



**Council Member Motion
For the Governance and Priorities Committee Meeting of September 17, 2015**

Date: September 10, 2015

From: Councillor Ben Isitt, Councillor Jeremy Loveday and Mayor Lisa Helps

Subject: Regional Housing First Strategy

Background:

The City of Victoria and Capital Region have faced a homelessness crisis for a number of years, reflecting provincial, national and international trends, including: structural changes within the Canadian economy; a retreat of other levels of government from an interventionist social policy for housing, income support, and mental health; deinstitutionalization of mental health services; and a proliferation of addiction issues in the absence of adequate harm reduction and treatment services.

The impacts of homelessness include harm to the health, security and wellbeing of individuals who lack adequate shelter and supports, as well as societal impacts including substantial financial expenditures on policing, hospitalization, criminal justice, parks and streets maintenance, and the economic impact of visible street-level homelessness in commercial and residential areas.

While homelessness is a regional issue with provincial and national dimensions, affecting people who become marginalized and their families in all 13 municipalities and 3 electoral areas within the Capital Region, its impacts are concentrated within urban centres such as the City of Victoria, and effective responses are undermined by the lack of full cost-accounting of its impacts by multiple agencies (provincial health, social assistance, criminal justice and corrections agencies; municipal police, parks and public works departments).

Research suggests that the most cost-effective option for responding to homelessness is to build long-term housing with supports, operated by partner social service agencies, alongside customized supports for people with lower barriers to housing. This approach has been implemented by local government jurisdictions including the City of Medicine Hat, in partnership with the governments of Alberta and Canada. Housing First recognizes that many people who are homeless require support beyond a basic tenancy relationship in order to retain secure housing and address other issues.

In 2008, local governments including the City of Victoria and Capital Regional District partnered with diverse agencies to form the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, with a mandate of eliminating homelessness in the Capital Region by 2018. The Coalition is recognized as the Community Advisory Board to provide advice to the Capital Regional District on the expenditure of Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds, in accordance with a contribution agreement between the Government of Canada and the Capital Regional District. Strengthening regional action on homelessness would provide greater capacity to meet the Coalition's mandate.

It is therefore proposed that the City of Victoria place itself on record supporting a Regional Housing First Strategy, with the Capital Regional Hospital District serving as the lead agency, in partnership with local, provincial and federal authorities, to develop and implement a plan for the construction and operation of a sufficient supply of housing with supports, estimated by partner agencies at 367 units, to eliminate visible homelessness within the Capital Region by 2018.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) That Council adopt the following resolution and forward it to the Chairs of the Capital Regional Hospital District Board and Capital Regional District Board:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Victoria places itself on record favouring a Regional Housing First Strategy, with the Capital Regional Hospital District serving as the lead agency, in partnership with the Community Advisory Board, social service providers and local, provincial and federal authorities, to develop and implement a plan for the construction of a sufficient supply of new units of housing with supports to eliminate visible homelessness within the Capital Region by 2018;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City of Victoria supports efforts by the Capital Regional Hospital District to evaluate options for financing the capital costs of 367 new units of housing with supports, including options for social impact investing, at a total estimated capital cost of \$50-million and estimated annual serving costs (after deducting the shelter allowance portion of tenants' social assistance payments) of \$2.08-million, equivalent to \$11.18 per household per year if levied regionally;

- (2) That Council requests that the Mayor write to the Prime Minister of Canada after the federal election requesting a Federal commitment toward the capital costs of 367 new units of housing with supports, which would reduce or eliminate the requirement for a regional contribution and reflect the Government of Canada's traditional role supporting the housing needs of Canadians;
- (3) That Council requests that the Mayor write to the Premier of British Columbia, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation, and the Minister of Housing, requesting a Provincial commitment toward the annual operating costs of 367 units of housing with supports, estimated at \$21,064 per unit per year or \$7.73-million annually, for these necessary health services to improve health outcomes and community wellbeing in our region.

Respectfully submitted,



Councillor Ben Isitt



Councillor Jeremy Loveday



Mayor Lisa Helps

Attachment. *Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities* Report (2015)