

Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING December 13, 2023

AUTHORED BY CHRISTY WOOD, SOCIAL PLANNER

SUBJECT SHOWER PROGRAM REVIEW

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Finance and Audit Committee with a review of shower services being provided for unhoused or precariously housed individuals in Nanaimo, including City of Nanaimo funded initiatives, and to provide options to expand, maintain, or transition out of providing funds to shower services in the city.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to maintain shower services as follows:

1. Increase the 2024 budget by \$16,450, from \$81,300 to \$97,750, to be funded by the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund to provide one additional hour of Shower Program services daily, Monday to Friday;
2. Add a project of \$25,000 to the 2024 budget to undertake building improvements to allow for further temporary use at Caledonia Park, funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund;
3. Encourage the First Unitarian Fellowship to promote the City's Leisure Economic Access Pass program to eligible Shower Program users;
4. Work with community partners over the long term to ensure that shower services are provided as part of a suite of services within new and existing shelters, daytime drop-in centres, and other community support services allowing the City to return the Caledonia Park building to its originally intended use; and,
5. Return to Council in the fall 2024 to provide an update on the Shower Program and any alternative solutions to replace the program at Caledonia Park.

BACKGROUND

At the 2023-MAR-20 Regular Council Meeting, Vicky Trill provided a letter (see Attachment A) and a delegation to Council on behalf of the Reaching Home Nanaimo Community Advisory Board (NCAB) requesting the City of Nanaimo to consider expanding the Shower Program to respond to health concerns among the unsheltered population. The request was based on a presentation the NCAB received from Island Health staff about an extreme increase in lice among the unhoused population, to the extent that people were accessing the emergency room for medical assistance. After the delegation discussion, Council passed the following motion:

“that Council direct Staff to prepare a report on the feasibility of expanding Shower Program access throughout the City of Nanaimo.”

First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo Shower Program

In January 2018, Council approved a budget of \$40,000 for the First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo (the Unitarian) to implement a one-year Shower Program at Caledonia Park for unsheltered or precariously housed individuals. Due to the ongoing lack of shower and hygiene services available, the City has continued to fund the program. Between 2018 and 2022, \$206,015 was spent on the program, a portion of which was funded by the City's Strengthening Communities' Services grant. In 2023, the City budgeted \$69,800 to operate the Shower Program. The Shower Program offers showers to unhoused or precariously housed individuals five days per week. The program also serves as a place where service providers can connect with those needing additional health and social support services. Agencies such as Island Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association Mid Island Branch, the 7-10 Club Society, and the Snuneymuxw Homeless Outreach team provide basic need services in conjunction with the Shower Program at Caledonia Park. Since 2018, over 29,762 showers have been provided. Thus far, in 2023, an average of 26 showers are provided daily and cost approximately \$12 per shower. The Unitarian reports that one to three individuals are turned away daily from shower services due to demand and the limited duration of the program. Usage has steadily increased since the program's inception. The table below provides a summary of Shower Program usage since 2018.

Year	Total Daily Shower Visits
2018	1,534
2019	2,790
2020	5,786
2021	7,147
2022	6,555
2023 (January to October)	5,950

The Shower Program operated by the Unitarian is the only free accessible program available to all unhoused and precariously housed individuals in Nanaimo. The Shower Program operates year-round, providing shower services between Monday and Friday from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. with an additional hour of operations to allow Unitarian staff to pack up supplies, clean, and launder towels at the Unitarian Shelter. Two employees from the Unitarian provide onsite staff support and manage access to the showers and provide towels, soap, shampoo, and conditioner. The City has a Service and Licence Agreement with the Unitarian until 2023-DEC-31 to operate the Shower Program at Caledonia Park. The City funds three hours of operations and Reaching Home¹ funds two hours to allow a total of five hours for Shower Program operations daily.

The Shower Program is located at Caledonia Park (110 Wall Street). There are two buildings located in the south end of the park and the Shower Program operates out of Building A (see Attachment B). The program has access to two separate change rooms and each change room contains a shower facility and a washroom. Building B has two change rooms each with its own shower and washrooms, a referee room, and a storage room. Building B is currently being leased to another park user.

At this time, there are no other shower services available that are free of cost or open on a drop-

¹ The Nanaimo region receives funding through the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, which is a community-based program, funded by the Government of Canada. Reaching Home aims to prevent and reduce homelessness across Canada.

in basis. Historically, the New Hope Centre operated by the Salvation Army provided drop-in showers but stopped providing shower services during the COVID pandemic. They do not plan to resume shower services except for their own shelter guests. All other shower services available to people experiencing homelessness are only available to existing shelter guests at emergency shelter sites.

Shower Program Models in Other Communities

A table of similar free, drop-in shower programs available in other communities is provided in Attachment C. Many shower programs offered in other communities are part of an overall suite of services and supports and may include other drop-in services such as laundry, storage, meals, warming/cooling relief, and other health services. With exception to the existing Shower Program operated by the Unitarian, the only other shower services available in Nanaimo are provided through existing shelter services for existing guests and not available on a drop-in basis.

DISCUSSION

Option 1 - Maintaining Shower Program Services in Nanaimo (recommended option)

Existing Services

The Shower Program may be maintained with the current operating hours, or expanded hours, at Caledonia Park by extending closing time by one hour from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. This expansion would allow more access to shower program users, without displacing other recreational park users. In order to accommodate the expansion, an estimated \$16,450 of funding would be required to cover the additional staffing costs. These funds would provide the Unitarian with enough City funding for four hours of service daily. The Unitarian would still be required to fund the additional two hours to provide six hours of shower services to supplement the existing hours of service. Should the City wish to fund the entire six hours of service, an additional \$54,650 would be needed. The summary table below provides an overview of the funds required to support the increase in hours.

<i>Shower Program Hours</i>	<i>City Funded Hours</i>	<i>Unitarian Funded Hours</i>	<i>Total City Estimated Annual Costs</i>
a) 5 hours per day (existing hours maintained)	3 hours per day	2 hours per day	\$81,300
b) 6 hours per day (recommended one hour expansion)	4 hours per day	2 hours per day	\$97,750
c) 6 hours per day (full City funding option)	6 hours per day	0 hours per day	\$135,950

In addition to operating funds, the City also provides custodian Staff to ensure the facilities are cleaned daily after the program ends. Extending the Shower Program by one hour will also require the extension of the custodian Staff team by one hour.

The creation of the Shower Program at the Caledonia Park building in 2018 was a temporary measure meant to address the lack of access to shower services until a more permanent option could be established. The shower facilities at Caledonia Park are not designed to accommodate a high volume of shower users. In order to continue using the Caledonia Park building as a temporary location for the Shower Program, the building will require upgrades to the electrical and hot water tanks, as well as regular ongoing maintenance. The estimated costs for these building upgrades is \$25,000. Any longer term use of the Caledonia Park building will require significant capital improvements.

In addition to the existing Shower Program services, the Leisure Economic Access Pass (LEAP) program may be used to reduce the number of shower users at the current Shower Program location. The LEAP program supports individuals and families in financial need with access to Parks, Recreation, and Culture programs and services. While accessing recreation facilities, LEAP program users may also access showers as part of the suite of services. Although many of the users at the existing Shower Program are individuals experiencing homelessness with complex mental and physical health needs, there is a population of shower users that could appropriately access recreation facilities, programs, and showers through the LEAP program.

Option 2 - Transitioning Shower Program Services to Other Community Partners

In June 2023, the NCAB engaged people with lived/living experience (PWLE) to collect feedback on what the NCAB should know about experiencing homelessness and what would help to reduce the impacts of homelessness. Feedback was ranked and the highest-ranking need identified by PLWE was the need for a dedicated drop-in centre where people can go to access basic need services such as showers, laundry, meals, and warming/cooling services. In addition, the Health and Housing Action Plan (2020), priority #5 Complex Needs Capability, identifies the need to support the creation of a navigation centre to bring together diverse key services to provide basic needs including showers, meals, and laundry services for individuals with complex needs. Meeting basic needs through a drop in centre can act as an entry point allowing individuals to connect to other support services.

As noted previously, many of the shower programs offered in other communities are part of an overall suite of services and supports and include other drop-in services such as laundry, storage, meals, warming/cooling relief, and other health services. Providing showers along with other programs and services is an ideal model allowing funds to provide basic needs more efficiently and effectively.

Over the long term, Staff can work with community partners to ensure that shower services are provided as part of a suite of services within new and existing emergency shelters, daytime drop-in centres including warming and cooling centres, and other community support services allowing the City to return the Caledonia Park building to its originally intended use. Staff can return to Council in fall 2024 to provide an update on the Shower Program and any alternative solutions to replace the program at Caledonia Park.

Option 3 - Expanding Shower Program Services in Nanaimo

Utilizing Other City Facilities

The City has other buildings with similar shower amenities that could be utilized for a Shower Program, such as May Richards Bennett Pioneer Park (6700 Dover Road) and Robins Park (620

Park Avenue). Considerations for the locations would need to explore how to manage existing schedules with park users. In addition, an operator would need to be identified and additional funding secured. The costs of duplicating the existing Shower Program in another similar City park building is approximately \$81,300 annually. Depending on location, facility upgrades, and additional maintenance costs would need to be considered.

Mobile Showers

Where permanent or suitable buildings are unavailable, communities such as the City of Maple Ridge or City of West Kelowna have utilized mobile shower trailers to provide shower program services. For example, the City of West Kelowna purchased a mobile shower/bathroom trailer with two shower/bathroom stalls in 2023 for \$50,000. The Westside Salvation Army operates the shower services and funds are raised through community donations. In Maple Ridge, a similar mobile shower trailer was purchased with Strengthening Communities' Services Program funds and designated Reaching Home funds provides operational support. New, larger mobile shower/bathroom trailers containing between four to six showers/bathroom stalls range between \$230,000 and \$290,000 per trailer. Suitable locations with water and electrical hook ups would need to be identified. In addition, operational funds would be required.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 2024 – 2028 Draft Project Plan was presented to Council on 2023-NOV-29 and revisions as directed by Council have been incorporated into the 2024 – 2028 Provisional Financial Plan. Staff recommend funding the \$16,450 increase to the Shower Program for 2024 and the \$25,000 for the Caledonia Park building improvements from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund so that other projects in the 2024 – 2028 Provisional Project Plan do not need to be delayed or cancelled. Future financial plans will incorporate any changes in the Shower Program hours for 2025 and beyond within our base project funding.

The current estimated 2024 closing balance in the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund based on the 2024 – 2028 Provisional Financial Plan is \$1.48 million.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to maintain shower services as follows:

1. Increase the 2024 budget by \$16,450, from \$81,300 to \$97,750, to be funded by the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund to provide one additional hour of Shower Program services daily, Monday to Friday;
2. Add a project of \$25,000 to the 2024 budget to undertake building improvements to allow for further temporary use at Caledonia Park, funded from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund;
3. Encourage the First Unitarian Fellowship to promote the City's Leisure Economic Access Pass program to eligible Shower Program users;
4. Work with community partners over the long term to ensure that shower services are provided as part of a suite of services within new and existing shelters, daytime drop-in centres, and other community support services allowing the City to return the Caledonia Park building to its originally intended use; and,

5. Return to Council in the fall 2024 to provide an update on the Shower Program and any alternative solutions to replace the program at Caledonia Park.

- The advantages of this option: Unhoused or precariously housed individuals will have existing access to shower program services in order to improve their hygiene and physical health until an alternative solution is identified.
- The disadvantages of this option: By expanding shower program services by one hour, any new users wishing to use the Caledonia Park building will have reduced access. In addition, Staff time will be required to work with the Unitarian to identify individuals who qualify for the Leisure Economic Access Pass program.
- Financial Implications: The 2024 – 2028 Provisional Financial Plan will reflect the changes.

2. That Council provide alternate direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The City has funded a Shower Program at Caledonia Park since 2018.
- The Shower Program offers showers to unhoused or precariously housed individuals five days per week. The program also serves as a place where service providers can connect with those needing additional health and social support services.
- The Shower Program, operated by the First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo, is the only free accessible program available to all unhoused or precariously housed individuals in Nanaimo.
- It is recommended to maintain the Shower Program at Caledonia Park in 2024 by extending services by one hour and dedicating funds to building upgrades to continue to operate the program temporarily.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Reaching Home Nanaimo Community Advisory Board Letter Re: Increase in lice and request for additional access to showers & laundry in Nanaimo

ATTACHMENT B: Caledonia Park Facilities Map

ATTACHMENT C: Drop-In Shower Program Models

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