

DATE OF MEETING | December 11, 2019

AUTHORED BY | DAVE STEWART, SOCIAL PLANNER

SUBJECT | FUNDING FOR LONG-TERM RECOVERY BEDS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Health and Housing Task Force with information regarding the provision of a one-time grant of \$70,500 to the Nanaimo Region of the John Howard Society for the purpose of funding five additional beds at the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community for a period of six months in order to support substance use disorder (addiction) recovery services in Nanaimo.

Recommendation

That the Health and Housing Task Force recommend that Council direct Staff to continue to work with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to secure additional sustained long-term funding for addiction recovery services at the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community in Nanaimo.

BACKGROUND

At the 2019-SEP-09 Council meeting, Council passed the following motion:

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Bonner's motion be referred to a future Health and Housing Task Force meeting for discussion accompanied by a Staff Report outlining funding options and implications:

Whereas it's recognized that the City has an addictions crisis and that there are not enough addiction facilities to meet the demand for treatment and that the John Howard Society presently has 5 beds available for addiction treatment that are not being used because of lack of funding.

That a one time grant of \$70,500 be provided to the John Howard Society to fund 5 beds at the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community for 6 months.

The motion was in reference to the well-documented opioid crisis within the community and the City's role in supporting solutions to address substance use disorders. The John Howard Society currently operates the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community (VITC) Supportive Recovery Housing facility in central Nanaimo. VITC is a residential substance abuse treatment program for adult males. The facility provides housing, meals, and supports for individuals recovering from alcohol and drug addiction. The minimum length of treatment is three months and residents are encouraged to extend their stay in the program until they are ready for independent living. Residents are not permitted to use drugs or alcohol during their stay.

The John Howard Society has advised the City that they have the space for five beds within their facility but lack the funding to fill these spaces, at an approximate cost of \$3,000 per bed per month. Users of the service pay a \$650 per month Program Residency Fee, which also includes three meals per day. At the present time, there is a significant waitlist (ranging from 20-50 people depending on the season) for the VITC program and any additional support could be utilized immediately.

DISCUSSION

Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness 2018- 2023, endorsed by Council in September 2018, noted that those struggling with homelessness and the insecurely housed are experiencing significantly high levels of mental health and substance use disorders than previously seen in our community. The report also noted an inadequate supply of supportive housing for those that need a drug and alcohol-free environment and a lack of transition support for those with acute mental health and substance use disorders.

While the City does provide tax exemptions to non-profits including those who provide social services, generally the City does not provide funding for the operation of programs, with a few specific exceptions including:

- \$85,000 in annual Social Planning Grants allocated to a range of different social projects (2020 grant applications closed on October 28, 2019).
- \$44,856 towards the Urban Clean-Up program, managed by the Nanaimo Region of the John Howard Society (budgeted for 2018-2020).
- \$39,629 towards the Shower Program at Caledonia Park, managed by the Unitarian Emergency Shelter (budgeted for 2018-2020). It is worth noting a majority of the funds are returned to the City as a facility rental.
- In 2019, Council agreed to provide the Unitarian Emergency Shelter with an additional \$20,000 to extend the hours of operation to provide extra support for shelter users.

The above programs demonstrate there is a precedent for the City to financially support some social service agencies where requests are made and/or gaps identified, specifically in response to the current homelessness and substance use crisis. The first three projects noted above were included in the City budget, while the extended shelter hours were financed through the Housing Legacy Reserve Fund. The Housing Legacy Reserve Fund targets projects that exclusively address housing needs; as the requested funding includes a focus on substance use support rather than housing, the Housing Legacy Fund is not the preferred City funding option.

In the past the City has contributed funding for the operation of the Unitarian Emergency Shelter prior to the Province funding a year round shelter since 2018. The City's funding of social and health related services is modest in contrast to the Provincial government who provide the vast majority of financial support for social service agencies and housing providers given that they are mandated to provide health and housing services.

On 2019-AUG-22, members of the Task Force met with Honourable Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA). One of the requests made to the Minister was for funding for the five additional treatment beds. On 2019-NOV-19, Nanaimo Council received a letter from Minister Darcy indicating she is working with her Staff to address priorities that were requested of her, including providing funding to the John Howard Society (see Attachment A). If

secured, this funding would provide more recovery beds for a longer term than the City could feasibly support. For this reason, Staff are recommending that the focus be on securing this additional funding from the MMHA rather than providing municipal support, which may serve to delay provincial investment.

It is anticipated that that the systems mapping process endorsed by the Health and Housing Task Force (with collaboration and funding through the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition and Provincial partners) will be complete within six months (by June 2020). The results of this process will provide a framework for reorganizing how social services are provided in the City. This will involve an analysis of social and health service needs and capacity that includes identifying service gaps and redundancies. It will also evaluate the social impacts and effectiveness of investments in health and housing services aimed at addressing a range of issues including substance use, mental health, homelessness and poverty. This information will assist the Task Force, Nanaimo Homeless Coalition, and Council in determining whether to consider directly funding this type of treatment or seeking alternative options including advocating that the Provincial government provide long-term funding for this program or other types of programs.

OPTIONS

1. That the Health and Housing Task Force recommend that Council direct staff to continue to work with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to secure additional sustained long-term funding for the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community.
 - The advantages of this option: May result in securing additional provincial funding for more beds (ten rather than five) and for a longer-term (indefinitely rather than six months). Reinforces that substance use disorders and mental health support is a Provincial responsibility.
 - The disadvantages of this option: By not providing the additional funding the addictions spaces will remain empty and may continue to remain empty if Provincial funding is not secured. May be viewed as a missed opportunity to respond to the substance use and housing crisis in the community and the livability objectives in the Strategic Plan.
 - Financial Implications: There will be no impact as no funding is being provided.
2. That the Health and Housing Task Force recommend that Council provide a one-time grant of \$70,500 from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve (SIR) to the John Howard Society to fund 5 beds at the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community for a period of 6 months, commencing in January 2020.
 - The advantages of this option: The proposed grant will help individuals in immediate need of housing and substance use support. By providing the funding the City will respond to the needs identified within Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness and the ongoing substance use crisis within the community.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The requested funds are not currently allocated within the City budget and as such may impact other expenses. Funding for substance use disorders and mental health support has traditionally been a provincial responsibility. The Province has indicated they are working to address funding needs for the John Howard Society to operate 10 additional recovery beds. The City providing funding for substance use disorder recovery may be seen as

accepting downloading by the Province of funding responsibilities and may discourage or delay the Province from providing their own funding.

- Financial Implications: The requested \$70,500 is not included in the City's 2019-2023 Financial Plan and as such, if funds are approved, an alternative source of funding is required to be identified.

3. That the Health and Housing Task Force provide alternative direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- On 2019-SEP-09 Council endorsed a motion to refer to the Health and Housing Task Force discussion of providing a one-time grant of \$70,500 to the John Howard Society to fund 5 beds at the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Community (VITC) for 6 months.
- VITC is a residential, substance abuse treatment program for adult males operated by the John Howard Society. The John Howard Society has advised the City that they have space available within their facility but lack the funding to fill these spaces.
- The Minister of Mental Health and Addictions indicated in a 2019-NOV-19 letter to Mayor and Council that she is working with her staff to address priorities identified during her 2019-AUG-22 meeting with Health and Housing Task Force members, including funding to operate ten additional recovery beds at the VITC.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Minister from Hon. Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, to the City of Nanaimo Mayor and Council (November 19, 2019)

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