

DATE OF MEETING September 14, 2020
AUTHORED BY KARIN KRONSTAL, SOCIAL PLANNER
SUBJECT CITY'S ROLE IN HEALTH AND HOUSING

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

To provide Council with Staff comment on the draft position statement "City's Role in Health and Housing" as requested by Council.

Recommendation

That Council refer the position statement on the "City's Role in Health and Housing" to the Health and Housing Task Force to be considered as part of their ongoing work.

BACKGROUND

At the Regular Council Meeting on 2020-JUN-15, Council passed the following motion:

"That Council discuss and refer the attached draft position statement on defining the City's role in health and housing to staff for review and comment."

A position statement is a guiding document that outlines an organization's values and goals on a particular issue. Position statements are typically concise and definitive and can be a valuable tool when a clear and united organizational stance is needed on an issue or when the organization is trying to call attention to an issue or perspective.¹ The draft position statement under consideration, "City's Role in Health in Housing", is included as Attachment A.

While the title of the position paper mentions 'health' and 'housing', the first paragraph clarifies that this position statement is specific to the City's response to homelessness. The statement outlines four areas where the City is currently active:

1. Actively seeks to encourage a wide variety of development types and forms to diversify and enhance the available housing stock.
2. Facilitates partnerships with and between other government agencies and social support services that are working to end homelessness.
3. Enhances and supports communications with the public and stakeholders on the causes of and possible solutions for homelessness while working in coordination with our partners in the sector.
4. Advocates to higher levels of government to obtain the resources required to fully address the often complex needs of community members experiencing homelessness.

¹ Ontario Medical Students Association, "Guidelines for Writing Position Papers and Policy Statements." Accessed 2020-AUG-29. Source: https://omsa.ca/sites/default/files/webform/84/omsa_policy_and_position_paper_guidelines_2018.pdf

The draft position statement concludes by noting the City is currently undertaking a collaborative process with our partners at the Health and Housing Task Force, and that the outcome of this work will further refine both the role of the City of Nanaimo and other key stakeholders working to end homelessness.

DISCUSSION

Council has requested Staff review and comment on the attached position statement. Staff comments are as follows:

1. The position statement, as drafted, would be more appropriately titled 'City of Nanaimo's Role in Responding to Homelessness'. The City takes a variety of actions to support both public health and the housing sector in general, so if the position statement pertains only to our response to homelessness, then the title should reflect that focus.
2. While Staff agree that working with the development community as a key stakeholder group in developing a range of housing options is important, the most critical stakeholders in solving our current homelessness crisis are Island Health and BC Housing. The type of housing options the private sector can deliver will not meet the deep affordability and health supports required to successfully house the majority of those experiencing long-term homelessness (i.e., more than a year). The position statement does not mention Island Health's role in successfully supporting transitions out of homelessness into long-term housing, but they are one of the most critical partners the City has in ensuring its success.
3. The statement "working with the development community to encourage all forms of housing" does not fully reflect the financial resources the City has put into developing housing solutions for homelessness over the past 20 years. These contributions have included (but are not limited to):
 - property tax exemptions for shelters (located in churches);
 - financial support for emergency shelter operations;
 - rent supplements;
 - social planning grants;
 - low- or no-cost land leases for supportive housing;
 - development cost charge exemptions for affordable and supportive housing projects;
 - works and services contributions; and
 - land for supportive and affordable housing projects.

Over the past 20 years, the City has made substantial financial investments (not including Staff time) to address homelessness. The position statement should acknowledge the City's leadership in this regard and affirm intent to continue this type of support when it is provided in a context of partnership with higher levels of government.

4. While not a financial investment, the City has also been a leader when it comes to introducing policies that encourage affordable rental housing development, including

density bonuses and parking reductions for rental housing. Nanaimo was one of the first municipalities in BC to permit secondary suites, which has allowed for the creation of over 3000 rental units over the past 15 years.

5. While not a social service agency, the City also provides some direct funding to agencies for services that support the health and well-being of those with lived or living experience of homelessness, including the Caledonia Shower Program and the Urban Clean-up Program. This contribution goes beyond the position statement's assertion of the City's role as a "convener and facilitator" of such solutions; we are also a funder and the statement should recognize this.
6. The position statement does not mention the investment the City has made over the years in providing dedicated Staff to work on ending homelessness. For many years, the City of Nanaimo has had a social planning function, and having dedicated Staff on this file has allowed the City to be more effective in every aspect of the roles mentioned in the position statement. Some of our counterpart cities in BC that have recently created positions specifically to address homelessness do not have other social planners on staff; consequently, it is worth noting Nanaimo is not lagging, but was an 'early adopter' in resourcing this function. The draft statement might make note of the commitment the City has shown in this regard. |

CONCLUSION

The Health and Housing Task Force mandate will conclude on 2020-OCT-31, by which time Council will have received the Health and Housing Action Plan currently being drafted by our consultants at Turner Strategies. One of the expected deliverables of this project is a new governance model for our collective response to homelessness that will have implications for the City's role as well as that of our partners on the Health and Housing Task Force and the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition. In the immediate term, the position statement "City's Role in Health and Housing" may be referred to the Task Force for their consideration along with the other recommendations regarding government roles and responsibilities in this sector.

Alternatively, a draft revised position statement, "The City's Role in Responding to Homelessness", is attached for Council's consideration. This draft reflects the above information in regards to the City's longstanding commitment to and investment in ending homelessness, and could be endorsed by Council as an affirmation of what is already being done by the City. Once the Health and Housing Action Plan has been reviewed and endorsed by Council, Staff will be prepared to further revise the position statement if so requested to do so by Council.

OPTIONS

1. That Council refer the position statement on the "City's Role in Health and Housing" to the Health and Housing Task Force to be considered as part of their ongoing work.
 - The advantages of this option: This option will ensure the position statement reflects the most up-to-date vision of the City's role vis-à-vis these critical issues.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The City will not have an interim position statement until the work of the Task Force has been completed.

2. That Council endorse the revised position statement on the “City’s Role in Responding to Homelessness,” with the understanding this statement may be revised following the recommendations of the Health and Housing Task Force.
 - The advantages of this option: The revised position statement provides a more comprehensive overview of the City’s current role in addressing homelessness, including financial and Staff contributions the previous statement did not contemplate.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The revised position statement does not take into consideration the work of the Health and Housing Task Force and may need to be revised in two months when the Task Force recommendations are complete.
3. That Council provide alternative direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Council has requested Staff comment on a draft position statement concerning the City’s role in responding to homelessness.
- The City has made a number of financial and in-kind investments in addressing homelessness that are not recognized in the current draft, but which should be included to accurately reflect the full extent of resources that are committed by the City. An alternative position statement has been prepared that reflects these contributions.
- The ongoing work of the Health and Housing Task Force to develop a Health and Housing Action Plan will have implications for the City’s role in addressing homelessness, and Staff advise referring the original position statement to the Task Force for their consideration and input.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: Position Statement – City’s Role in Health and Housing

ATTACHMENT B: Position Statement – City’s Role in Responding to Homelessness |

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