

DATE OF MEETING March 4, 2018

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SUBJECT DAYTIME DROP-IN RESOURCE CENTRE UPDATE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with an information update on options for the provision of a daytime drop-in centre for homeless individuals in Nanaimo.

Recommendation

That the report titled “Daytime Drop-in Resource Centre Update” dated 2019-MAR-04 be received for information.

BACKGROUND

The term ‘daytime drop-in resource centre’, as used in this report, refers to a place for people without stable housing to go during the daytime hours in order to access physical and mental health assistance, as well as to be sheltered from the elements. The intended user population includes both Nanaimo’s homeless population and street-involved individuals, who are not necessarily homeless, but who are exposed to the physical, social, and emotional risks of spending significant time on the street.

At the Regular Council meeting on 2018-MAR-19, Council was provided with a range of potential municipal responses to address homelessness and issues related to individuals who are homeless and/or street-involved (needles, loitering on business property, public urination, etc.). One of the options proposed was for the City to explore partnerships with the goal of opening a daytime drop-in resource centre.

The overall intent is to provide a safe space during the daytime gap that currently exists when all other services are closed. For example, right now, the 7-10 Club serves breakfast every day of the week except Sundays, and the emergency shelters are open from 7 PM – 7 AM. For a person reliant on those two services, that leaves a gap of nine hours with no consistent services or shelter on six days of the week (and for 12 hours on Sundays). There are some drop-in services offered by various non-profit groups in Nanaimo for their service user groups, such as the Women’s Resource Centre and Seniors Connect, but these have limitations (e.g., are only for particular demographics, have limited hours/space, etc.). Salvation Army’s New Hope Centre provides daytime shelter and support for the homeless, but is only available to those who are staying at the shelter.

The concept of opening a daytime drop-in resource centre is not a new idea: Between 2005 and 2007, Island Health entered into a contract with the New Hope Centre to open a daytime drop-in centre. Island Crisis Care Society was sub-contracted by the New Hope Centre to provide this service, which operated seven days a week from 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM. The original location was on Nicol Street, and then moved to the bottom of 55 Victoria Avenue (where the methadone clinic is located). It is estimated around 30-50 individuals were in the space at any

given time, with a minimum staff required of three outreach workers (two frontline workers and a manager).

In speaking with the previous manager of the drop-in centre (which was informally known as 'The Living Room'), he noted that while some crisis response nurses operated satellite offices out of the Living Room, it had not been set up or resourced with a full suite of services. The Living Room was closed when the New Hope Centre opened in 2007; however, the drop-in services provided by the Salvation Army operate on a different model of care (abstinence-based) and, as noted above, are now only available to shelter residents.

As noted in Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, the current system of services for homeless individuals in Nanaimo has an obvious gap in that there is no indoor shelter available during the day. This has a negative impact on both the homeless and/or street-involved and the rest of the community, as individuals with nowhere else to go end up in public and semi-public spaces where they are neither welcome nor comfortable (e.g. business doorways).

In the absence of a dedicated drop-in centre, places such as the Vancouver Island Regional Library and fast food restaurants such as Tim Hortons have become the primary indoor communal space for the homeless and/or street involved. This creates challenges for their staff who have limited resources and time to support this group. To this end, the Action Plan recommends the creation of a daytime drop-in centre for the homeless and the street-involved. In addition to providing a warm, dry, safe space to go to when the shelters are closed, a drop-in centre would assist health outreach workers in serving clients whom they might otherwise spend significant time trying to locate.

In response to the 2018-MAR-19 report, Council passed a motion requesting that City Staff:

"Pursue partnerships to provide a day time drop in resource centre for homeless individuals and that Council allocate \$100,000 per year towards a drop in resource centre in the 2018 budget cycle and proceed with determining potential locations for the resource centre and report back to Council."

Following this direction, it was determined that significant additional funding beyond the \$100,000 annual allocation would be required to appropriately resource a drop-in centre, even with limited hours. In consultation with the staff at Our Place Society in Victoria, Nanaimo Staff estimated the costs of operating a drop-in centre for 6-8 hours a day, every day of the week, would cost an estimated \$650,000 per annum. This estimation assumed some leasehold and start-up costs, but was approximate as the location was undetermined.

Subsequently, based on the estimated costs being in excess of what was allocated, Staff recommended approaching the Province for the additional funding needed; however, since there is no Provincial program or budget line assigned to provide funding for this category of service, a special request was necessary. At its Regular Council meeting of 2018-JUL-09, Council passed the following motion:

"That Council direct Mayor McKay to send correspondence to Mr. Leonard Krog, MLA, regarding the City of Nanaimo's request for financial support from the Provincial Government for a daytime drop-in resource centre for homeless individuals in Nanaimo, and ask that this request be brought forward to an inter ministerial forum for consideration."

The inter-ministerial forum referred to was to include BC Housing, Island Health, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and other Provincial agencies on supporting a request for a drop-in centre in Nanaimo.

Upon approval of the above recommendation, a letter was sent to the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). On 2018-JUL-24, the MLA provided a response indicating he would be pleased to meet with City Staff at any time to discuss the initiative. At a subsequent meeting between the Mayor, the MLA and Staff, the MLA requested more information about the project and Staff committed to providing this to him. Due to a change in the local context (i.e., focus on addressing Tent City), this response was delayed. However, in the following months, Staff continued to work with community partners to identify potential locations, operators, and costs for a drop-in centre in order to determine the scope of cost required for a safe and successful operation.

In addition to discussions with the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition and Island Health, Staff have been in dialogue with Our Place, a non-profit society based in Victoria. Our Place operates one of the largest drop-in centres for the homeless on Vancouver Island, as well as offering transitional housing, shelter space, and a therapeutic recovery centre.

Our Place has expressed interest in working with the City and other partners to open a new drop-in centre in Nanaimo. A summary of their proposed services and budget is included as Attachment A. The estimate they have provided is consistent with previous estimates provided to Council, with the caveat that their proposed budget does not include any lease costs, utilities, or lease improvements.

Scope of Services

A proposed service framework for a drop-in resource centre would include a core staffing function that would ensure the space is safe for attendees and staff. It would also ensure the area immediately adjacent the centre is managed with respect to public safety and anti-social activities, and that the building and grounds are well maintained and functionally operational.

Additional services that may be offered include but are not limited to:

- Shower program (currently provided by the City at a local sports field)
- Health supports, such as wound treatment, foot care, and referrals
- Counselling and advocacy supports
- Individual wellness planning
- Housing placement programs
- Pre-employment skills training
- Support to apply for income assistance
- Clothing program
- Laundry facilities
- Meal program/snacks (Nanaimo's free breakfast program currently operates from a City-owned building downtown)
- Social/recreational programming

The City would employ the services of an experienced organization to act as operator, who would work closely with all our colleagues in the Provincial ministries and non-profit

organizations to ensure that we achieve a well-balanced, supportive environment that complements existing services.

Siting Considerations

Staff have been reviewing a number of options for a potential location for a drop-in centre. Siting considerations include the following:

- Ownership/availability
- Appropriate zoning
- Building code classification (i.e., approved for assembly use) and accessibility
- Capacity/occupancy load
- Proximity to other social services/downtown
- Size requirements for services
- Facility amenities (e.g., showers/bathroom)
- Availability of outdoor/courtyard space
- Potential impact on neighbourhood
- Potential impact on other building tenants (depending on location)

Budget Considerations

Regardless of how many days per week or hours per day the proposed drop-in centre would be open, staffing would be the largest budget line item. One lesson learned from previous experience opening a drop-in space in Nanaimo (the Living Room on Nicol Street) is the need for a core level of professional staffing to ensure the effective and safe operation of a daytime drop-in resource centre. Employing professional, trained staff, in addition to support from community volunteers, will minimize the impact on the surrounding neighbourhood.

Given the limited number of suitable, available municipal buildings, Staff have been reviewing options in the private market. If a suitable option in the private market is identified and selected, this would significantly increase the required budget. Additionally, Council would need to consider whether they are willing to enter into a multi-year lease, which is often a requirement for commercial properties. A major consideration for the budget is the cost of leasing a suitable building. The proposal from Our Place is based on the City providing space and improvements at no cost. There may be opportunities to share space and utility costs with other non-profits if a suitable building is found.

Additional budget considerations include whether the space would provide meals or snacks, start-up costs, the size and ownership of the site selected, and any additional programming that may be offered by the City (in addition to coordinated services offered by service providers such as Island Health). There may be some cost efficiencies by offering a “one-stop shop” for the homeless and/or street-involved. For example, the City may be able to relocate the existing shower program from Caledonia Park to the drop-in centre instead of paying for a stand-alone service.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to work with Our Place and our local service providers to determine the optimal level of service and location. Council will be provided with an update when suitable potential site locations and operation options are determined. Staff are of the opinion that this project will require financial support from the Provincial Government and would note that any future recommendation will likely include a recommendation to pursue support from the Province.

SUMMARY POINTS

- In 2018, Council allocated \$100,000 per year for the provision of a daytime drop-in resource centre for homeless and street-involved individuals.
- City Staff have been working with Our Place Society in Victoria and local service providers to determine the initial scope of services and budget for a drop-in centre and to identify potential locations.
- Council will be asked to provide direction on location options and pursuing additional funding at a later date.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: Our Place Daytime Drop-In Centre Overview

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Concurrence by:

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