



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of November 25, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** November 22, 2021
From: Daniel Atkinson, Acting Fire Chief
Subject: Victoria Extreme Weather Warming and Cooling Centre Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive the report and the attached City of Victoria Extreme Weather *Warming and Cooling Centre Plan* for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide council with information regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Provincial Government and the City of Victoria with respect to reducing the impacts to vulnerable community members during periods of extreme weather. Attached to this report is the *City of Victoria Extreme Weather Warming and Cooling Centre Plan*.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has amplified the impacts vulnerable populations experience as a result of extreme weather events. Reduced availability of services and/or locations where vulnerable community members can seek refuge from the elements has become a more frequent occurrence for both hot and cold weather events. In response to the increase in both extreme weather events and the impacts to vulnerable community members, staff conducted a review of existing supports through a process of engaging with representatives from BC Housing, Emergency Management BC, local service providers, and faith-based organizations. The review identified what supports are currently in place to identify potential gaps that may exist. The goal of the review was to develop a response plan that is pro-actively activated through coordination with partner agencies, ultimately reducing the impacts to vulnerable community members during extreme weather events.

The review identified a need for the establishment of both warming and cooling centres during periods of extreme weather. BC Housing is responsible for sheltering vulnerable community members during periods of extreme cold through the activation of their Extreme Weather Response Program (EWRP). BC Housing has contracted the Coalition to End Homelessness to administer the EWRP for the 2021 – 2022 winter season. The sheltering of individuals during extreme weather events generally concludes at 6 a.m. or 7 a.m. daily, and those individuals who were sheltered at night must navigate the extreme weather during daytime hours until the shelters re-open. Many individuals are unable to seek refuge from the cold for up to 13 hours. *Warming and Cooling Centres* would be activated in conjunction with the BC Housing's Greater Victoria Extreme Weather Response Plan.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide council with information on the City of Victoria's Extreme Weather Warming and Cooling Centre Plan and how it will be activated and implemented.

BACKGROUND

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Victoria has experienced a decrease in the number of available shelter beds and other opportunities for vulnerable community members to take refuge from the effects of extreme weather events. Extreme Weather events are also increasing in frequency and severity. In the winter of 2020-2021, community-led warming shelters and other structures began to "pop-up" in an effort to fill this void; however, these facilities required additional oversight from staff across multiple departments to ensure the preservation of health and safety of those community members utilizing the services.

Responding to extreme weather events is a shared responsibility. Under the Emergency Program Act, Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation, a Local Authority is responsible for:

- identifying hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities within their jurisdictional area and
- creating plans for these hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities
- notifying the public of impending hazards,
- identifying the procedures by which emergency resources, including, without limitation, personnel, equipment, facilities and financial resources, may be obtained from sources within or outside of the jurisdictional area for which the local authority has responsibility

BC Housing is responsible for the management of the Extreme Weather Response Program (EWRP), which funds community-based services to provide extra emergency shelter beds for unhoused community members during periods of extreme weather. This year, BC Housing will provide funding through contract with the Coalition to End Homelessness for a Community Coordinator responsible for the EWRP as well as the activation of time-limited, temporary shelter beds and providing notification of EWRP activations. Notifications include website and media updates as well as emails to stakeholders who should be aware of when the EWRP and that time-limited shelters have been activated.

BC Housing does not provide funding or resources for daytime warming centres. Sheltered individuals must leave the EWR shelters by 6 a.m. or 7 a.m. each morning with possibly nowhere to go to stay warm, or cool, during daytime hours. Currently a gap exists in these daytime hours. Activation of daytime warming or cooling centres during extreme weather events may reduce the impacts to vulnerable community members.

Staff have engaged community service providers and faith-based organizations and have secured suitable locations where warming or cooling centers may be activated. The criteria for activation of a cooling center remains under development; however, warming center activation would be consistent with the criteria utilized by BC Housing in the activation of the EWR program; which include:

- Temperatures are at or near zero degrees Celsius with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for unhoused individuals to remain dry; and/or
- Sleet/freezing rain; and/or
- Snow accumulation; and/or

- Sustained high winds; and/or
- Temperatures at or below zero Degrees Celsius.

In the event extended periods of days and nights meeting the above criteria are present, the EWR shelters will likely not have the capacity for all individuals; in these circumstances the warming centres may also be activated in the evenings. Based on historical data and weather predictions, it is anticipated that the EWRP and warming centres would be required for approximately 30 calendar days this winter season.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Emergency Support Services (ESS) is a Provincial Program delivered by Local Authorities and funded by Emergency Management BC (EMBC). In past years, ESS has not covered the costs associated with a response to assist the unhoused during extreme weather events, nor will WorkSafeBC cover City of Victoria ESS volunteers if serving in that capacity.

This winter, in the event of extreme cold weather, EMBC has advised Local Governments that they will now cover the incremental costs of daytime warming centres including the costs associated with staffing the centre. The City of Victoria is presently recruiting to fill these positions through the creation of an auxiliary staffing pool.

Warming centre information provided by other municipalities, such as the City of Vancouver, confirm the cost for activation is approximately \$2,000 per 12 hour operating period which includes:

- Security
- Cleaning
- Hot beverages and snacks
- Personal Protective Equipment (masks, hand sanitizer, gloves etc.)
- Staff – check in/out, safety, information
- Any rental fees

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Accessibility Impact Statement

The City of Victoria Extreme Weather *Warming and Cooling Centre Plan* was developed through consultation with local faith-based organizations and community groups. For each potential location, a comprehensive checklist was created identifying what services may be provided as well as any accessibility considerations including wheelchair accessibility and access to secured storage for personal belongings.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Implementation of the City of Victoria Extreme Weather *Warming and Cooling Centre Plan* aligns with several of the objectives contained in the 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan including:

Strategic Objective Three – Affordable Housing

The opening of warming or cooling centres has been identified as a valuable opportunity to connect vulnerable community members with a sustainable support base or other long-term outreach and

support services. Stable and sustainable support bases may contribute to a reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Strategic Objective Five – Health, Well-Being and a Welcoming City

The opening of warming or cooling centres will certainly increase the number of people who feel safe and connected to the community and the personal connections established at those centres may improve individuals' mental and physical health.

Strategic Objective Eight – Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods.

Activation of warming and cooling centres will increase citizen engagement opportunities within neighbourhoods.

Impacts to Financial Plan

Operating costs to activate and run a Warming Center will be reimbursed by Emergency Management BC. Based on actual costs incurred by other municipalities, costs are estimated to be \$2,000 per operating period (daytime only), or \$4,000 if required for a 24-hour period. Based on historical weather data, staff project the need for approximately 30 operating period activations for the 2021 – 2022 winter season for a projected total cost of \$60,000.

Staff have prepared and will submit an Expense Authorization Form (EAF) to EMBC should an activation be required. The EAF will cover all incremental costs associated with opening a warming center offsetting any expense to the City of Victoria.

No impacts to the Financial Plan are expected.

CONCLUSIONS

Through funding provided by BC Housing, the Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness continues to work with community partners to staff EWR resources during extreme weather events in Victoria. To supplement this service, City staff have worked with local and provincial stakeholders, community groups, and faith-based organizations to activate daytime warming centres. Funding for warming centre activation will be recovered through submission of an Expense Authorization Form (EAF) to EMBC following activation. Warming Centres will provide an opportunity for vulnerable community members to seek refuge from the cold during extreme weather events when other options are not available. This new integrated and coordinated emergency extreme weather service model is a marked improvement from years past.

Once EMBC determines the activation criteria and funding model for summer cooling stations, staff will work with existing stakeholders and partners to finalize the Cooling Centre Plan prior to summer 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Tanya Patterson
Emergency Program Coordinator

Daniel Atkinson
Acting Fire Chief

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments

City of Victoria Extreme Weather Warming and Cooling Centre Plan