

DATE OF MEETING February 11, 2019

AUTHORED BY LISA BHOPALSINGH, MANAGER, COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL PLANNING

SUBJECT BC HOUSING TEMPORARY MODULAR HOUSING UPDATE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with an update of the BC Housing Temporary Modular Housing Sites and City actions to support the sites and neighbouring communities.

Recommendation

That the report titled “BC Housing Temporary Modular Housing Update” dated 2019-FEB-11 be received for information.

DISCUSSION

Nanaimo’s tent city (Tent City) was occupied for approximately six months from the time it was first established at 1 Port Drive on 2018-MAY-18 until it was closed on 2018-DEC-10. At peak occupancy, it was one of BC’s largest encampments with an estimated 300 people residing on site. BC Housing announced on 2018-OCT-05 that in response to the crisis they would provide approximately 170 units of temporary housing with supports on two sites:

- 80 units at **250 Terminal Avenue North (Newcastle Place)** – a site purchased by BC Housing and operated by Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS)
- 90 units at **2060 Labieux Road (Nikao)** – City-owned land leased by BC Housing and operated by Pacifica Housing Advisory Association (Pacifica)

Approximately 260 people from Tent City registered for the 170 units of temporary housing. Recognizing the shortfall in housing, BC Housing funded an additional 35 extreme weather shelter beds at St. Peter’s Church that were available starting on 2018-DEC-01.

The roughly eight-week timeframe for preparing and fully completing both sites with modular workforce-style housing units proved to be very ambitious. There was pressure to rapidly house those living at Tent City ahead of extreme winter weather conditions and on time for the City’s court injunction to close the site by 2018-NOV-30. This resulted in BC Housing moving tenants into the housing sites while they were still under construction.

Between 2018-NOV-30 and 2018-DEC-07, approximately 170 Tent City occupants were moved into the temporary housing at 250 Terminal Avenue North (Newcastle Place) and 2060 Labieux Road (Nikao). While both sites are now close to completion, until very recently, site operators have struggled with trying to manage a residential operation in a construction zone. Challenges have ranged from the ability to lock building and room doors, site access control, power supply, heat, hot water, telecommunications, lack of operating kitchen facilities, meeting spaces, security cameras, and lighting. This has created many complications for operating the sites,

including the ability to establish operating procedures while stabilizing residents with a diversity of complex vulnerabilities and health issues.

There are varying reports from different community members and other sources regarding the extent and severity of social impacts on the surrounding community and whether or not they are caused by residents, visitors to the sites, or others who are living without shelter in the neighbourhoods. What is clear is that there have been impacts and changes to the surrounding community. However, what is not clear is to what extent these sites have alleviated issues in the neighbourhoods around Tent City and also how these community impacts may be connected to an overall shift in social issues across the city related to the housing, mental health, and opioid crises.

In spite of these challenges, progress is being made, particularly in the past two weeks as construction gets completed and the sites are able to operate with proper servicing, improved safety and security, functioning kitchens, meeting rooms, and offices. Site operators and Island Health are reporting successes with some residents participating in site Clean Teams, finding employment, connecting to medical supports (accessing mental health services and detox treatment), and taking general actions to improve their health.

BC Housing, the City, and a number of agencies are taking ongoing actions to improve conditions for site residents and surrounding neighbours. Actions taken include:

BC Housing – BC Housing has oversight responsibility for the two projects and their operators. All correspondence and feedback from the community received by the City is forwarded to BC Housing to address. City Staff are in regular communication with BC Housing. BC Housing has positively responded to issues as they are identified.

Site Improvements – Both modular housing sites have made significant improvements to security and on-site management systems. These include completing fencing, lighting, building and entrance security, strengthening security personnel, and staff training. The site improvement process is ongoing.

Island Health – Health workers regularly attend the sites as part of the wrap-around services being provided to residents of the two modular housing sites. There are offices at each site for health workers to support residents. This allows for consistent and continuous physical and mental health care that is critical for those struggling with addictions to stabilize and access the detox supports being offered.

Neighbourhood Meetings – BC Housing and the operators have held several neighbourhood meetings, open to anyone who is interested, to address community concerns related to the housing. They are in the process of establishing community advisory committees (CACs) for both modular housing sites. Representatives from the neighbouring communities, BC Housing, Island Health, the housing operators, RCMP, and City Staff attend these meetings.

RCMP – The RCMP have ongoing and increased patrols, including their bike squad, general duty officers, and plain clothes officers. The RCMP have provided liaison officers to each site who are providing safety training to the security personnel and staff. Existing and new Block Watch and Citizens on Patrol programs are also being supported by the RCMP. The RCMP are also conducting community education workshops with Island Health.

A Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment has been undertaken for both sites. RCMP are establishing a protocol agreement with the operators to ensure collaboration and information sharing to increase community and site safety. In addition, planning is underway to start an integrated BC Housing outreach model with RCMP, City Bylaw Services Department, and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to address homelessness issues in parks and around the housing sites.

City – The City continues to hold ongoing meetings and discussions with BC Housing and the operators to establish close lines of communication and address issues. The City is supporting and coordinating the efforts of groups/agencies involved in addressing community safety. This includes working with CAC members to customize public safety brochures and other information. Internally, City Staff are coordinating across departments and with external partners to determine how best to maintain service levels for clean and safe public spaces while addressing increased demands for service resulting from city-wide social issues related to the ongoing health and housing crises.

There is ongoing coordination of city-wide efforts to maintain public parks and spaces through increased shopping cart, garbage, and needle pick-up. This involves Public Works in collaboration with Bylaw Services, Parks and Recreation, School District 68, housing site Clean Teams, and individual community member efforts. The City is actively supporting efforts to increase fire safety, including providing staff training.

City Parks – The Nanaimo Parks and Recreation Department has identified Beban Park as a high-priority area for monitoring, and a CPTED assessment is being undertaken. Lighting improvements for the area are under review. In addition, the department has ongoing liaison and communications with its leaseholders and user groups. An update to the “Parks, Recreation and Culture Regulation Bylaw 2008 No. 7073” to address concerns related to parks will be presented to Council for their consideration later in February.

Immediate Next Steps – The City is actively working to identify options and work with BC Housing and other partners to build permanent housing options in both the short and long term. As part of this, the City has identified the need to work more closely with the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition and other agencies to evaluate the need for new collaborative approaches to resolve the growing social crisis the City is dealing with. Related to this, Council will be holding a workshop in the coming months to review the social service system in Nanaimo. Service providers will be engaged as part of the review process.

Staff are reviewing resource demands to maintain levels of cleanliness and safety of public spaces and will provide information to Council for their consideration in February/March. On 2018-MAR-04, Council will have an opportunity to discuss a range of social issues connected to homelessness and housing affordability and actions the City can take to address them.

Long-Term Strategies – The City continues to implement actions to achieve homelessness and affordable housing strategies to address the longer-term issues in the community.

SUMMARY POINTS

- BC Housing, the housing operators, RCMP, and numerous agencies are working collaboratively with the City to take actions that support the successful operation of the two housing sites and address the impacts and concerns of neighbouring community members.
- City Staff are coordinating across departments and with external partners to determine how best to maintain clean and safe public spaces given the increased demand for services resulting from city-wide social issues related to the ongoing health and housing crises.
- The City is actively working with BC Housing to find permanent housing solutions to address the housing crisis in the short and long term.
- The City continues to take actions to implement long-term housing and homelessness strategies.

Submitted by:

Lisa Bhopalsingh
Manager, Community and Cultural Planning

Concurrence by:

Dale Lindsay
Director, Community Development