Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole meeting of February 18 2021

To:	Council	**Date:**	February 15 2021
From:	Mayor Helps		
Subject:	Emergency Housing Function and Related Matters		

Background
At the February 11th Council meeting Council referred the matter of whether to add "Explore the creation of an emergency housing function" to the Strategic Plan in 2021 or 2022 to Committee for further discussion.

There are a number of related matters to this consideration that also came up during the Council discussion including the definition of emergency housing, the provincial Emergency Program Act review underway, and the use of City-owned facilities in an emergency.

This report makes recommendations with respect to these issues.

Definition of "emergency housing"
There is a lack of consensus around the Council table and therefore no clear direction to staff as to whether emergency housing means the provision of a mat on a church hall floor for a limited period of time, or a motel room, or a rental apartment for a permanent period, as in a "rapid rehousing" approach. In order to give staff clear direction for the consideration of the development of an emergency housing function, this needs to be clarified by Council through motion.

Recommendation #1
That Council hold a Council-led workshop to discuss and determine direction to staff on the parameters of what constitutes emergency housing.

Provincial Emergency Program Act Review
The provincial government is currently in the process of "Emergency Program Act Modernization" and according to a provincial website, new legislation will be introduced, likely this year, which will "reflect lessons learned from the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and the flood and wildfire seasons in 2017 and 2018, and address all four pillars of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery)."[1] In response to a key theme raised during the

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[1] https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/emergency-program-act-modernization/

government's consultation phase "new regulations regarding the content of emergency management plans will include requirements to consider the needs of vulnerable populations."[2]

In Victoria during the early days of the pandemic and more recently with the flood at Central Park and the cold weather snap that just hit, it is clear that those who are already displaced when a disaster hits do not have the same rights or protection under the Emergency Program Act as those who are living in homes.

For example, during the recent extreme winter weather the City's Emergency Management staff wrote to Emergency Management BC seeking assistance for those experiencing homelessness during a winter storm under the "Local Authority Response Costs" (see extensive list of eligible expenses in Appendix A, with most relevant information highlighted). Staff received a response from Emergency Management BC indicating that costs EMBC has authorized for this weather window include heater rentals, but do not extend to staffing costs, specialist services for a particular demographic, or resources to support overnight sheltering.

Thankfully, BC Housing stepped in to cover all of these costs and with their support, an amazing community effort came together to protect the lives of the most vulnerable during severe winter weather. However, every dollar that BC Housing spends to provide emergency sheltering takes away from their mandate of building permanent housing, which is the best disaster prevention investment possible for vulnerable populations and for taxpayers more generally.

Recommendation #2
That Council indicate to the Province its support for the inclusion in the modernized Emergency Program Act to take into consideration the needs of vulnerable populations in the event of an emergency.

City-owned facilities
During the early months of the pandemic and again more recently, it became evident that the City does not have easy access to of City-owned facilities in the event of an emergency and that many City-owned lands and facilities including community centres, the Curling Club, the Save on Foods Memorial Arena, the Crystal Garden and the Conference Centre have operating agreements that make it difficult for use by the City in an emergency.

Recommendation #3
That Council direct staff to report back on the implications of and workload associated with updating the agreements the City has with third-party operators of City-owned facilities to make it easier for the City to use these facilities in the event of an emergency while respecting the operating needs of various groups.

Conclusion
The work laid out in this report can be undertaken in 2021 and, if necessary (pending the outcome of the new Emergency Program Act legislation and the degree to which it considers the needs of vulnerable populations), the City can explore the creation of an emergency housing function in 2022.

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[2] https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/reports/epa_what_we_heard_report.pdf

Recommendations
1. That Council hold a Council-led workshop to discuss and determine direction to staff on the parameters of what constitutes emergency housing.
2. That Council indicate to the Province its support for the inclusion in the modernized Emergency Program Act to take into consideration the needs of vulnerable populations in the event of an emergency.
3. That Council direct staff to report back on the implications of and workload associated with updating the agreements the City has with third-party operators of City-owned facilities to make it easier for the City to use these facilities in the event of an emergency while respecting the operating needs of various groups.

Respectfully submitted,

Mayor Helps