



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 0890-20

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: July 16, 2025

Subject: 971 Cumberland Road – Authority to apply for a Temporary Use Permit

PURPOSE: For Council to consider giving authority to Lookout Housing and Health Society to apply for a Temporary Use Permit at 971 Cumberland Rd, a City-owned property.

BACKGROUND:

The 2023 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count in the Comox Valley unveiled a worrying escalation in homelessness, with a recorded 272 individuals experiencing homelessness—more than doubling the 132 individuals identified in 2020. This data, gathered nearly two years ago, underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and community support.

In summer 2024, the City of Courtenay requested authority to lead the development and implementation of a Winter Shelter Strategy on behalf of the region with the financial support of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), including facilitating the establishment of winter shelter services for the 2024/2025 winter season.

In December 2024, Council through an emergency policy decision, facilitated the use of a recently acquired City property (971 Cumberland Road) for the provision of winter shelter services in the 2024 / 2025 winter season until April 15, 2025. Following this decision, Lookout Housing and Health Society (Lookout) was funded by BC Housing to operate an Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelter at this location based on the Community EWR Plan developed by the Coordinator for the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (CVCEH) and approved by BC Housing. The shelter operated for 46 nights and provided 668 overnight stays from February through April 2025.

A report summarizing the impacts and outcomes of the EWR shelter at 971 Cumberland Road, including feedback from the operator, local service providers and partners, shelter guests, neighbouring businesses and residents was presented to Council on May 21, 2025.¹ The report outlines that the shelter effectively delivered critical shelter services that met the urgent needs of unhoused community members and also identified the neighbourhood impacts and observations of this service. The report provided considerations and potential actions to improve both service outcomes and address neighbourhood impacts when planning any future winter shelter activation.

DISCUSSION:

Winter Shelter Strategy

Development of the regional Winter Shelter Strategy builds on the significant efforts of the regional EWR Task Force, Winter Shelter Working Group, as well as the advocacy and work of the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, service providers, peers, and others in the Comox Valley over the past few years.

¹ Extreme Weather Response End of Season Report, City of Courtenay, Council Meeting May 21, 2025. [Extreme Weather Response Shelter – End of Season Report](#)

A key priority of the Winter Shelter Strategy was the identification and activation of a location for a winter shelter for the 2024 / 2025 season. Over the past two years, community groups and local governments worked collectively and urgently to identify suitable locations for winter shelter services. This included reviewing over 60 properties across a wide range of commercial, private, and publicly owned spaces. Despite this significant effort, including potential lease negotiations, building and fire code reviews, and partner and funder discussions, no shelter was able to be activated for the 2023/2024 season, and a location had not yet been identified well into the early 2024/2025 winter shelter season months. Following the City's acquisition of 971 Cumberland Road in December 2024, the vacant, City-owned property was identified as the most promising option to deliver winter shelter services for the 2024/2025 season and Council facilitated its use through a resolution of Council at the December 11, 2024 meeting.

Based on learnings from the 2024/2025 activation of the EWR at 971 Cumberland Rd, recommendations and considerations will be applied to inform the creation of a regional action plan for winter shelter activation in future years. Completing a fulsome Winter Shelter Strategy and action plan for the Comox Valley is essential to ensuring the community does not find itself once again urgently seeking shelter locations, operators, and funding well into the cold weather season as happened in late 2024. It is expected that the Winter Shelter Strategy will be completed in summer 2025 and will provide recommendations regarding decision making, roles and responsibilities, and actions that will position the Comox Valley to be able to better respond to opportunities as they arise and ensure that the full spectrum of winter shelter services are considered and planned for, as well as maximizing access to funding streams available through the Province.

BC Housing Shelter Funding & Timelines

Throughout development of the Winter Shelter Strategy, including activation of the EWR shelter for the 2024/2025 season, staff have been in regular contact with BC Housing regarding funding availability, approval processes, and timelines. BC Housing staff have shared the following funding timelines and processes with city staff:

- Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Shelters²:
 - EWR Community Plans are due no later than September 30 annually, including proposed nightly budgets by an operator and site identification.
 - It is the operator's responsibility to obtain approval by the municipality and the fire department for use as an EWR shelter.
 - BC Housing is committed to reviewing EWR Community Plans throughout the season, however funding is allocated based on first come first served basis following the September 30 deadline.
- Temporary Winter Shelters³:
 - BC Housing have shared that decisions regarding funding for Temporary Winter Shelters for the 2025/2026 season will be made in summer 2025.
 - Funding allocations are based on likelihood of shelter activation, with those shelter programs with confirmed locations being funded first, followed by those with potential for activation, until such time as all funding is allocated.
 - For the 2024/2025 winter season, the city was informed by BC Housing that funding allocations for Temporary Winter Shelters were completed by the end of August 2024.

BC Housing has recently shared that they have identified Courtenay as a potential location to receive Temporary Winter Shelter funding. In order to avoid a repeat of the urgent nature of this past season's EWR

² [About the Extreme Weather Response Program | BC Housing](#)

³ [Emergency Shelter Services and Support | BC Housing](#)

activation, it is recommended that the site selection process for the 2025/2026 winter season be facilitated in a timely manner well before the cold weather.

971 Cumberland Road

2024/2025 EWR Operation

The City owned property at 971 Cumberland Rd was activated as an EWR shelter from February through to April 15, 2025 following building renovations and modifications necessary to comply with building and fire code requirements for sheltering. As per the “Extreme Weather Response End of Season Summary Report” presented to Council on May 21, 2025, the EWR effectively met the needs of unhoused community members during times of extreme winter weather – providing a safe, sheltered space to sleep overnight. However, neighbouring residents and businesses provided feedback that the shelter increased the observance of loitering, sheltering, and public consumption of substances, including increased presence of drug paraphernalia, in the surrounding neighbourhood. The majority of feedback was supportive of shelter services in general, although concerns were raised about the location at 971 Cumberland Road due to its proximity to a daycare, residences, and schools.

The site at 971 Cumberland Road is zoned Industrial Two (I-2), a zoning classification that does not allow shelter services. To facilitate the temporary operation of a winter shelter, Council via resolution at the December 11th, 2024, exercised their authority under Section 20(2) of the Community Charter to not strictly enforce the zoning bylaw until April 15th, 2025.

Authority to Apply for a Temporary Use Permit (TUP)

Prior to finalizing shelter program funding allocations, BC Housing requires confirmation of site availability and suitability, including any necessary permissions from local governments and approvals from fire and building officials. Because shelter service providers must secure these permissions and approvals prior to BC Housing funding approvals, providers are not in positions to enter into lease or license agreements for use of spaces until these steps are completed and funding is confirmed. Therefore, it is not an option to first lease the lands and then have the service provider apply for a Temporary Use Permit (TUP).

BC Housing has recently shared that it is holding funding for a potential Temporary Winter Shelter at 971 Cumberland Rd, and subsequent to a successful TUP application and the site being secured, BC Housing would finalize an operating agreement with the shelter operator. Lookout has now approached staff indicating their interest in pursuing the use of 971 Cumberland Rd for winter shelter purposes. As 971 Cumberland Rd is a city-owned property, the City would need to authorize any third parties / external agencies to apply for uses and or permissions related to City-owned properties. Providing such authority does not in any way imply approval of the use but rather allows for council to hear from the public via the TUP process and then either reject or approve such use after consideration of public comments.

Lookout Housing and Health Society (Lookout) operated the EWR at 971 Cumberland Rd and have indicated to staff that they would like to further explore the use of this location for Temporary Winter Shelter. Lookout has indicated that they are confident that with more planning and preparation time, including for community engagement and consultation, that many of the concerns raised by neighbouring businesses and residents could be addressed and mitigated.

Based on the experience of the Extreme Weather Response shelter in the 2024/2025 season, staff support that Lookout be given authority to apply for a Temporary Use Permit and or other required permissions and or approvals at this City-owned location for the future provision of winter shelter services. A decision of Council authorizing Lookout to make such an application in no way provides explicit or tacit approval of the use. It will however allow for a public process as outlined in the City of Courtenay Development Procedures Bylaw No. 3106, 2023. A public process would also respond to the feedback provided by residents regarding

the perception of a lack of transparency and public input opportunities into the decision made by Council in December 2024 based on emergency conditions.

If Council authorizes Lookout to apply for a TUP, Council would hear the application and make a decision at that time regarding the use of 971 Cumberland Rd for the provision of winter shelter services. If Council approves a Temporary Use Permit, Council could at that time direct staff to enter in to the necessary forms of agreement to facilitate Lookout's use of the property (such as a Lease or License). If council does not approve the TUP, other potential options for a location for winter shelter will need to be considered by Lookout and the City or region.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

OCP, 2022

Affordable Housing

- AH 13: Identify undeveloped and underdeveloped municipal sites for future affordable housing projects with emphasis on providing a mix of tenures including supportive housing.
- AH 18: Advocate for senior government funding for affordable housing projects and initiatives.

Social Infrastructure

- SI 6: Identify an appropriate role for the City in the delivery of social infrastructure in relation to other organizations, agencies, and jurisdictions that provide services for equity-priority groups.
- SI 8: Continue to support regional partners on program administration and delivery for homelessness, poverty prevention, mental health, addiction, and overdose prevention programs.
- SI 21: Support volunteers, organizations, and other social assets to continue undertaking their work within the community

Zoning

Zoning for 971 Cumberland Road site is Industrial Two (I-2). This site was permitted to operate temporarily without strict enforcement of the Zoning Bylaw in accordance with Section 20(2) of the Community Charter, Emergency Powers, via Council resolution on December 11th, 2024 until April 15th, 2025.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Development and implementation of the regional Winter Shelter Strategy has been led by Recreation, Culture, and Community Services with support from several other departments including Planning, Building, Communications, and Corporate Services, as well as a hired consultant.

Should Council grant authority to a third-party to apply for a Temporary Use Permit for 971 Cumberland Rd, Development Services would facilitate the necessary reviews according to City policy and procedure and City of Courtenay Development Procedures Bylaw No. 3106, 2023.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

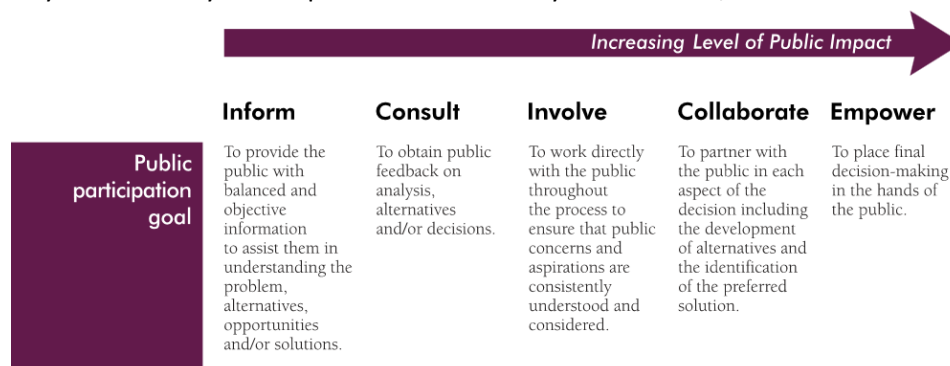
This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Social Infrastructure - Continue working with community agencies to deliver day services. Explore role in the provision of social support services, including future of Connect Centre.

- Social Infrastructure - Identify roles for the City in the delivery of social infrastructure outlined in the OCP; Implementation plan for delivery of social infrastructure
- Public Safety - Build capacity for emergency planning and local response
- Affordable Housing - Explore approaches to develop affordable housing: Review potential of city property for housing partnerships with BC Housing

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff would inform and consult the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. Should Council proceed with the recommendation, the applicant would be required to adhere to public notification and engagement protocols as guided by Division 8 (Temporary Use Permits) of the Local Government Act and the City of Courtenay Development Procedures Bylaw No. 3106, 2023.



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OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council hereby grants authority to Lookout Housing and Health Society in regards to 971 Cumberland Road, legally described as PID: 002-492-431 Lot A, Section 69, Comox District, Plan VIP26945, to apply for a Temporary Use Permit for the provision of winter shelter services.
2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

Prepared by: Susie Saunders, Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Reviewed by: Marianne Wade, Director of Development Services
Kate O'Connell, Director of Corporate Services

Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.P.I., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)