

DATE OF MEETING August 31, 2020
AUTHORED BY DAVID STEWART, SOCIAL PLANNER
SUBJECT BC HOUSING NAVIGATION CENTRE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with information related to BC Housing-funded navigation centres that help people who are experiencing long-term homelessness, and to obtain Council direction to host a navigation centre in the City of Nanaimo. |

Recommendation

That Council provide direction on the opportunity to host a navigation centre in Nanaimo.

BACKGROUND

On 2020-AUG-05, BC Housing announced a partnership with the City of Vancouver to launch Canada's first ever "navigation" centre to help people who are experiencing long-term homelessness and who require supports. The official announcement noted a second location is anticipated on Vancouver Island. The Provincial Government is providing funding of \$1.5 million per year for each centre for the next three years to fund up to 60 beds.

The two proposed Navigation Centres are the first time this type of enhanced shelter model that supports people experiencing homelessness will be implemented in Canada.

The centres are intended to provide 24/7 shelter accommodation, and key to their successful operation is the provision of integrated clinical health supports, which involves care for each resident based their unique needs and circumstances. Culturally-appropriate services for Indigenous peoples are another important component of the wraparound service approach.

Access to up-to-60-bed facilities is assigned through a referral system, and as such, there would be no daily line ups for beds typical of overnight emergency shelters. Residents referred to a navigation centre will be able to stay in a stable environment until longer-term housing is secured. The tenancy model of the navigation centre is similar to the bridge-to-housing shelter model currently used by Samaritan House at 355 Nicol Street.

Once a host city has been determined for Vancouver Island, BC Housing will undertake a process to select an experienced non-profit partner and location for the centre. Funding is intended to cover operations and also to include the lease/rent of an existing building (not for new construction). BC Housing is aiming to explore creative options for a building location and operational model on Vancouver Island.

DISCUSSION

When considering whether or not to support hosting a navigation centre in Nanaimo, Council will have to weigh the potential positive impact of stabilizing up to 60 individuals who are currently unhoused on the streets with the potential impacts the centre may have on the surrounding neighbourhood. The key to mitigating these impacts will be in having a robust referral process that matches potential residents to health and social supports.

Need for Shelter with Support Services

The need for additional shelter space and wraparound supports in Nanaimo is evident. The 2020-MAR-12 Point in Time (PIT) count documented 425 people living unsheltered in Nanaimo. This represents a 25% increase in the number of homeless in Nanaimo from the 2018 count. Organizations working directly with unsheltered individuals estimate the number of homeless in Nanaimo to be closer to 600. While the recently announced Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between BC Housing and the City aims to provide up to 190 additional supportive housing units, the majority of these are intended to replace the two temporary emergency housing sites at Labieux Road and Terminal Avenue.

Nanaimo currently has two permanent emergency homeless shelters:

- 19 Nicol Street: 20 beds during COVID, 24 regularly operated by the Salvation Army
- 595 Townsite Road: 24 beds during COVID, 30 regularly operated by the First Unitarian Fellowship

During the past two winters, a cold weather shelter has operated at St. Peter's Church (301 Machleary Street). A location for a 2020/2021 cold weather shelter has not yet been confirmed. The Salvation Army is the only shelter that does not require guests to leave during the day. In all other shelters, guests line up in the evening at opening time and are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. Operators of all three shelters have advised Staff that the shelters are generally filled to capacity on a nightly basis and noted the need for additional shelter space in the city.

An additional 20 spaces will be provided by the Emergency Response Centre temporary COVID response shelter scheduled to open in September/October.

In addition to the need for overnight shelter, there is a need for daytime space, particularly during the winter. The need for daytime space for the homeless was identified in *Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness (2019-2023)* as a priority action, and in 2018, Council allocated \$100,000 per year, for five years, for the provision of a daytime drop-in resource centre for homeless and street-involved individuals.

Following this direction, it was determined significant additional funding beyond the \$100,000 annual allocation would be required to appropriately resource a drop-in centre, even with limited hours. Given the uncertainty of where the additional resources would come from, on 2019-OCT-02, the Health and Housing Task Force decided not to recommend Council release an Expression of Interest for providing daytime drop-in services. This annual funding of \$100,000 is not currently included in the City's annual budget after 2022.

Last winter, in response to a snowfall in January, the City (in partnership with the Nanaimo 7-10 Club and the Salvation Army) opened up a cold weather daytime drop-in centre at 285 Prideaux Street from 2020-JAN-14 to 2020-JAN-17. The operation of the centre was funded through the City's Housing Legacy Fund. As the 285 Prideaux Street building is now being converted into a temporary COVID response emergency shelter and will later be demolished and replaced with a new supportive housing building, the building will no longer be available to use as a cold weather drop-in space.

Many Nanaimo residents experiencing homelessness require additional health and wellness supports not currently available at emergency shelter spaces. The Navigation Centre will allow service providers to meet people where they are at and provide additional health support that addresses barriers to housing.]

Neighbourhood Impact

If BC Housing does choose Nanaimo as a host city for a navigation centre, the operator and location will need to be selected. Critical to the success of such a navigation centre would be a commitment for the provision of adequate 'integrated clinical health' and other supports. Without knowing the location, operator, and level of 'integrated clinical health supports', it is difficult to comment on the potential impact the centre will have on the surrounding community.

Given that residents will only be able to access the Navigation Centre by referral and will be provided 24/7 accommodation, it is anticipated that with a strong referral process and staffing model, the impact of the centre will be more comparable with that of a supportive housing development or the Samaritan House bridge-to-housing-shelter model rather than a more typical overnight homeless shelter.

A challenge will be finding a suitable building and location to host a navigation centre in Nanaimo. When selecting the location, it will be important to consider impact on the neighbourhood with attention paid to crime prevention, public disorder, as well the delivery of other social and recreational services. The City will have an opportunity to work with the operator and BC Housing in securing a location. Existing social supports in the neighbourhood should also be noted in order to support a dispersed social service delivery model. If a location with suitable zoning is not available, rezoning may be required. The building may also require renovations to meet current building code/fire safety standards.

The proposed 60-bed capacity is significant and larger than all other shelters or supportive housing developments in Nanaimo.

OPTIONS

1. That Council authorize the Mayor to provide a letter of support to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding the City of Nanaimo's interest in hosting a navigation centre in Nanaimo for people who are experiencing homelessness that involves an agreement with Island Health to provide an adequate level of 'integrated clinical health supports'.
 - Advantages: If Nanaimo is selected to host a navigation centre, the City will see 60 additional all-day shelter spaces and individualized support for Nanaimo's

- homeless residents. The goal is to provide supports needed to transition to long-term stable housing.
- Disadvantages: BC Housing intends to locate the centre within an existing building, and at this time, no location has been identified. Should Nanaimo be selected, the City, BC Housing and the operator will be challenged in locating a suitable building.
 - Financial Implications: Should Nanaimo be successful in advocating for and receiving such a centre, this would involve a \$4.5 million Provincial investment over three or more years (\$1.5 million per year). This funding will largely cover the costs of the operations (staffing) and lease of a suitable space. Note, we understand BC Housing will not fund any new construction or substantial capital improvements. While not required, a municipal contribution towards capital improvements to a leased building and/ the provision of space would be seen as a sign of commitment to the partnership for hosting a centre. In addition to addressing health and shelter needs, it is anticipated to reduce the use of City resources currently allocated to address the impacts of homelessness on community health and safety, allowing RCMP members and Bylaw Staff to address other priorities.
2. That Council refer this item to the Health and Housing Task Force for consideration and comment as part of the Systems Mapping and Social Impact Audit to be completed in October 2020.
- Advantages: Once the Systems Mapping and Impact Audit work is complete, Staff, Council, and BC Housing will have a better understanding of the City's health and housing needs to support homeless and other vulnerable populations.
 - Disadvantages: While BC Housing has not yet specified a timeline for selecting the Vancouver Island Navigation Centre, delaying comment until October may negatively impact the City's chances of being selected.
 - Financial Implications: Delaying comment may inadvertently result in the City missing out on an opportunity to access funding to operate a 24/7 navigation centre for up to 60 individuals.
3. That Council take no action at this point in time.
- Advantages: Allows BC Housing to complete their review of suitable locations for a Navigation Centre on Vancouver Island. This would allow Council to respond if Nanaimo is determined to be a suitable location.
 - Disadvantages: While BC Housing has not yet specified a timeline for selecting the Vancouver Island Navigation Centre, delaying comment until October may negatively impact the City's chances of being selected.
 - Financial Implications: Delaying comment may inadvertently result in the City missing out on an opportunity to access funding to operate a 24/7 navigation centre for up to 60 individuals.

SUMMARY POINTS

- BC Housing has announced \$1.5 million in annual funding per centre for three years to operate two navigation centres: one in Vancouver and one on Vancouver Island. The Vancouver Island host municipality has yet to be determined.
- A navigation centre will provide 24/7 accommodation, individualized attention, case planning, and wraparound supports to support people experiencing homelessness.
- If Nanaimo wants to host a navigation centre, BC Housing has requested the Mayor provide a letter of support on behalf of Council.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: BC Housing News Release

Submitted by:

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Concurrence by:

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