

DATE OF MEETING June 19, 2024

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SUBJECT **WARMING CENTRE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS UPDATE**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Finance and Audit Committee with an overview of the warming centre services and supports provided over the 2023/2024 winter season.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council:

1. allocate \$400,000 from the Special Initiative Reserve and reallocate the remaining 2023/2024 winter season funding to match funds provided by the Reaching Home Community Advisory Board to support up to two year-round drop-in hubs that can also serve as warming and cooling centre services for the City of Nanaimo's extreme weather response starting in the 2024 winter season; and,
2. direct Staff to provide Council with an evaluation of the drop-in hub service as part of the City's extreme weather response for future funding consideration in summer 2025.

BACKGROUND

At a Special Council Meeting on 2023-NOV-01, the following motion was passed:

1. *"Direct Staff to reallocate up to \$230,000 from the Asset Retirement Obligation project surplus to fund warming centre services approximately between November 14, 2023 and March 31, 2024 , 7 days per week; and,*
2. *Authorize the Mayor and Corporate Officer to enter into a service agreement with Risebridge Society to:*
 - a. *Provide warming centre services during the identified service gaps*
 - b. *Mitigate impacts on the surrounding neighbourhood through good neighbourhood agreement requirements*
3. *That a further call for expressions of interest be posted for organizations willing and able to run an additional warming centre in Nanaimo; and*
4. *If an additional site is found, that additional funds be identified."*

The City of Nanaimo entered into a service agreement with Risebridge Society (Risebridge) to provide a warming centre from 2023-NOV-14 to 2024-MAR-31.

On 2023-NOV-06, the City released a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for service providers to operate an additional warming centre. In addition, a press release was issued on 2023-NOV-09, stating the City's need for another warming centre. The call for EOIs closed on 2023-NOV-17, and the City received one EOI from Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS). Nanaimo 7-10 Club Society (7-10 Club) submitted an EOI after the deadline.

At the 2023-DEC-04 In Camera Meeting, Council reviewed the proposals provided by ICCS and 7-10 Club and passed the following motion:

- *“direct Staff to allocate \$175,000 to fund a warming centre service at 2025 Bowen Road approximately from 2024-JAN-02 to 2024-MAR-31, and direct Staff to allocate \$112,000 to fund a warming centre service at 5 Nicol Street approximately from 2023-DEC-17 to 2024-MAR-31 and that the warming centres be funded by a budget transfer from the Asset Retirement Obligation project surplus with the remaining funds coming from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve*
- *authorize Staff to enter into a service agreement with Island Crisis Care Society and the 7-10 Club Society to:*
 - *provide warming centre services during the identified service gaps; and,*
 - *mitigate impacts on the surrounding neighbourhood through good neighbourhood agreement requirements.”*

The City entered into service agreements with ICCS to provide a warming centre from 2024-JAN-02 to 2024-MAR-31 and 7-10 Club to provide a warming centre from 2024-JAN-07 to 2024-MAR-31. The City spent \$474,094 to fund three warming centres for the 2023/2024 winter season.

At the Regular Council Meeting on 2023-DEC-18, Staff presented Council with an update on funding from Island Health to provide additional support to the three City-funded warming centres. On 2024-JAN-09, the City entered into a contribution agreement with Island Health for \$250,000. The contribution agreement outlines the distribution of the funds and is meant to support organizations providing warming services to allow for expansion or enhancement of services where there may be evident gaps. These funds are not limited to the three City-funded warming centres but can support other agencies providing warming services. The agreement allows the City to distribute these funds at its discretion based on evident need and allows the City to recover costs of services provided. To date \$108,649 has been spent on provision of additional services.

Between 2024-JAN-11 and 2024-JAN-17, Nanaimo experienced an extreme cold weather event as defined by the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR). The extreme cold thresholds for Nanaimo are:

- Environment Canada has declared or has forecasted, for the next 24-hour period, a temperature of -4° Celsius or lower as the lowest temperature for that period; or,
- Environment Canada has declared or has forecasted, for the next 24-hour period, a temperature of 0° Celsius or lower as the lowest temperature for that period and has issued a weather warning.

The City facilitated access to \$58,443 in EMCR funds to provide expanded services at the warming centres. In addition, funds were used to expand existing outreach services and implement a daytime warming centre at the Unitarian Shelter.

Distribution of Funds

Organization	City Funds	Island Health Funds	EMCR	Total
Risebridge Society	\$209,482	\$27,810	\$21,070	\$258,362
Nanaimo CAT – Peer Support Team	NA	\$21,160	NA	\$21,160
7-10 Club Society	\$89,807	\$19,176	\$2,260	\$111,243
Island Crisis Care Society	\$174,805	\$25,215	\$13,361	\$213,381
Regional District of Nanaimo – Transit Shuttle Service	NA	NA	\$640	\$640
Unitarian Shelter	NA	NA	\$7,608	\$7,608
Community Safety Officers and City Supports	NA	\$15,288	\$13,504	\$28,792
Total	\$474,094	\$108,649	\$58,443	\$641,186

Currently \$184,257 of funding from the 2023/2024 winter season remains available and consists of \$42,906 of City funds and \$141,351 of Island Health grant funding. The Island Health grant funding may be allocated to offset the costs incurred by the City for the three warming centres for the 2023/2024 winter season or could be used to fund additional services.

At the 2024-FEB-21 Finance and Audit Committee meeting, \$500,000 of the 2023 surplus was allocated to the Special Initiatives Reserve to help provide support services to the unhoused population in 2024.

DISCUSSION

Approximately 138 spaces were provided to unsheltered individuals (at one time) over the 2023/2024 winter season, however an average of 199 individuals accessed the three warming centres on a daily basis. The three City-funded warming centres included:

- 520 Prideaux Street, operated by Risebridge Society – up to 48 people at one time, 7 days per week, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- 5 Victoria Road, operated by Nanaimo 7-10 Club Society – up to 30 people at one time, 7 days per week, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; and,
- 2025 Bowen Road operated by Island Crisis Care Society – up to 60 people at one time, 7 days per week, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The following provides an overview of the warming centre services offered, including the daily average number of clients served, any reported neighbourhood impacts, and lessons learned.

1. Risebridge Society

The City contracted Risebridge to provide warming centre services from 2023-NOV-14 to 2024-MAR-31, for 131 operational days. On average, the Risebridge warming centre reports that they supported 59 individuals daily. Warming centre services on site included access to refreshments, harm reduction supplies, and other support services such as wound care, mental health and addiction supports. In addition, Risebridge provided expanded services when extreme cold weather thresholds were met as outlined by EMCR and when EMCR funds were available. Between 2024-JAN-11 and 2024-JAN-17, Risebridge provided extreme cold warming spaces for up to 24 women between 7 p.m. and 9 a.m. daily.

On 2023-NOV-27, Risebridge reported to City Staff that the warming centre was operating at or near capacity and that there were safety and security challenges due to substance use, overdose incidents occurring on site, and interactions with neighbourhood residents. Staff were unable to enumerate or validate the needs of the Risebridge warming centre. Risebridge did not allow RCMP or the Community Safety Officers (CSO) to enter their facility or to drop people off in need of warming services unless requested by Risebridge staff. To respond to neighbourhood concerns, the CSOs increased patrols immediately surrounding the Risebridge warming centre and to assist with the continued challenges identified by Risebridge, additional funds from Island Health were provided. These funds supported the warming centre service by providing additional staff supports allowing for five-support staff onsite, four hours of professional nursing services daily, and an increase to administration support for five hours daily. In addition, the City entered into a service agreement with the Nanaimo Community Action Team (CAT) and provided \$21,160 of Island Health funds to the CAT Peer Support Team to provide assistance to Risebridge staff where appropriate, to monitor for overdoses, provide resources, social connections and mentorship, and to role model safe behaviours for clients accessing services. The CAT Peer Support Team also provided assistance in the general neighbourhood and where needed in the downtown area.

The service agreement with Risebridge outlines good neighbour commitments and includes working with the neighbourhood, the City's Bylaw and Fire Departments, and the Nanaimo RCMP to address issues that may arise in the neighbourhood regarding the operation of the warming centre service or the conduct of its patrons. City Staff received emails, phone calls, and impact statements about the warming centre service and the inability of the warming centre staff to engage with the neighborhood residents, the CSOs, or RCMP to mitigate any of the negative impacts that the warming centre service had in the neighbourhood. On 2024-APR-10, City Staff met with residents of the Nob Hill Neighbourhood to hear about their experiences about the increase in social disorder and attempts to work with Risebridge staff. Other key points the Nob Hill Neighbourhood residents expressed to Staff included a suggestion that the development of a good neighbour policy and a communications plan should be co-developed with residents and that responses be identified when the good neighbour policy is breached. In addition, warming centre service operators should be made to follow a standard of practice and

that this standard should require collaboration with appropriate enforcement supports. Risebridge received funds through a direct award process which did not include evaluating proposed operations or organizational standards of practice as normally done through an expression of interest or request for proposal process. As requested by the neighbourhood association, a compilation of impact statements from residents living in Nob Hill Neighbourhood can be found in Attachment A.

In addition to daytime warming centre services, Risebridge was funded by BC Housing to provide 24 temporary overnight shelter spaces from 2024-FEB-26 to 2024-APR-30. Guests were provided permanent shelter beds for the duration of the shelter service unless they missed more than one night, at which point their bed was given to another individual on the shelter wait list.

2. Nanaimo 7-10 Club Society

The City contracted the 7-10 Club to provide warming centre services from 2024-JAN-07 to 2024-MAR-31, for 85 operational days. On average, 7-10 Club reports that they supported 107 individuals daily. Warming centre services on site included access to meals and peer supports.

In addition, 7-10 Club worked closely with ICCS, Island Health Mental Health and Substance (MHSU) outreach staff, and CSOs to pool resources and staffing to provide expanded services when EMCR extreme cold weather thresholds were met, and funds were made available. A shared staffing model was implemented allowing the 7-10 Club warming centre to remain open outside of regular operating hours during an extreme cold weather event and allowed for additional services and supports when the ICCS warming centre had to close temporarily due to flooding. Between 2024-JAN-13 and 2024-JAN-16, the 7-10 Club warming centre provided extreme cold weather spaces for up to 30 individuals at one time on a 24-hour basis.

As outlined in the service agreement, good neighbourhood commitments require service providers to inform residents and businesses within 100 metres of the newly established warming centre service and provide contact information where concerns can be reported. Due to the delay of the opening of the warming centre service, residents and businesses were informed much earlier than anticipated, however this allowed the 7-10 Club staff the ability to hear concerns and build operational procedures, and where appropriate, to address these concerns. Prior to the opening of the 7-10 Club warming centre, City Staff met with the Nanaimo and Area Public Safety Association and the Victoria Crescent Association to hear concerns about the placement of the 7-10 Club warming centre location. The 7-10 Club staff also worked closely with businesses, CSOs, and RCMP to mitigate neighbourhood impacts as best as possible for the duration of the warming centre service.

To further support neighbourhood concerns, and the large number of unsheltered individuals seeking warming services, additional funds from Island Health was provided to the 7-10 Club warming centre to expand hours of service by opening earlier in the morning. These funds provided additional staffing support, program supplies, and additional food resources. The funds also allowed for a portable toilet rental to address an ongoing plumbing issue in the facility and allowed the warming centre to remain open. Bi-weekly reporting provided by the 7-10 Club staff reported that they responded to an average of two overdoses daily with some days reaching as high as seven overdoses.

3. Island Crisis Care Society

The City contracted ICCS to provide warming centre services from 2024-JAN-02 to 2024-MAR-31, for 90 operational days. On average, ICCS reports that they supported 33 unique individuals daily. Warming centre services on site included access to meals, harm reduction supplies, professional nursing, and other support services such as mental health and addiction supports.

In addition, ICCS worked closely with 7-10 Club, MHSU outreach staff, and CSOs to pool resources and staffing to provide expanded services when EMCR extreme cold weather thresholds were met, and funds were made available. During the extreme weather event from 2024-JAN-11 to 2024-JAN-18, ICCS provided expanded warming centre services and due to flooding, on 2024-JAN-13, the ICCS warming centre had to move its warming centre services temporarily. ICCS staff worked with the Regional District of Nanaimo, MHSU, and the CSOs to relocate people to 702 Nicol Street. Warming Centre services resumed at 2025 Bowen Road on 2024-JAN-17.

Prior to the opening of the warming centre service, and as required in the good neighbourhood commitments outlined in the service agreement, ICCS delivered letters to residents and businesses living or operating within 100 metres of the centre. These letters were delivered over the winter holidays, due to this, a handful of residents reported that they did not receive notification of the warming centre services. ICCS also provided tours of the warming centre allowing residents to view the operations. In addition, ICCS received neighbourhood concerns on social media about the warming centre operation and ICCS staff attempted to reach out to all those who voiced concerns to provide opportunity for dialogue and information sharing. City Staff also received a number of emails and phone calls reporting an increase in social disorder and the visible presence of people experiencing homelessness. ICCS staff worked with the City, CSOs, and the RCMP to mitigate these impacts on the neighbourhood. On 2024-JUN-10, City Staff and ICCS Staff attended a meeting with residents living at Meredith Courts to discuss the residents' experience of living in close proximity to the warming centre. Residents shared frustration about not receiving adequate notification of the warming centre service and safety concerns with increased drug use and criminal behaviour in the area. Ongoing dialogue and future meetings will be scheduled with ICCS Staff and residents of Meredith Courts to support information sharing and transparency.

ICCS accessed additional funds from Island Health to provide an additional 5 hours of warming centre services daily. The funds provided additional staffing support, program supplies, and additional food resources.

The ICCS warming centre service provided one additional month of service with the support of Federal Reaching Home Designated Funding¹ Program received through the Nanaimo Community Advisory Board (CAB). The warming centre closed on 2024-APR-30.

4. Unitarian Shelter

The Unitarian Shelter provided extreme cold warming centre services from 2024-JAN-11 to 2024-JAN-16 when EMCR weather thresholds were met. Up to 27 existing overnight clients

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.

staying at the shelter were able to stay on site during the day to stay warm. A lunch meal was provided along with activities such as movie viewing and board games. The Unitarian was also able to provide connections to medical, mental health, and social supports through existing partnerships with other agencies.

5. Community Safety Officers

The CSOs provided supports to all three warming centre services by responding to Calls for Service from warming centre service providers, businesses, and residents. In addition, CSOs participated in community and service provider planning meetings. The CSOs accessed Island Health funds to purchase blankets, ponchos, jackets, hand warmers, tarps, hot soup, and beverages to distribute while on patrol to individuals who did not have access to a warming centre or an overnight shelter.

During the extreme cold weather event in January, the CSO team also provided overtime Staffing supports to the warming centres allowing the centres to remain open on a 24-hour basis. They also coordinated transportation supports for clients wanting to get to warming centres. In addition, the CSOs provided wellness checks and distributed warming supplies for individuals who were not able to access warming centres. EMCR funds were accessed to provide coverage for CSO overtime wages.

Lessons Learned

Through provincial legislation, the City plays a role in coordination and the provision of emergency response to events that can impact life-safety within our area of jurisdiction. Incidents of extreme weather pose a risk to vulnerable populations, and the City's response procedures are activated when certain temperature thresholds are met and/or when a public health emergency is declared. Our emergency response is defined in our Emergency Management Plan and the Extreme Weather Response Procedures, which are documents required through the same provincial legislation.

Although they are vital to our response, it can be extremely challenging to spontaneously establish cooling and warming centres as the arrangement of facilities and staff takes time and multi-agency coordination, all while resources for both are extremely thin. In particular, resourcing trained, capable, and available staff is the most challenging in these events. There are also challenges in finding suitable facilities and a service provider willing and able to provide services with short notice, as third-party staff and facilities all need to be arranged. This is a task that is challenging at the best of times and sometimes can be impossible, which can leave our vulnerable populations dangerously exposed.

Having established, daytime warming centre services allowed for a straightforward expansion of services during extreme weather events with specially trained staff available to support people with complex needs. This alleviated acute life-safety risk for individuals able to receive shelter and fulfilled the City's legislated requirement to adequately account for public safety during emergencies.

The extreme cold weather services provided this past winter season, as part of the City's emergency response, would not have been possible without the support and expertise of the City's CSOs and the MHSU team from Island Health. CSOs and MHSU team members provided

staffing support to the warming centres allowing them to operate on a 24-hour basis during the city's coldest nights. In addition, the funds received from Island Health provided additional support to the warming centres, which could not be funded by City or EMCR funds. For example, without the funds from Island Health to rent the portable toilet, the warming centre operated by 7-10 Club would have closed due to plumbing issues. The partnerships between the City, the CSOs, Island Health, and community partners are a result of the ongoing collaborative work done on a regular basis throughout the year.

In addition to providing lifesaving warming services, the warming centres addressed gaps for basic need services for the unsheltered population and provided relief to other social support programs that were overburdened. Anecdotal reports from other social support programs operating downtown report that the need for meals and basic need services such as clothing, drastically increased immediately after the closure of the two downtown warming centres. The only consistent meal provision being provided in the downtown area is provided by Wisteria Community Association and the 7-10 Club bagged lunch program. There are no breakfast meals being provided and no meals being provided indoors unless individuals have access to a bed at one of the local shelters. The RCMP Bike Patrol and the CSOs report that without the warming centres, it has been challenging to move unsheltered people out of public spaces, doorways, or parks without daytime services to direct them to.

The placement of warming centres has impacts on the surrounding neighbourhoods and good neighbour agreements can only do so much to address the behaviours of individuals with complex needs after they leave the warming centres. For this reason, it is important to carefully evaluate the willingness of service providers to work with the community, the police and CSO's and to consider factors such as occupancy limits, hours of operation, and staffing supports in place including the knowledge and experience of staff. It is important to commit funding early in the season to provide sufficient time to identify suitable operators and locations.

Next Steps

Staff continue to look for funding and partnership opportunities to provide more stable supports for people experiencing homelessness. On 2023-SEP-27, the Reaching Home Designated Funding Program for Nanaimo closed a call for proposals to address local homelessness needs for the Federal 2024/2025 funding cycle. The 2024/2025 Reaching Home grant application recognized input from people with living/lived experience (PWLE) and they requested more options to access drop-in services in a variety of locations to access basic need services such as showers, laundry, meals, and warming/cooling services. No eligible grant applications were submitted to operate a drop-in hub for 2024/2025, however, a new round of grant applications will be open over summer 2024 for the 2025/2026 fiscal year. Nanaimo is anticipated to receive \$1,034,866 for the 2025/2026 funding cycle. The CAB is a committee that oversees the distribution of the Reaching Home Designated funds within the City of Nanaimo.

On 2024-JUN-05, the CAB held a special meeting to discuss fund allocations for the 2025/2026 fiscal year. At this meeting, Staff presented the CAB with an opportunity to leverage Reaching Home funds with City funds to support up to two, year-round drop-in hubs that could serve as warming/cooling centres during extreme weather events should Council wish to fund daytime warming centre services for the upcoming 2024/2025 winter season. By leveraging both City and Reaching Home funds, and using the 2023/2024 daytime warming centre budgets as a baseline, two drop-in hub services could be feasibly funded from November 2024 to 2026-MAR-31.

On 2024-JUN-12, the Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization (SPO) held a meeting with select CAB members to discuss the idea of leveraging City and Reaching Home funds. The working group drafted the following motion for the CAB to consider:

“The Ad Hoc committee established at the June 5th special meeting the Reaching Home Community Advisory Board of the N-CAB recommends that the N-CAB supports the concept of matching up to \$500,000 of City of Nanaimo funding for the purpose of supporting a year-round drop in hub concept”

The CAB held an e-vote between 2024-JUN-12 and 2024-JUN-13, 11 CAB members voted and all voted in favour of the motion.

In addition, Staff are supporting the SPO in identifying operators and locations that can provide overnight shelter services under BC Housing’s Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Program for the 2024/2025 winter season. The SPO is hosting a debrief meeting for those involved in the EWR program that launched in March 2024, however, that date has not been confirmed. There may be an opportunity to include a EWR program within the daytime drop-in hubs or warming centres should there be operator capacity and a suitable location identified.

Finally, as outlined in the City’s Extreme Weather Response Procedure, Staff will begin winter preparations in early fall 2024 and will host pre-season meetings with community partners to gauge existing resources including staffing capacity and any expansion services that could be offered should EMCR funds be made available for extreme weather events.]

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The City has \$184,257 in remaining funding from the 2023/2024 winter season. In addition, the City has \$500,000 of 2023 surplus that was allocated to the Special Initiatives Reserve to help provide support services to the unhoused population in 2024.

The \$141,351 in Island Health grant funding could be used to offset a portion of the City funds spent during the 2023/2024 winter season. This would result in funding being returned to the Special Initiatives Reserve to fund other City projects and priorities or the funding can be allocated to help support two year-round drop-in hubs or warming centres.

The total operating funds provided for the 2023/2024 City-funded warming centres, including the provision of additional services through the Island Health grant funds, was \$582,743. To provide a similar level of service, should Council wish to fund daytime drop-in hubs or warming centres starting in the fall 2024, Staff suggest reallocating all the remaining 2023/2024 winter season funding in addition to allocating \$400,000 of the \$500,000 allocated to the Special Initiatives Reserve to provide support services to the unhoused population. The remaining \$100,000 will be available to undertake additional initiatives in 2024.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council:
 1. allocate \$400,000 from the Special Initiative Reserve and reallocate the remaining 2023/2024 winter season funding to match funds provided by the Reaching Home Community Advisory Board to support up to two year-round drop-in hubs that can

- also serve as warming and cooling centre services for the City of Nanaimo's extreme weather response starting in the 2024 winter season; and,
2. direct Staff to provide Council with an evaluation of the drop-in hub service as part of the City's extreme weather response for future funding consideration in summer 2025.
 - The advantages of this option: Unhoused or precariously housed individuals will have ongoing access to warming and cooling centre services during extreme weather as well as year-round access to social supports and basic need services until 2026-MAR-31.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Providing funds for two year-round drop-in hubs will limit any other responses the City may wish to take to address homelessness. Reaching Home Designated funding is distributed annually and may not be available for year-round drop-in hubs after the 2025/2026 funding cycle. In addition, Staff time will be required to work with the Nanaimo Community Advisory Board to coordinate an evaluation of the year-round drop-in hubs. Finally, Island Health grant funds would not be allocated to offset costs already incurred by the City.
 - Financial Implications: The 2024 – 2028 Financial Plan will be amended for the allocation from the Special Initiatives Reserve.
 2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council allocate \$400,000 from the Special Initiatives Reserve and reallocate the remaining 2023/2024 winters season funding to support up to three daytime warming centres that can also provide expanded services during extreme weather events for the 2024/2025 winter season.
 - The advantages of this option: Unhoused or precariously housed individuals will have access to warming centre services for the 2024/2025 winter season.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Staff time will be required to identify service providers with space and capacity to provide short-term warming centre services. In addition, Staff time will be required to manage the service agreements. Island Health grant funds would not be allocated to offset costs already incurred by the City.
 - Financial Implications: The 2024 – 2028 Financial Plan will be amended for the allocation from the Special Initiatives Reserve.
 3. That the Finance and Audit Committee provide alternative direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The City provided \$474,094 to fund three warming centres for the 2023/2024 winter season.
- Island Health contributed \$250,000 in funds to the City to support the three City-funded warming centres and other warming support services.
- Approximately 138 unsheltered individuals (at one time) had access to three City-funded warming centres over the 2023/2024 winter season, however, on average the warming centres received 199 daily visits.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Nob Hill Neighbourhood Impact Statements

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