



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT

To: Council

File No.: 2980-20

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: October 25, 2023

Subject: 685 Cliffe Avenue – Lease Renewal and Temporary Washroom Consideration

PURPOSE: To Seek Council approval of a one-year lease renewal for the Connect Community Access Centre in accordance with the 2021 Lease Agreement, for the property located at 685 Cliffe Avenue, and for Council to provide direction on the consideration of placement of a temporary washroom at the location.

BACKGROUND:

The Comox Valley Transition Society (CVTS) has operated the Connect Centre at 685 Cliffe Avenue since 2019 first via Occupancy Agreement and more recently via Lease Agreement. Since 2019, the property has been used to provide day centre services for individuals experiencing homelessness, extreme weather shelter or emergency shelter as authorized by Council.

On November 1, 2021 Council entered into a Lease Agreement with the CVTS for a portion of the property located at 685 Cliffe Avenue. In 2022 CVTS requested an amendment to the 2021 Lease Agreement to expand the lease area to incorporate the entire building. With Council's approval of the lease, renovations were completed that facilitated the combination of the original and expanded lease space. This renovation enabled CVTS to enter into an operating agreement with BC Housing for the provision of a temporary year-round overnight shelter and increased the available shelter beds at the Connect Centre to 33 per night.

The 2021 Lease Agreement can be found in Attachment 1 and the 2022 Lease Renewal and Amendment Agreement can be found in Attachment 2. The Lease Agreement includes lease term renewal options in one year increments up to a total of five years – each renewal is subject to Council approval. The second year of the term will expire on October 31, 2023. CVTS has requested a one-year renewal of their lease as per the attached letter (Attachment 3) and as such staff are seeking Council's approval of a one-year lease renewal.

In addition, staff, CVTS, and BC Housing have recently engaged in preliminary discussions about locating a temporary washroom facility next to Connect in order to address the a) insufficient washroom facilities available inside the facility and b) address concerns related to the impacts of public urination and defecation. Staff are seeking Council's direction before proceeding with further exploration of this opportunity.

DISCUSSION:

The results of the 2023 Homeless Count for the Comox Valley show that the number of people experiencing homelessness has more than doubled since 2020, increasing from 132 to 272. The count represents a snapshot in time and is likely an undercount as many people who are unhoused are not easily accessible or visible. Of the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness, 35% (n=95) were unsheltered meaning they stayed outside or were temporarily staying at someone else's place and / or using homelessness services. The remaining 65% were sheltered and stayed overnight in homeless shelters, including transition

houses, youth safe houses, people with no fixed address staying temporarily at hospitals, jails, or detox facilities; this number also includes those temporarily living what was previously the Travelodge.

The count results showed an 11% increase in those living with an acquired brain injury, 16% increase in those living with two or more health concerns, 8% increase in those who identify as Indigenous, and a decrease of 21% of people experiencing homeless for less than six months which indicates that individuals are staying homeless for longer as compared to the 2020 results.

The results of the 2023 Homeless Count demonstrate the increasing need for shelter and supports for those who are unhoused. Any decrease in the current level of shelter beds available and or support services would increase the numbers of individuals who are unsheltered and have significant impacts on the health and well-being of people experiencing homelessness in the community.

Connect Access Centre

The Connect Access Centre provides critical services to individuals who are unhoused or experiencing the traumatic impacts of mental illness and the unregulated toxic drug supply. The day program at Connect operates six days a week and provides individuals experiencing homelessness with access to: survival gear (tents, meals, snack, tarps and clothing), washroom and shower services (located at the Lewis Centre), hygiene supplies and PPE, primary health care and addiction medicine through the physician outreach team, connection to Integrated Case Management, social connections and decreased isolation, personal belonging storage, criminal justice system navigation support, and administrative support (e.g. housing applications, tax filings, income assistance etc.).

Overnight shelter services, in accordance with Section 4.3 of the agreement, are provided seven days a week from 7:00pm to 9:00am. Following facility renovations to expand Connect, CVTS entered into a temporary shelter operating agreement with BC Housing for the provision of these services throughout the year as the services were previously only available in winter months as an Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelter or based on grant funding.

CVTS is also a recipient of funding through the Strengthening Communities' Services Grant (SCG). SCG funds go towards day services and wrap around supports that are not funded through the shelter Operating Agreement with BC Housing. This funding supports the provision of survival and harm reduction supplies, additional daytime staffing and security, wages for people with lived and living experience of homelessness, and other critical services as outlined in the terms of the grant. An extension to the grant was received in September 2023 and additional funding made available to support the continuation of these services through to June 2024.

It is important to acknowledge that the location of Connect and the services it provides are often associated with rising community concerns with homelessness and associated impacts of mental illness and substance use harms. While the services Connect provides contribute partially to an increased congregation of individuals in the vicinity as they access Connect for critical health, nutrition, and social services, the 2023 Homeless Count for the Comox Valley demonstrates an overall increase in homelessness in the community since 2020 due to housing unaffordability, substance use harms, and mental health concerns. Without the services of Connect, the City would see a greater number of individuals unsheltered in the community as well as individuals without access to critical services. In addition, the physical facility of the Connect location

is not purpose-built and poses significant limitations on CVTS's ability to accommodate the full level of service needs within the facility itself including: capacity constraints, one publicly accessible washroom, lack of storage, and inadequate facility design for the current temporary use. It is for these reasons the City continues to advocate to the Province for a purpose-built shelter to relocate the essential services of Connect.

To mitigate concerns related to Connect, the 2021 Lease Agreement includes the following requirements:

- Article 5.15: The Tenant ... will ensure that no garbage, waste, biohazardous materials, or other debris accumulates on the Lease Area or the Perimeter by ensuring that all ... materials or other debris are removed ... at a minimum of two times per day with one of these checks occurring by 11:00am each day.
 - o Through funding received by the Strengthening Communities' Services Grant (SCG), CVTS employs individuals with lived and living experience to complete site clean ups of the leased area and perimeter two times per day, generally at 9:00am and 11:00am.
- Article 5.2: Community Advisory Committee [CAC] - ... the Tenant will establish a Community Advisory Committee
 - o The implementation of a CAC by CVTS has experienced numerous delays due to operational constraints, including staffing limitations and the move of the supportive housing program from the Travelodge to 1885 Cliffe Ave (previously the Super 8 Motel) and the subsequent establishment of a CAC for that location.
 - o However, the Executive Director for CVTS sits on the DCBIA Board of Directors, as well as the DCBIA Safety and Security Committee, where they regularly respond to and address concerns raised by DCBIA members.
 - o Staff have reviewed a draft Terms of Reference for the CAC that complies with the terms of the Lease Agreement and is reflective of other CACs, including the one currently in place at 1885 Cliffe Ave and have received confirmation from CVTS that a CAC will be established and meet before the end of October 2023.
 - o The purpose of the CAC is to assist in identifying and resolving issues, opportunities and concerns related to building operations; building positive relationships in the community; facilitating information sharing; and supporting the success of Connect.

In addition to providing funds towards the employment of people with lived and living experience of homelessness, SCG funds contribute towards increased daytime staff and on-site security for Connect. The additional staffing levels enable staff to be able to support and respond to patrons of Connect, including in crisis de-escalation and overdose response. On-site security supports safe and secure access and use of the leased area and perimeter; security does not have responsibility nor jurisdiction over activities outside of the leased area and perimeter (i.e. the parking lot or nearby businesses). Please see Attachment 4 outlining the Lease Area and Perimeter.

CVTS continues to demonstrate its willingness and desire to be a good tenant and to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of the Lease Agreement. The externalities associated with the services of Connect, while mitigated by community engagement strategies and peer led clean up crews, cannot be placed solely on the responsibility of Connect as the 2023 Homeless Count clearly demonstrates an increase in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the community and who require access to essential health, social, and nutritional services.

The provision of access to 685 Cliffe Avenue is intended as a temporary measure until such time as a purpose-built shelter facility is available. As per Council's direction, staff continue to work with BC Housing to identify a suitable location for a purpose-built shelter and to ensure that a new facility will adequately meet the needs of individuals who are unhoused in our community.

Temporary Washroom Facilities

Staff, CVTS, and BC Housing have entered into preliminary discussions about locating a temporary washroom facility next to Connect. There are two washrooms available within the Connect facility, with one washroom dedicated to staff and one for the public. One washroom is often insufficient to meet demand and often results in required repairs, biohazard concerns, and conflict between users. Additionally, the City receives complaints from adjacent neighbours and local businesses regarding public urination and defecation. While there are other public washrooms available in the vicinity (Urbaloo at 6th and England and Randy Wiwchar Plaza), for individuals with significant health or mobility challenges the distance to these washrooms may pose barriers and individuals accessing the services of Connect would prefer to access washroom facilities on site.

Through conversations with staff, BC Housing has offered the City the use of a temporary washroom facility that could be located next to Connect in the adjacent parking lot. Pursuing the temporary placement of a washroom facility will require significant work by staff and CVTS to analyse and understand the capital and operating impacts of such a facility.

Preliminary discussions with BC Housing, CVTS, and staff have identified the following initial considerations:

- Washrooms must be supervised to ensure the health and safety of users and the ongoing viability of the facility
- Placement and set up of the facility will require careful consideration in light of current neighbourhood congregation concerns and building code requirements
- Capital costs are estimated at \$50,000 to \$100,000 for the required sewer, water, and electrical connections

The funding received by CVTS through the Strengthening Communities' Services Grant is allocated to additional day staff and individuals with lived or living experience who could support the supervision of the temporary washroom facility. These funds conclude June 30, 2024 so a different source of funds would need to be identified to continue to support its operation following this date. While BC Housing has indicated they do not have funds currently available to support operating costs, operating agreements are negotiated annually and an opportunity may exist for CVTS to request additional funds for this service at that time (typically March / April).

Staff have conducted initial assessments of the connections required to service the temporary washroom facility and have estimated capital costs to be between \$50,000 and \$100,000. If Council directs staff to continue to explore the placement of a temporary washroom facility at this location staff would return with specific costs and recommended sources of funding.

While the placement of a temporary washroom facility adjacent to Connect would address concerns related to adequate washroom access at Connect as well as some issues with public urination and defecation, it

comes with capital and operating costs, and operational impacts that must be further considered. Staff are seeking Council direction before continuing with further consideration of this option.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

CVTS as tenant will bear the financial responsibilities as outlined in the November 1st 2022 Lease Agreement. Council has previously approved a rental subsidy for Connect and renewal of the lease agreement will continue this subsidy. The annual rent for the building is \$24,000 per year. If approved, the City would be required to advertise the provision of assistance acknowledging a \$48,000 per year rental rate subsidy (based on current market rental rates) as per the *Community Charter*.

If directed by Council, staff would return with detailed financial costs and recommended funding sources for the location of a temporary washroom facility adjacent to the Connect Centre.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Recreation, Culture, and Community Services (RCCS) provide support and relationship management to CVTS through the lease agreement, with the support of Civic Facilities and Corporate Services. This work includes lease management, repairs and renovations, administration of SCG funds, and other administrative tasks. Further work will be required by RCCS and Development Services to explore the feasibility of locating a temporary washroom facility at the site.

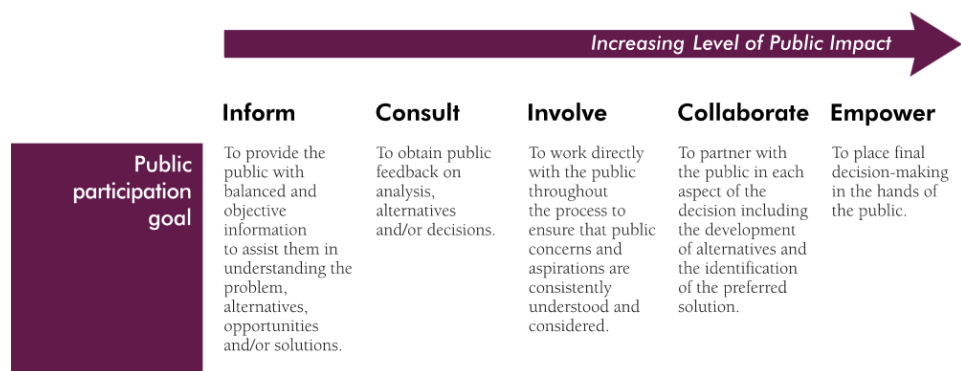
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

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.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff would inform the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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Staff will provide public notice to satisfy the statutory advertising requirements for the provision of assistance and disposition of City land per Section 24 of the *Community Charter*.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (to be made as separate resolutions):

1. THAT Council approve a one-year lease extension between the City of Courtenay and the Comox Valley Transition Society for the continued use of the property located at 685 Cliffe Avenue, PID: 006-102-930, Lot 3, Section 61 Comox District Plan VIP3817, as authorized and in accordance with Section 2.1(e) of the November 1, 2021 Lease Agreement.
2. THAT Council direct staff to explore the placement of a temporary washroom facility adjacent to the Connect Centre and report back to Council with recommendations

Option 2:

1. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

Option 3:

1. THAT Council give notice to the Comox Valley Transition Society of its intent to terminate the Lease Agreement in accordance with Section 2.1(a) "Demise and Term".

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 2021 Lease Agreement
2. 2022 Lease Renewal and Amendment Agreement
3. Letter from Comox Valley Transition Society
4. 685 Cliffe Ave. Lease Area and Perimeter

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