



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

For the meeting of July 16, 2015

To: Governance and Priorities Committee **Date:** July 15, 2015
From: Robert Woodland, Director of Legislative & Regulatory Services
Subject: Status Report - Action Plan for Housing, Supports & City Services

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Receive the July 10, 2015 *Status Report - Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Sheltering in City Parks*; and
2. Approve the following *Action Plan* recommendations:
 - a. Temporary Housing Initiative 2(a) – Increase Emergency Shelter Spaces
 - i. Adjust the City's advocacy focus as follows:
 - Request the Province of British Columbia and BC Housing to provide more funding for rent supplements in the City of Victoria to secure permanent housing for people currently housed in emergency shelters or transitional/supportive housing.
 - b. Temporary Housing Initiative 2(b) – Clarifying Roles in Micro-Housing
 - i. The City's role in the development of a micro-housing village is to:
 - Advise on land use, building construction and fire safety regulations;
 - Advise on municipal servicing requirements and community standards;
 - Process any required applications for land use, building construction or site preparation approvals;
 - Consider any applications for financial support in relation to the development or implementation of the village; and
 - Consider entering into agreements to enable the operation of the village.
 - ii. Micro-Housing Victoria's Role in developing a micro-housing village is to:
 - Build a community of interest and organizational capacity to support the village project;
 - Develop site plans, housing unit plans and site servicing plans;
 - Develop operational rules and procedures for the village;
 - Identify and acquire a site for the micro-housing village;
 - Apply for land use, building construction or site servicing approvals;
 - Engage in community consultation to support the project, including required CALUC consultations respecting any land use applications;
 - Acquire the necessary funding to support the development and operation of the village; and
 - Operate the village in accordance with Micro-Housing Victoria's rules and procedures, and any agreements with the City or other parties.

- c. Temporary Housing Initiative 2(c) – A Designated Sheltering Site in a Park
 - i. The City's approach to establish a designated sheltering area in a park is to:
 - Seek a service partner who will manage the operation of the site;
 - Develop a service model and budget with the service partner;
 - Confirm the site location and seek public input on the proposed service model and location;
 - Seek final approval of the service model budget from Council.
- d. Operational Initiative 1 - Storage Project for Homeless Persons' Belongings
 - i. The City's approach to establishing a storage facility is to:
 - Continue to work cooperatively with interested service partners to establish the facility in September 2015; and
 - Initiate a proposal call if there is no substantive progress achieved by September 2015.

Executive Summary

On June 11, 2015 Council approved the *Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Sheltering in City Parks*. Over the past month staff have been working to implement the initiatives outlined in the *Action Plan* many of which involve developing partnerships with organizations external to the City. A detailed outline of each specific *Action Plan* initiative is provided in the attached *Status Report* along with its current status shown in the right hand column.

Temporary Housing Initiatives outlined in Section 1 of the *Action Plan* are the more complex initiatives, as they involve developing arrangements with external organizations in new service areas unfamiliar to the City. Over the past month staff have made contact with potential service providers for the micro-housing initiative and the designated park sheltering site who have expressed interest in working with the City to implement these initiatives. BC Housing has advised in discussions with City staff that funding for additional emergency shelter spaces is not available as their priority is funding permanent housing opportunities for people in need.

The 2015 Operational Initiatives mostly involve City service areas, such as parks maintenance and bylaw compliance monitoring. Progress has been made on implementing a number of these service initiatives. There are also two projects where the City will partner with other organizations to deliver new services; namely, the Storage Project and Social Service Outreach. In the first case, the City is seeking a service partner to provide storage for homeless peoples belongings. While potential partners have discussed their interest with City staff no concrete service proposal has been communicated to the City. In the second case, a scope of service for the additional social service outreach has been developed with partners. Staff are seeking additional partner funding to extend the period of the pilot project and then will proceed to fill the position and implement the project.

Staff recommend the following direction in relation to four *Action Plan* initiatives:

1. Increase the Supply of Emergency Shelter Spaces in the Region – adjust advocacy focus.
2. Develop Micro-Housing Model – role clarification.
3. Regulating Overnight Sheltering in Specific Locations – confirm approach.
4. Storage Project for Homeless Persons' Belongings – confirm approach and timeline for implementation.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to advise on the progress toward implementing the *Action Plan* initiatives since the plan's approval on June 11, 2015, and to seek Council direction on four of the *Action Plan* initiatives.

Background

The lack of adequate housing opportunities for homeless people in Victoria has resulted in many taking shelter in City parks. These sheltering activities are having a number of impacts on City parks and resources, and the community. The *Action Plan* approved by Council on June 11, 2015 contains a number of strategies and initiatives designed to address the housing needs of homeless people and to improve the City's service response to the impacts of sheltering activities in City parks. Details regarding the progress and current status of the *Action Plan* initiatives are outlined in the right hand column of the attached table. Further detail and discussion of these initiatives will be highlighted in a presentation at the July 16, 2015 meeting.

Issues and Analysis

Housing Initiatives - Increase Shelter Capacity

BC Housing advises through discussion with the City that operating funding is not available for additional emergency shelter beds nor is capital funding available for the construction of emergency shelters. Their position is founded on their endorsement of a Housing First strategy, which focuses their programs and funding toward permanent housing for people in need. However, BC Housing advises that rent supplements may be available to move people into permanent housing, which is expected to free spaces in emergency shelters over time. The City should adjust our Provincial housing advocacy strategy to focus on requesting more funding for rent supplements through BC Housing.

Alternatively, local emergency shelter providers would be able to open up to 40 adult mats during the summer (May to October) and 35 youth mats (September 2015, April/May 2016) if the City is prepared to provide direct funding. The City could also explore a low barrier emergency shelter option proposed by another service provider. In either case, a decision to directly fund emergency shelter operations would be a new service for the City. The expected cost for the additional adult and youth shelter mats (about \$150,000) is not included in the City's Financial Plan.

Committing City funding to increase emergency shelter capacity will limit the City's ability to fund the other two Temporary Housing Initiatives noted below. Staff believe it is premature to commit City funding to increase emergency shelter capacity.

Micro-Housing

A local micro-housing group has recently incorporated as Micro-Housing Victoria Society (MHV) and is developing their organizational capacity to support the development, implementation and operation of a micro-housing village in the City of Victoria. In recent discussions with the City, MHV representatives outlined their conceptual plan for the village, which would house about 35 people on a half-acre site. MHV has been undertaking their own evaluation of potential sites, and has not yet identified a specific site for potential use as a village. City staff committed to providing advice and feedback to MHV regarding proposed village design and operations, building construction and safety issues, and neighbourhood compatibility.

The City will have different roles to play in the development of the micro-housing village community. The City's primary role will be as a regulator, in terms of land use and construction approvals, fire

safety and community standards. Another important City role is to provide municipal services to the site, such as potable water, sewer and storm drain services, solid waste collection, fire and police services.

Additional roles for the City could include:

- Site acquisition - identifying or facilitating the acquisition of potential sites for MHV.
- Project funder – providing grants for the lease of a site or to support village operations; in-kind grants for services; property tax exemption.
- Landlord – providing a City-owned site for lease.

City staff believe that the success of the micro-housing initiative will depend upon the community of interest and organizational capacity mobilized by MHV, and the energy and commitment of their prospective residents. The City should support, advise and facilitate MHV's efforts to develop the village, but not take their place in this community driven initiative. As such, staff recommend the current roles for our respective organizations that are set out in the recommendation. In light of these roles, the timeline for the implementation of the micro-housing village is difficult to predict and will depend upon MHV's progress. City staff will ensure we are responsive and timely in performing our supporting roles.

Designated Sheltering Site in a Park

With respect to the designation of a specific park area for overnight sheltering the City is currently assessing potential park sites for this service. At this point in time, the southwest corner of Topaz Park appears to have the greatest potential due to the presence of tennis courts that are currently closed, nearby washrooms, distance from residential areas and the proximity to transit as well as access to the downtown and services. A service provider has expressed interest in exploring a service contract with the City to manage a proposed shelter site. The next step for this initiative would be to formally confirm their interest, develop a proposed service model for a specific location, and consult with neighbours of the proposed site. The final step would be Council approval of the proposed budget for the operation of the designated sheltering area in the identified location. Staff will report back in September on progress toward this initiative.

The Director's team is also assessing the City's capacity to operationalize the temporary housing initiatives contained in the Action Plan, as both the designated sheltering area in a park and the micro-housing village may require an unanticipated level of City involvement. There may also be a similar need for staff resourcing that flows from the recommendations contained in the Mayor's Task Force on Housing Affordability. The Director's group may need to adjust staff resourcing to meet the timelines of these organizational priorities.

Operational Initiatives

Many of the 2015 Operational Initiatives are also underway, including a number of City services outlined in Section 3, such as the special parks clean-up service, extended washroom availability in Beacon Hill, Stadacona and Topaz Parks, and new approaches to bylaw compliance monitoring.

City staff are working with VicPD and health service partners to establish an outreach field worker position whose role will be to connect people to housing and support services. The need for this type of position was recently demonstrated when VicPD Community Resource Officers were able to find housing for a couple who had been residing in City parks. Extensive amounts of time were invested by VicPD members in resolving this issue, which is arguably not core police work.

Discussions are also underway with local service providers to establish a storage facility for people who are homeless. Prospective locations have been surveyed; however, a specific location and service delivery model have not been confirmed at this time. The service model will require care to

ensure that it is set-up and operated in a manner that successfully meets customers' needs and does not negatively impact adjacent neighbours. If Council wishes to accelerate this initiative, the City could initiate a request for proposal process to solicit potential service providers and locations. It is not known whether the \$45,000 allocated by Council for this initiative would be sufficient to support the service model independent of other funding or partnerships.

Bylaw amendments that improve the City's ability to manage overnight sheltering in City parks and to reduce the number of locations where people can take shelter are being developed. An evaluation of which parks or park areas should be excluded from overnight sheltering activities is also underway. These bylaw amendments are expected to be ready in September and proposed in conjunction with progress toward the temporary housing initiatives.

Options and Impacts

Staff are recommending the directions noted below on four initiatives.

1. ***Temporary Housing Initiative 2(a) – Increase the Supply of Emergency Shelter Spaces***
 - Advocate for more rent supplements to people in need in Victoria to the Minister responsible for BC Housing.

The proposed direction noted above has no Financial Plan impact.

Alternative Options (Unfunded):

1. City directly funds service providers to open additional emergency shelter spaces:
 - ~ \$112,000 for 40 adult spaces from May to October
 - ~ \$40,000 for 35 youth spaces for September 2015 and April/May 2016
2. City explores other emergency housing options with service providers.

The Financial Plan would have to be amended to enable funding for these alternative options. Committing City funds to emergency shelter mats may limit available funding for Micro-Housing and a Designated Shelter Area, and is not recommended at this time.

2. ***Temporary Housing Initiative 2(b) – Clarifying Roles in Micro-Housing***
 - Micro-Housing Victoria's role is to develop a proposal that specifies a site, and to seek any City regulatory approvals to authorize the proposal (E.g. rezoning application)
 - Micro-Housing Victoria will undertake public consultation about the project/site and seek to acquire a site
 - Micro-Housing Victoria will develop operational policies and procedures for the village, and seek City approvals as required
 - The City's roles are primarily those of regulator, municipal services provider and advisor
 - The City will consider any grant applications or resource requests from Micro-Housing Victoria to enable their proposal

These roles are consistent with City staff's current direction on micro-housing. Changing these roles may impact the City's Operational and Financial Plans, and is not recommended at this time.

There is currently no budget amount set aside to assist with the micro-housing village project. The Financial Plan will need to be amended in future if Council wishes to provide financial assistance to MHV.

3. Temporary Housing Initiative 2(c) – A Designated Sheltering Site in a Park

- The City will engage a service partner to manage the site, develop a service model with the partner based upon a specific site and consult with area neighbours before seeking final budget approval of the initiative from Council

This approach will enable more meaningful public engagement as there will be more complete information available to the public about the proposed service model.

The Financial Plan will need to be amended in future to enable implementation of this initiative. Cost estimates for developing this service will be developed and communicated to Council in September.

4. Operational Initiative 1 - Storage Project for Homeless Persons' Belongings

- The City will continue to work cooperatively with existing service providers to develop and implement this model. If there is no further progress toward implementation by September then the City will initiate a proposal call to find a service provider.

This approach enables potential service providers to develop a service model that best meets their clients' needs in terms of service delivery and location. Initial indications are that this approach may also enable other partnerships and funding sources, which could yield a higher level of service from the City's funding.

The Financial Plan currently allocates \$45,000 for this initiative.

The implementation of this initiative might be expedited by moving directly to a proposal call. However, this may impact relationships with potential service partners, partnership opportunities and other sources of funding.

Conclusion

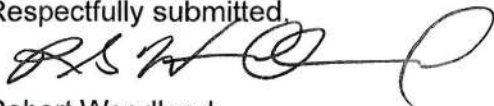
In the past month progress has been made in a number of areas. Initiatives that involve external service providers are more complex to implement, but progress has been made in seeking interest and discussing new service opportunities. Confirming the recommended direction on the four initiatives outlined above will facilitate the City's progress on these initiatives.

The Director's team is also reviewing the need for focused staff resourcing to operationalize the temporary housing initiatives contained in the Action Plan and to support the recommendations expected to flow from the Mayor's Task Force on Housing Affordability. Staff will continue to assign a high priority to the work outlined in the *Action Plan* to achieve its objectives.

Attachments

Status Report – Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Sheltering in City Parks

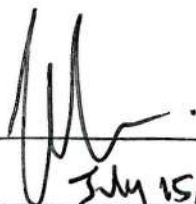
Respectfully submitted,



Robert Woodland
Director of Legislative & Regulatory Services

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date:


July 15, 2015