

DATE OF MEETING January 13, 2020

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SUBJECT **HEALTH AND HOUSING TASK FORCE – SIX-MONTH UPDATE**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To provide an update on the activities of the first six months of the Health and Housing Task Force and outline actions for the next six months.

## **BACKGROUND**

On 2019-MAY-13, Council approved the creation of a Health and Housing Task Force (the “Task Force”) to address the health and housing crisis in our community. At the same meeting, Council approved the Task Force Terms of Reference and appointed Councillors Bonner and Hemmens as Chair and alternate Chair (See Attachment A – Health and Housing Task Force Terms of Reference). This report provides an update to Council on what the Task Force has accomplished over the past six months and what is scheduled over the remaining time in their one-year appointment.

Over the past six months, the Task Force has held seven regular meetings, with the first on 2019-JULY-17. The first three of these meetings included introductions, briefings about the Task Force’s mandate, and presentations from different Task Force members on how their organization is responding to health and social needs in Nanaimo (e.g., Island Health, BC Housing, City of Nanaimo, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and Service Canada).

At the fourth and fifth meetings, the Task Force heard from two leaders from the field of homelessness prevention and response: Dena Kae Beno, the Homelessness Coordinator from Abbotsford, and Dr. Alina Turner of Turner Strategies. Both presentations focused on how mapping and auditing the resources available in a community can help to identify service and resourcing gaps and overlaps to meet the needs of those struggling with, or at risk of, homelessness. At their Special Meeting on 2019-OCT-29, the Task Force worked with a facilitator to identify priorities for the Task Force to focus on for the remainder of their term. The outcome of this meeting resulted in the following recommendation (which Council passed at their Regular Meeting on 2019-DEC-02):

1. That Council direct Staff to hire a contractor until June 2020 with funds re-purposed from the Drop-In Centre to coordinate the activities of the Health and Housing Task Force.
2. Council request Service Canada to engage Turner Strategies to assist the Health and Housing Task Force with its work starting January 2020.

The last two meetings of the Task Force during December included discussion of the upcoming contract with Turner Strategies, as well as an update on the Affordable Housing Strategy implementation and a presentation from the BC Rent Bank on starting a regional rent bank.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Task Force has a broad mandate (see Attachment A) to address the health and housing crisis in our community, which includes facilitating the implementation of policies aimed at increasing housing supply, diversity, and affordability (through the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition's Action Plan to End Homelessness and the City's Affordable Housing Strategy); providing recommendations to Council on other issues arising from and giving rise to homelessness in our community (poverty, mental health, and substance use disorders); and advocating for additional resources from all levels of government for housing, health, and poverty reduction initiatives.

This is a very broad mandate, and the outcomes of the systems/asset mapping and social impact project work coordinated by Turner Strategies is intended to provide data and recommendations that will enable the City, Nanaimo's Homeless Coalition, Provincial and Federal government agencies, community non-profits, and others to make collective decisions to align investing government and donor dollars to achieve the greatest impact for improving community health and housing priorities. It is anticipated these efforts will help to confirm and prioritize ongoing efforts to implement the Coalition's Action Plan to End Homelessness and Nanaimo's Affordable Housing Strategy.

Beyond the upcoming project with Turner Strategies, the Task Force has been an instrumental forum for fostering strategic relationships amongst members of the organizations appointed to serve on the Task Force, as well as other key stakeholders and groups. Three examples of how having a Task Force has already made a significant impact include:

- 1) On 2019-AUG-22, members of the Health and Housing Task Force met with the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, the Honourable Judy Darcy. As part of the meeting, Task Force members were asked for priorities for investment, which included increasing funding to support temporary housing sites at 2020 Labieux Road and 250 Terminal Avenue; providing funding to the John Howard Society to operate additional supportive recovery beds in Nanaimo; and consideration of using the City as the location for a pilot project for innovative programs supporting mental health and addictions treatments. The Minister responded to this request on 2019-NOV-19 and indicated she is working with her staff to address these priorities.
- 2) Service Canada, which has a representative on the Task Force, offered to make a significant contribution (\$40,000) towards the costs of the systems/asset mapping and social impact project. This funding would not have been made available without the collaborative work of the Task Force leading up to the decision to undertake this project.
- 3) The Task Force has provided strategic direction and increased collaborative opportunities with the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition. The coalition voted to allocate a significant portion of their Federal funding (\$60,000) towards the systems/asset mapping project, with the understanding that this is a critical step towards implementing a coordinated access system that will ensure better use of resources and access to services for community members in need of a variety of health and housing supports.

## **CONCLUSION**

The next six months will be an exciting time for the Health and Housing Task Force and the broader community as we undertake this systems/asset mapping and social impact project to better understand what resources already exist in our community, how well those resources are currently being used, what further resources are required to meet community needs, and how we can best allocate and coordinate our efforts and funding to meet the health and housing needs of our most vulnerable community members to build a more resilient, healthy community. The next meeting of the Task Force will be on 2020-JAN-22, at which Dr. Turner will be presenting the project workplan and next steps, including opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

## **SUMMARY POINTS**

- On 2019-MAY-13 Council approved the creation of a Health and Housing Task Force with representation from government and non-government stakeholders working to address the health and housing crisis in our community.
- Over the first six months of their one-year mandate, the Health and Housing Task Force has been effective in fostering relationships between partner agencies and in leveraging investment to work on strategic priorities.
- The next six months will be focused on overseeing and participating in a systems/asset mapping and social impact project that will help the City and its partners better understand what resources already exist in our community, how well those resources are currently being used, what further resources are still required, and how we can best allocate and coordinate our efforts and funding to meet the health and housing needs of our most vulnerable community members to build a more resilient, healthy community.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

ATTACHMENT A: Health and Housing Task Force – Terms of Reference

### **Submitted by:**

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### **Concurrence by:**

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