

Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING May 13, 2019

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SUBJECT TASK FORCE ON HEALTH AND HOUSING

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To request that Council approve the creation of a Health and Housing Task Force to be chaired by a member of City Council as outlined in the Terms of Reference attached to this report.

Recommendation

That Council:

- 1) approve the creation of a Health and Housing Task Force;
- 2) approve the proposed Task Force on Health and Housing Terms of Reference; and
- 3) appoint a Council representative or representatives to the Task Force on Health and Housing.

BACKGROUND

In the past few years, issues related to mental health, poverty, substance use disorders, homelessness, and housing affordability have escalated in Nanaimo. This has resulted in creating a state of crisis for Nanaimo's most vulnerable community members, with impacts for the wider community. Nanaimo's 2018 Tent City and the ongoing challenges with the temporary modular housing and those who remain street-entrenched clearly demonstrate the need to find more effective ways to tackle these increasingly complex health and housing issues. Strong leadership is required to facilitate the collaboration needed to develop appropriate responses to address these challenges.

At its 2019-FEB-11 Special Committee of the Whole Meeting, Council received an information report on affordable housing and homelessness. One of the subjects outlined in that report was the ongoing work of the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition (the "Coalition"). The Coalition was formed in 2015 to address the issue of homelessness. Its membership includes a number of non-profit agencies, government bodies, faith groups, and residents of the community (see Attachment A). The group meets monthly to discuss issues related to homelessness and to share information between service providers.

The Coalition was preceded by Nanaimo's Working Group on Homelessness, which began in 2001 and whose make up was very similar to the current Coalition. The Coalition and its constituent members provide a range of responses to housing needs, including:

- emergency shelter beds;
- transitional and supportive housing;

- affordable housing and rent subsidies;
- free or low-cost meal programs;
- homelessness outreach support; and
- mental health, harm reduction, substance use recovery services, and more.

Funding for these programs and services is provided by the Provincial Government through BC Housing, the Federal Government through Service Canada, and by local government through the City of Nanaimo and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). Community donations and volunteer time are also a key resource.

Historically, one of the main roles of the Coalition has been to allocate funding received through the Federal Government's Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS). The Federal Government through Service Canada has been funding Nanaimo as a designated community since 2001. A sub-committee of the Coalition allocates the \$811,000 in Federal funding received annually under the HPS. There are two streams of funding: Aboriginal (\$256,000) and Designated (\$555,000) streams. The last agreement expired at the end of March 2019 and the program was renewed for ten years under the name "Reaching Home." The United Way acts as the community entity through which the HPS money is received and allocated.

Part of receiving the Federal funding through HPS requires that the Coalition have a community plan that guides the allocation decisions. The Coalition recently completed *Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness 2018-2023* (the "Action Plan"). The Action Plan is a five-year plan to help Nanaimo end homelessness or diminish the harms produced by homelessness where it persists by guiding and organizing services. At its 2018-SEP-17 Regular Council Meeting, Council endorsed the Action Plan as a companion document to the *Nanaimo Affordable Housing Strategy*.

Challenges with Current Coalition Structure

In its current formation, the Coalition has a large membership that includes numerous non-profit societies of varying sizes and capacity; representatives from the municipal, Provincial and Federal levels of government; faith groups; and community members with an interest in developing and carrying out solutions to homelessness. Due to the size of the group and the spectrum of services it represents, meetings are primarily focused on information sharing. Smaller working groups typically take on specific project work (i.e., the Allocations Committee, and the Community Plan Committee), and since it is often the same individuals and organizations that sit on the smaller working groups, capacity is limited.

A second challenge with the existing Coalition is that it is not a legal entity and has neither a budget nor staff. The United Way did receive a 2019 Social Planning Grant from the City of Nanaimo to hire a part-time communications coordinator for the Coalition, but this is a one-time grant that is not renewable beyond two years. Members end up bringing their own resources to the Coalition agenda and activities. These factors present a significant challenge to the ability of the Coalition to quickly respond to the current health and housing crisis.

Historically, the United Way of Central and Northern Vancouver Island has been a major facilitator of the work of the Coalition by acting as the 'Community Entity' for the HPS funding and taking on much of the communication and administrative work associated with the Coalition. As noted by the Executive Director of the United Way in her 2019-FEB-11 presentation to Council, the scope of the challenge has evolved and the on-going crisis requires a new

approach to governance that builds on the strengths of the existing network. The suggestion made at that time was for the City to take a leadership role to help advance the work to address issues that lead to homelessness.

Task Force Approach to addressing Health and Housing

Other communities facing a similar scale of mental health, substance use, homelessness, and housing affordability challenges as Nanaimo have created a municipal task force with participation of a Council member, or members, some of whom are designated to chair. For example, the Oceanside Task Force on Homelessness was formed by the City of Parksville in 2010 to address homelessness and related issues in School District No. 69, with one Parksville Council member appointed as liaison. Other communities, such as Victoria, Burnaby and New Westminster, have created specific City-led task forces to provide recommendations to Council on policies, projects, and specific initiatives that increase housing supply, diversity, and affordability.

While the City of Nanaimo is a key stakeholder in identifying or facilitating solutions to the health and housing crisis, currently there is no elected municipal leadership on the existing Coalition. In discussions with New Westminster City staff, it was observed that Council and senior City staff participation on their City-led task force allows for more in-depth exploration of issues than time typically permits at a Regular Council Meeting. The appointed Council members also bring forward questions and ideas on behalf of their colleagues without having to wait for a report to Council when they are being asked for a decision.

Frequently, task forces typically have a limited-time mandate. For example, Victoria City Council created the Mayor's Task Force on Housing Affordability in April 2015, which was comprised of citizens and community leaders with experience in planning, architecture, real estate development, anti-poverty, and non-profit housing. Within several months of weekly meetings, the task force developed an action plan which consisted of recommendations to Victoria City Council on innovative housing policy solutions that resulted in Victoria's current Housing Strategy. In this case, it should be noted Victoria's Mayor is also the co-chair of the board of directors of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. Another example is Nanaimo's Cannabis Task Force, which met three times to develop recommendations for how the City should respond to changes to Federal legislation regarding the legalization of cannabis.

Nanaimo is in a good position to create a health and housing task force, given that Council has recently endorsed the Coalition's Action Plan to End Homelessness and the Affordable Housing Strategy that reflect current best practices and identify key priorities. While BC Housing has the primary mandate for housing, and Island Health has the mandate for addressing mental health and substance use, solving issues related to the housing crisis and homelessness is a collaborative work across jurisdictions and sectors that requires one partner to take the lead in facilitating these partnerships. Staff are recommending Council take a leadership role by approving the creation of a task force on health and housing (the "Task Force") with a Council member or members appointed as Chair for an initial term of one year.

The Task Force would have the mandate to facilitate the implementation of policies aimed at increasing housing supply, diversity, and affordability; as well, would consider what each organization can do to address issues that give rise to and perpetuate homelessness. This would include addressing poverty, mental health, and substance use disorders. A draft Terms of Reference for the Task Force is included as Attachment B.

It should be noted this is not a proposal to disband the existing Coalition, but rather to build on its strengths while recognizing its limitations. Discussions with the Coalition membership have indicated that most participants would be interested in continuing to meet on a less frequent basis to share information if there was another table of key players working on Action Plan implementation. As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the proposed Task Force would also participate at Coalition meetings to provide updates and solicit input on actions. Should Council approve creating the proposed Task Force, the Coalition could amend its own Terms of Reference to reflect the complementary roles of the two groups.

OPTIONS

1. That Council:

- 1) approve the creation of a Health and Housing Task Force;
- 2) approve the proposed Task Force on Health and Housing Terms of Reference; and
- 3) appoint a Council representative or representatives to the Task Force on Health and Housing.
 - **Budget Implication:** It is anticipated that the Task Force budget would be \$2,500, consistent with typical budgeted amounts for Council committees. This could potentially be funded using existing 2019 budgeted resources for committees. If the committee budget funding is not used, then Council has the option of using Council contingency funds.
 - **Policy Implication:** Creation of a Task Force would facilitate prioritizing activities and implementing the Action Plan to End Homelessness and the Affordable Housing Strategy.
 - **Strategic Priorities Implication:** The proposed Task Force supports the draft 2019-2022 Strategic Plan values of Governance Excellence and Livability.
 - **Political Implication:** Would be responsive to community pressure to address frequently overlapping issues of poverty, mental health, substance use, homelessness, and housing affordability.

2. That Council provide alternative direction to Staff.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Established in 2015, the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is a partnership between a number of government and non-governmental agencies working together to end homelessness in our community.
- Input from the Coalition and the increasing complexity and severity of Nanaimo's health and housing crisis requires enhanced municipal leadership.
- A City-led Task Force on Health and Housing created by Council would oversee the implementation of both the Action Plan to End Homelessness and the Affordable Housing Strategy, while also considering actions to address issues related to homelessness, mental health, and substance use.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition Membership

ATTACHMENT B: Task Force on Health and Housing Terms of Reference (Proposed) |

Submitted by:

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Concurrence by:

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