



MINUTES

SPECIAL MAYOR'S LEADERS' TABLE

Friday, May 3, 2024, 9:01 A.M.
Boardroom, Service and Resource Centre,
411 Dunsmuir Street, Nanaimo, BC

- Present: Mayor L. Krog, Chair
Donna Hais, Chair of Board of Nanaimo Port Authority
Bob Moss, Tectonica Management
Dave Witty, Past Chair Nanaimo Airport Commission
- Absent: Richard Horbachewski, Chief Advancement Officer and AVP
External Relations, Vancouver Island University
Erralyn Joseph, Councillor, and Assistant Negotiator, for
Snuneymuxw First Nation
Mark Walsh, Secretary-Treasurer at Nanaimo Ladysmith Public
School District 68
- Staff: D. Lindsay, Chief Administrative Officer
B. Sims, General Manager, Engineering and Public Works
K. Robertson, Deputy Corporate Officer
N. Sponaule, Communication Advisor
J. Vanderhoef, Recording Secretary
- Others: Bern Muller, Director, Salvation Army, New Hope Centre
John McCormick, Executive Director, Nanaimo Systems Planning
Organization
Andrew Thornton, Research and Knowledge Mobilization Lead,
Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization

1. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:

The Special Mayor's Leaders' Table Meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA:

It was moved and seconded that the Agenda be adopted. The motion carried unanimously.

* Denotes electronic meeting participation as authorized by "Council Procedure Bylaw 2018 No. 7272"

3. AGENDA ITEMS:

1. Discussion re: Homelessness Topic

Mayor Krog introduced Bern Muller, Director, Salvation Army New Hope Centre, John McCormick, Executive Director, Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization, and Andrew Thornton, Research and Knowledge Mobilization Lead, Nanaimo Systems Planning Organization, who had been invited to participate in the meeting.

Presentation:

1. David Witty and Bob Moss provided a PowerPoint presentation. Highlights included:

- Reviewed some of the reasons for the increase in homelessness and noted that it has been an incremental process
- Recognizing the homelessness issue as a crisis
- Provided statistics related to homelessness in Nanaimo
- Noted some of the work completed to date to address homelessness
- Compared the percentages of homeless and unsheltered homeless in Nanaimo to other communities
- The number of homeless has been increasing at a rate of 30% per year over the past four years and could reach 2,500 in 2030
- Currently reacting to individual/one off emergencies rather than in a coordinated/integrated way
- Approximately \$21 million a year (from all levels of government) is being spent to support people on the street and could be redirected to take people off the street through housing
- Reviewed personal experiences travelling to Switzerland
- Successful homeless management is done in Switzerland through the Housing First Plus model
- Due to the incremental growth of homelessness many people have come to accept homelessness as a new way of life and find the issue overwhelming
- Need to take a more vigorous approach
- Reviewed the Housing First approach used in Medicine Hat
- Advocated for a Housing First Plus:
 - Housing is a human right
 - Housing needs to be provided in a variety of ways
 - Housing on its own will fail. It must include individualized supports and wraparound services

- The four pillars of a substance abuse program include: harm reduction, therapy/treatment, prevention, and enforcement
- The current focus in Canada and Nanaimo is providing housing but not the supports around housing
- Outlined the financial benefits of transferring funds towards a Housing First Plus approach
- The federal and provincial government must be approached in the near term for their support to implement a robust action plan to address Nanaimo's homeless crisis
- Suggested that the Mayor's Leaders' Table (MLT) recommend that Council initiate a Housing First Plus approach, and take action to finally address all of the requirements of homelessness, including the long-term provision of affordable housing

Table discussion took place. Highlights included:

- Identifying resources within the City's control to be reallocated towards the suggested changes
- Suggestion to create a new position "City Director of Housing" whose role is to move pieces ahead
- Concerns regarding how funds are allocated currently
- Suggestion to host a conference regarding homelessness
- Medicine Hat is an example of the provincial government investing in homelessness in 2009 and now the results of that are becoming apparent
- Public response is more towards anger than empathy towards homeless individuals at this stage and drug addiction is a significant issue
- Without supports in place, increased housing will not improve the situation
- Different government/legal structure in Switzerland and how to implement a similar program in Canada
- National conversations are being held around this topic
- Other levels of government are in debt with minimal funding available to provide supports without clear cooperation from various levels of government
- Nanaimo's climate making it possible for people to survive outside year-round versus the colder climate of other municipalities across the province
- Those homeless individuals who are visible on the streets are often chronically homeless and are the most challenging to house. It would

be a more efficient use of resources to address prevention and take a proactive approach to keep people housed

- Community churches and other organizations are working to coordinate efforts with the Nanaimo System Planning Organization (SPO) to provide housing options
- Providing services in Nanaimo is challenging due to the geography and how the city is stretched out without centralized resources
- Ensuring prevention is addressing people that will become unhoused such as women fleeing domestic violence, potentially with children, and what resources they will need
- The importance of a bottom-up approach and taking issues to other levels of government and demanding their support
- Medicine Hat has experienced 0% population growth during their 0% homelessness while Nanaimo has experienced 10% population growth
- Concerns regarding staffing the supports being proposed and the significant costs for land costs acquisitions
- A private/public partnership model for housing has worked with a social or public group that runs the facilities funded by the federal government
- The implications of being on an island and how that impacts the homeless situation locally
- The Housing Needs Report is addressing many of these topics
- Cities of Nanaimo's size appear to be having the most issues with homelessness
- Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) impacted income distribution data during COVID
- Island Health and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction are open to sharing information and coordinating efforts
- This is a North American crisis, and the City of Nanaimo does not have the bricks and mortar, or the people, to implement these services
- Homelessness being a topic of the upcoming Provincial election
- Desire to pass a motion recommending that Council adopt a Housing First Plus model and take urgent action to address homelessness including long-term affordable housing
- Healthcare and housing are Provincial responsibilities/jurisdictions
- Need to flush out specifics regarding what the City is able to do

Dale Lindsay, Chief Administrative Officer, spoke. Highlights included:

- Staff find the homeless issue challenging as they are trying to deal with individual issues in order to maintain the operation of the City
- The City endorsed a housing first policy a few years ago and working with BC Housing has implemented six or seven housing units within the City with more on the way
- The City has spent public funds to provide housing resources and expected services to be provided in those buildings; however, there are challenges due to staffing shortages
- The City has shifted its land acquisition budget away from parks and has been focused on housing projects
- The City is very limited in where/how it can gather resources as funds are generated through taxation
- Concern regarding the impact of fentanyl and the higher level of supports/care needed as a result of significant brain damage

Table discussion continued. Highlights included:

- Clarification regarding what housing first means and the need for supporting services to make it housing first plus
- Comparison between the current healthcare conversation and these homeless issues, and the need to change individual group conversations to form an ecosystem made of key stakeholders
- Potential for a recommendation to Council suggesting that a grass roots group be created to lead other stakeholders to the table for a cohesive discussion. The City would sit at the table but would not be responsible for it
- The number of people that can be impacted on the street is limited and there is a need to address early intervention where a change can be made
- Potential to include wording in a motion to expedite the implementation of a new Health and Housing Task Force through the SPO
- Wording of a potential motion to be discussed further to clarify specific details and to coordinate with Staff to understand implications

4. ADJOURNMENT:

It was moved and seconded at 11:02 a.m. that the meeting adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.

CHAIR

CERTIFIED CORRECT:

DEPUTY CORPORATE OFFICER