drop-In Centre functioned as a central resource hub for homeless individuals in Richmond. Some of the services provided included: hot beverages and snacks, access to internet, showers, counselling and supports. In 2015, the Drop-In Centre averaged 10 client visits per day. Since the closure of the Drop-in Centre, Chimo Community Services has reported a significant increase in calls on their crisis phone line and individuals accessing the office for services and resources.

Turning Point will be operating the Drop-in Centre in the future and has received funding from the Ministry of Health to run a drop-in centre in Richmond. Turning Point is working with a realtor to rent a space in Richmond and hopes to secure a location by October 2016. Priorities for the space include wheelchair access, a shower, kitchen/cooking facilities and an area for counselling and outreach supports. It is anticipated that the new Drop-in Centre will be able to accommodate the Friday meal program. In the event that Turning Point is able to secure a space, it is likely some renovation work will be needed and there will continue to be a gap in services for a number of months in the community.

City Grants Towards Housing and Homelessness Initiatives in Richmond

The City cannot solve housing affordability and homelessness issues alone, but can play a key role in developing partnerships with senior government, who have the primary responsibility, to work towards addressing challenges and needs. In terms of funding, the City currently supports housing and homelessness initiatives through two grants:

1. The City funds the Facilitation Administration role to support the Richmond Homelessness Coalition (\$10,000 contract). The role of the Coalition is to address issues of homelessness in Richmond by collecting information about homeless needs, identifying gaps in services, advocating to all levels of government for funding, and generating collaborative and action-oriented solutions to reduce homelessness. The role of the Facilitation Administrator role is to provide support by researching and distributing funding opportunities to member organizations, distributing information on evolving homeless needs and situation, assisting in development and monitoring of project outcomes, maintaining Coalition reports, and liaising with regional homelessness bodies.
2. In 2016, the City contributed \$576,958 in grant funding to non-profit organizations through the Health, Safety and Social Grants process. The grants are used towards various community initiatives, including support services and health promotion in Richmond.

Approximately \$350,789 of the grant funding was allocated towards services and supports that serve vulnerable or at-risk individuals.

The City recognizes that housing affordability remains a critical issue in Richmond, which has implications for transitional and emergency housing options, and is committed to working with senior governments and community partners to work towards solutions.

Summary of Challenges in Richmond

The community has experienced a decrease in resources towards addressing homelessness in a relatively short period of time, leading to a crisis situation. With the upcoming cold and wet weather season (November to March), addressing the challenges and needs will be a priority. In summary, the current challenges Richmond faces include:

- Lack of a central hub or connection point for homeless/at-risk individuals to access resources, supports or assistance with entering into housing
- An uncertainty around the future of the only emergency shelter with no secured permanent space at this time
- Lack of access to shelter for women and women with children experiencing homelessness
- General lack of shelter space to accommodate the growing number of homeless individuals

Staff continue to maintain contact with local non-profit providers regarding the current situation and track emerging challenges and needs with respect to homelessness.

Summary of Needs in Richmond

It is recognized that homelessness is a complex issue that requires collaboration with multiple partners to develop viable solutions. Initiatives for individuals to successfully access and maintain stable housing can be multi-faceted but typically include: access to permanent and appropriate housing, sufficient income, health services, and community support connections. The following table highlights the short-term, medium-term and long-term needs in Richmond.

Timeframe	Needs in Richmond
Short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent site for the Drop-in Centre • Coordinated and collaborative outreach efforts to serve the immediate needs of homeless/at-risk clients (e.g. connection to income assistance, access to health services) • Additional outreach workers and supports in Richmond • Permanent site for the Salvation Army's emergency shelter (to accommodate existing 10 beds), with potential to include co-ed beds
Medium-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent emergency shelter site to provide additional beds for growing homeless population (including women/women with children)
Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated housing development that could accommodate a continuum of emergency, transitional and supportive housing with programmed community and health service spaces for individuals who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness • Increased access to housing options, including supportive and rental units

Delegation Requests from September 12, 2016 Council Meeting

A delegation from Chimo Community Services and the Poverty Response Committee approached Council on September 12, 2016 requesting the City's immediate assistance to support community resources for Richmond's homeless population. Due to the crisis situation that Richmond is facing regarding lack of housing and supports for homeless individuals, service providers report experiencing an increase in volume of crisis calls and clients with complex needs. The providers state that the current resources are not sufficient to address the growing number of clients. The delegation requested four specific items from the City:

	Request	Staff response
1	House the families and individuals (Chimo clients) in Richmond as soon as possible	As the City does not own or manage any affordable housing units, staff are unable to directly place any individuals in housing. However, staff continue to regularly update and advocate to BC Housing for more funding and resources for Richmond's homeless population.
2	Provide access to Brighthouse Pavilion for homeless/at-risk individuals from the drop-in centre so the clients can touch base with outreach/support workers, gather socially and share lunch through a mobile Friday lunch program	City staff are working with the non-profit organizations to provide access to the Pavilion every Friday, beginning in October, for meal distribution during lunch time, from 10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. This will be an interim measure until Turning Point is able to secure a long-term/permanent space for the Drop-in Centre.
3	Contract with a housing provider to coordinate rental accommodation with local service providers and create a central registry of units by working with landlords, property management companies and developers	Staff note that the concept of a central registry for the low-end market rental units was raised by both the development community and non-profit groups during the consultation phase of the Affordable Housing Strategy update. A recommendation to fund the creation of a centralized housing database is outlined in the recommended options.
4	Find funding for additional support/outreach workers so local agencies can provide timely and appropriate resources and referral services to the homeless/at-risk population	BC Housing currently funds the Homeless Prevention Program outreach worker (based out of Chimo) and staff continue to have discussions with BC Housing regarding funding more outreach workers in Richmond. Turning Point is anticipating on hiring additional outreach workers for their Outreach and Resource Support Program. There is a need to provide a collaborative and coordinated effort for outreach. Staff are currently working to expand the role of the Richmond Homelessness Coalition Administrator (funded by the City) to provide more support for outreach workers in Richmond.

Recommended Options

To work towards addressing the homelessness situation in Richmond and responding to the delegation's specific requests for increased outreach and funding, staff recommend the following options for Council consideration:

1. Homelessness Liaison Pilot

City staff and local service providers recognize the need for a coordinated and collaborative outreach effort. Staff have assisted with facilitating discussions among various service providers regarding outreach in response to the Drop-in Centre closure, and will continue to do so until the new Drop-in Location is secured and opened. In addition to this involvement in outreach, it is recommended that the City fund a one year pilot contract up to a maximum of \$30,000 for a qualified individual to act as a Homelessness Liaison. The role of this contract position would include collection of data and analysis with respect to homelessness needs and support the coordination of outreach. This could alleviate the pressure that local service providers are facing with an increased case management load due to the volume of clients in crisis and with complex needs. If this recommendation is approved, staff would work closely with service providers to define the responsibilities of this contractor to ensure that the role is adequately supporting collaborative outreach efforts in Richmond. The role would be coordinated by the City as a one-year pilot program, with the opportunity to revisit the role with local non-profit service providers after one year.

2. Centralized Housing Database

In response to the delegation's written request for the creation of a centralized housing registry to be managed by a non-profit organization, it is recommended that the City fund the creation of a centralized housing database that would include a waitlist component for up to a maximum of \$20,000. The database and waitlist would be managed by a qualified non-profit organization that would keep a list of the affordable housing units in Richmond and maintain a waitlist. The organization would also be responsible for liaising with BC Housing to coordinate efforts with the provincial Housing Registry to ensure processes are not duplicated. This recommendation is supported by feedback from consultation sessions during the Affordable Housing Strategy update process, where stakeholders and members of the public expressed challenges with accessing information regarding affordable housing application processes and availability.

3. Continued advocacy and partnership with senior levels of government

Staff will continue to advocate and work with senior levels of government for the development of long-term stable housing options and access to emergency housing options, recognizing that opportunities along the housing continuum are important in the community.

Next Steps

With respect to addressing the need for homelessness resources, staff are taking the following next steps:

1. Present the Housing Affordability Profile for Council consideration in November 2016, which will summarize the consultation findings from the first phase of the Affordable Housing Strategy (AHS) update with the housing statistics that were presented to Council in March 2016. The profile will outline the housing needs and challenges in Richmond, and identify priority households and housing gaps.
2. Work towards completing the policy review (Phase 2 of the AHS update), which will provide Council with policy options that address the priority households and housing gaps identified in the Housing Affordability Profile.
3. Update the 2002 Homelessness Strategy (a budget request has been submitted for 2017). The Strategy has not been updated since, and is identified as a “short-term action” in the Social Development Strategy (SDS), adopted by Council in 2013. Action 1.5 of the SDS places priority attention on “updating the Homelessness Strategy, in collaboration with other community partners, examining housing and support service needs and options for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Richmond”. The updated Homelessness Strategy is anticipated to include updated data and statistics about homelessness in Richmond, policies and strategies with respect to the City’s role in addressing homelessness and stakeholder consultations, and could be used as an advocacy tool to senior government requesting permanent and stable resources for homeless/vulnerable individuals in the community.
4. Work with Chimo Community Services and St. Alban to pursue access to Brighthouse Pavilion for a Friday community lunch program.
5. Continue to work with internal City departments to assist with homelessness initiatives and investigate any possible opportunities for potential sites/spaces and will report back to Council if a suitable property becomes available.
6. Continue to work with senior government regarding a variety of housing and homelessness initiatives, including updating BC Housing with information regarding the current homelessness situation and pursuing partnership opportunities to address the challenges and needs in Richmond.

Financial Impact

The City’s Affordable Housing Reserve Fund may be utilized to fund the Homelessness Liaison pilot contract and the creation of a centralized housing database. Should Council wish to approve the Homelessness Liaison pilot project and the centralized housing database, an amendment to the 5-Year Financial Plan (2016-2020) would be required for the contributions for up to a maximum of \$50,000.

Conclusion

Access to appropriate emergency housing and support options are critical in every community. When support structures and service entry points are made available for the community's most vulnerable residents, there are positive impacts on the broader community along all points of the housing, community care, and socio-economic continuum.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'JR' followed by a stylized flourish.

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