



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of April 8, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** March 29, 2021
From: Susanne Thompson, Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer
Subject: UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Program Grant Application

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Authorize City staff to submit an application to the UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Program for the following proposed activities:
 - a. Tiny Homes Project
 - b. Outdoor Sheltering in Parks – Temporary Service Supports
 - c. Additional Bylaw and Peer Outreach Resources
 - d. Additional Protective Services Resources
 - e. Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness – Move-in Mobilization and Welcoming Neighbourhoods Mobilization
 - f. Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness – Outreach Services and Supports
 - g. Burnside Gorge Community Association – Community Integration and Inclusion Working Group, Improved Safety, and Clean and Safe Team
 - h. Canadian Mental Health Association – Pilot of Civilian-Led Mobile Mental Health Crisis Team
2. Authorize staff to provide overall grant management, should the grant application be awarded funding.
3. Authorize the Mayor and City Clerk to execute a grant agreement with terms generally in accordance with the outline in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Province of BC announced the Strengthening Communities' Program funding stream on September 17, 2020. This funding is part of the \$540 million under the Safe Restart Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Province of BC. \$100 million is available to local governments and Treaty First Nations through an application-based program which provides up to 100% funding for eligible projects and costs. It encourages a multi-faceted approach to support unsheltered individuals, to address related community concerns about public health and safety, and to improve coordination and partnerships with community organizations and service providers.

The grant program is intended to provide support for those currently experiencing homelessness (as opposed to individual at risk of becoming homeless or individuals already sheltered, even if temporary); activities must address an urgent need and provide an immediate response (within weeks of grant approval as opposed to months); and must provide temporary or emergency support without creating ongoing long-term financial obligations that are not supported by the applicant. In addition, the activities must be new or an expansion of existing activities with costs incurred after September 17, 2020 and must be completed within a year of the grant approval, which is expected in July 2021.

As part of ongoing dialogues between the City and various organizations, a number of proposals were submitted to the City for potential inclusion in the City's grant application. The proposals (or portions) that align with the grant program criteria are recommended to be included.

In addition to reviewing the grant program guidelines, staff also sought input and advice from UBCM program staff on potential project alignment. Based on that feedback, the proposed projects for Council's consideration are those that appear to align well with this program.

The proposals as presented in this report (ranging \$3 - \$4 million) exceed the total guideline amount of \$2.5 million, which is based on the population size of the city. The City can submit a request above the guideline amount if evidence of need for the activities can be demonstrated. Should the program be oversubscribed, the City may be asked to review its application and resubmit with a reduced request. Should Council authorize staff to submit an application for the recommended projects, staff will work closely with community partners during the preparation of the application to ensure projects, or components, clearly identify community need and are consistent with grant program criteria.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on the UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Program, provide a list of possible project activities to include in the grant application and to seek Council approval on recommended proposed project activities, based on alignment with the grant program evaluation criteria and feedback received from UBCM staff.

BACKGROUND

The Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia are providing \$540 million in shared funding to local governments under the Safe Restart Agreement to manage the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the Safe Restart funding, \$100 million is being delivered through the Strengthening Communities' Services Program, which aims to support **unsheltered homeless populations and address related community impacts** through an application-based program.

The Program Guide defines unsheltered homeless populations as *“people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation except during extreme weather conditions.” This includes people living in public or private spaces without consent (parks, sidewalks, squares, vacant buildings, lots etc.) and people living in places not intended for permanent human habitation (vehicles, garages, attics or buildings not designed for habitation, makeshift shelters, shacks or tents).”*

The goal of this program is to support local governments and Treaty First Nations who wish to take action, understanding that this will complement parallel provincial efforts. This program is meant to bridge the period between the COVID-19 outbreak and the post-COVID recovery period. The funding is being administered by UBCM on behalf of the Province and the Government of Canada.

The application deadline is April 16, 2021.

Intended Outcomes

The intent of the Strengthening Communities' Services program is to assist local governments and Treaty First Nations with:

- 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 eligible applicants and health/social service providers, Indigenous organizations and others working on housing, homelessness and service provision; and;
- Increased capacity of eligible applicants to work with homeless persons and Indigenous organizations towards culturally safe and trauma-informed responses.

Funding Guidelines

The Strengthening Communities' Services Program can contribute up to 100% of the cost of the eligible activities. Eligible costs can be incurred after September 17, 2020 to the date of submission of the final report.

Funding permitting, applications for projects that exceed the Funding Guidelines may be considered for funding provided that applicants are able to demonstrate evidence of need in the community and provide a rationale for the request. If the total funding request exceeds the available funding, applicants that have requested additional funds may be asked to reduce their funding request.

UBCM has provided funding guidelines, identified below:

Table 1: Funding Guidelines

Population (based on 2019 BC Stats Population Estimates)	Funding Guideline
Under 5,000	\$200,000
5,000-40,000	\$450,000
40,000-75,000	\$1,250,000
75,000-200,000	\$2,500,000
200,000-500,000	\$3,500,000
500,000 or greater	\$10,000,000

Eligible Projects

To be eligible for funding, applications must demonstrate that proposed activities meet one or more of the intended outcomes of the program (identified above) and all of the following:

- Demonstrate evidence of need in the community (e.g. unsheltered homeless population estimates, housing needs report, community concerns about public health and safety) 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 applicant;
- Include new activities or expansion of existing activities with costs incurred after September 17, 2020;
- Be capable of completion by the applicant within one year of the grant approval (approximately July/August 2022)

In addition, as part of both the development of the application package and the delivery of the approved project, local governments are encouraged to engage with local First Nations and Indigenous organizations.

Evaluation Criteria

The Program Guide states that higher scores will be given to applications that:

- Demonstrate greater alignment with the intent of the Strengthening Communities' Services program (i.e. address multiple program outcomes).
- Provide evidence of need in the community (e.g. existing homelessness plans, strategies or initiatives; unsheltered homeless population estimates; community concerns about safety) and provide a rationale for how these issues have been exacerbated by COVID-19.
- Demonstrate partnership and engagement with Indigenous leadership, organizations, and communities.
- Demonstrate a plan for communicating and engaging with unsheltered homeless populations to include perspectives of people with lived experience.
- Apply an anti-stigma lens and increase public awareness and understanding of causes and responses to homelessness.
- Include proposed activities and costs that are part of comprehensive, multi-faceted, approach to addressing unsheltered homelessness.
- Include collaboration with distinct needs-serving organizations, public health, health authorities, non-profit organizations, other local governments, police, bylaw enforcement, etc.
- Demonstrate cost-effectiveness.
- Demonstrate a plan for winding up and concluding the funded activities (or continuing with alternative sources of funding).

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Proposed Activities

Based on the Program Guide evaluation criteria as well as the feedback received from UBCM Program staff, the following project activities are recommended for inclusion in the grant application (additional details outlined in appendices noted):

1. Tiny Homes Project (Appendix A)
2. Outdoor Sheltering in Parks – Temporary Service Supports (Appendix B)
3. Additional Bylaw and Peer Outreach Resources
 - a. Additional bylaw officers, peer outreach support and improved calls for service response
 - i. Primary goals:
 1. Support transition of all current unsheltered persons into new and/or currently available transitional shelters and/or into supportive housing sites, Regional Housing First Programs and/or into Market Rent by collaborating with BC Housing, VIHA, GVCEH, ACEH, PEERS and all Outreach Services.
 2. Individualized approach in regard to compliance with the end of 24/sheltering. Taking into account various obstacles to compliance including, but not limited to, property downsizing/storage issues, mental health and addictions, transportation, ability to communicate with housing and financial assistance providers etc.
 3. Collaboration with Cool Aid, Pacifica, Our Place, PHS Society in order to facilitate placement.
 4. Team of peer outreach workers (contracted through Coalition to End Homelessness) working in the field with bylaw officers to help reduce stress of the homeless population and act as intermediary and facilitate conversation.
 5. Dedicated phone line (hotline) that will be answered at all times for persons who are experiencing homelessness and potentially peer workers and other service providers. Regular line often difficult to get through due to call volume.
4. Additional Protective Services Resources
 - a. 4 extra police officers extra police patrols five days per week
 - i. Providing visible police presence and maintaining public safety by taking proactive action to prevent criminal activity
 - ii. Engage with residents and service providers
 - iii. Work with partner agencies and stakeholders to maintain a sense of order, lawfulness and safety
5. Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness – Move-in Mobilization and Welcoming Neighbourhoods Mobilization (Appendix C)
6. Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness – Outreach Services and Supports (Appendix D)
7. Burnside Gorge Community Association – Community Integration and Inclusion Working Group, Improved Safety, and Clean and Safe Team (Appendix E). While the background information provided by BGCA includes impacts of existing supportive housing/indoor shelters in the area, which would not be eligible under this grant program, the community engagement project, improved safety, and the clean and safe team are likely eligible. BGCA also requested increased bylaw enforcement which is included as a separate project as outlined in point 3 above.

8. Canadian Mental Health Association – Pilot of Civilian-Led Mobile Mental Health Crisis Team (Appendix F)

The above proposed activities meet multiple program outcomes, represent a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to supporting unsheltered homeless populations which is reflective of community need, demonstrate partnership and collaboration amongst needs-serving organizations, municipal staff, residents and people with lived experience and are ready to be implemented immediately. Should Council direct that an application be submitted for the grant program, staff will refine the submissions with community partners and with input from UBCM staff to ensure eligibility and alignment with the program criteria.

The list of proposed activities for consideration and inclusion in the grant application was developed by staff and includes submissions from community partners that have been involved in ongoing dialogues with the City. Given the short timeline to the application deadline, no formal “intake” process from community organizations was undertaken. One option that staff considered was to create a flow-through grant application process for community organizations to apply under, similar to the Emergency Social Services grant in late 2020. However, UBCM staff confirmed that flow-through grants would not be an eligible expense given the difficulty in confirming alignment with the Strengthening Communities Services’ Program outcomes in advance; that is, UBCM staff would have to assess each application for funding to determine the fit.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Option 1 – Authorize staff to submit an application for the Strengthening Communities’ Services Program and to provide overall grant management should the grant be awarded (recommended)

The following proposed activities would be included:

- a. Tiny Homes Project
- b. Outdoor Sheltering in Parks – Temporary Service Supports
- c. Additional Bylaw and Peer Outreach Resources
- d. Additional Protective Services Resources
- e. Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness – Move-in Mobilization and Welcoming Neighbourhoods Mobilization
- f. Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness – Outreach Services and Supports
- g. Burnside Gorge Community Association – Inclusion Working Group, and Clean and Safe Team
- h. Canadian Mental Health Association – Pilot of Civilian-Led Mobile Mental Health Crisis Team

Based on assessments by staff and preliminary discussions with UBCM staff, the above projects appear to align well with the grant program criteria and would likely score quite well since they reflect a multi-faceted approach and meet multiple program outcomes. Should Council authorize staff to submit an application for the recommended projects, staff will work closely with community partners during the preparation of the application to ensure projects, or components, clearly identify community need and are consistent with grant program criteria.

Option 2 – Provide alternate direction to staff

Council may have additional information that staff are not aware of that could be considered as part of a grant application under this program.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Strategic Objective 1: Good Governance and Civic Engagement

- Offer training to staff, Council members and community leaders in best practices in respectful facilitation; identify challenging topics for engagement in advance and ensure that everyone involved (staff and community leaders) have adequate training to lead engagement

Strategic Objective 3: Affordable Housing

- Examine existing City land as possible sites for affordable housing and emergency shelter spaces

Strategic Objective 5: Health, Well-being and a Welcoming City

- Mental Health and Addictions Advocacy:
 - b. Advocate for more funds for mental health and more publicly-funded recovery options and de-stigmatization of mental health and addictions
 - e. Advocate for and work with agencies and other governments and professional bodies to facilitate increased harm reduction training

Impacts to Financial Plan

The Strengthening Communities' Services Program can contribute up to 100% of the cost of the eligible activities and would enable the City and its partners to action these projects to achieve the anticipated outcomes.

Council has already authorized funding for the Tiny Homes project and the additional, temporary services that have been added to support the increase in outdoor sheltering in parks (primarily from the Restart Grant). If the City were awarded funding for the recommended activities, this previously authorized funding could be used to address funding needs as part of the 2022 budget or potentially reallocated to other community priorities.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

Policy 13 Housing and Homelessness includes a number of goals and objectives that align with the intended outcomes of this grant application.

Specifically, 13.39 states: Work with senior governments, the health authority, the private sector and community organizations to provide access to essential services and facilities that meet people's basic needs, including those necessary to maintain public and personal health, such as emergency shelters, drop-in centres, public toilets, drinking water, and food services.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed comprehensive approach and suggested projects appear to align well with the intended outcomes of the Strengthening Communities' Services Program and should position the City well in successfully securing funding.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments

Appendix A - Tiny Homes Project Summary

Appendix B - Outdoor Sheltering in Parks – Temporary Service Supports

Appendix C - Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness – Move-in Mobilization and Welcoming Neighbourhoods Mobilization

Appendix D - Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness – Outreach Services and Supports

Appendix E - Burnside Gorge Community Association – Inclusion Working Group, and Clean and Safe Team

Appendix F - Canadian Mental Health Association – Pilot of Civilian-Led Mobile Mental Health Crisis Team