



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

## STAFF REPORT

**To:** Council

**File No.:** 5020-01

**From:** Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

**Date:** December 6, 2023

**Subject:** Warming Centre and Extreme Weather Response Shelter Update

**PURPOSE:** To provide Council an update on City of Courtenay's response and role in Warming Centre and Extreme Weather Response shelter activities and for Council to authorize the City Manager to enter into agreements with service providers as required.

### **DISCUSSION:**

City of Courtenay staff have been involved in recent discussions regarding the support for and location of Warming Centres and Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelters.

### ***Warming Centres***

In response to extreme cold, warming centres may be opened for the public at the discretion of local governments and First Nations in affected areas. In the Comox Valley, warming centres are activated by the Comox Valley Emergency Program (CVEP) as authorized and funded by Emergency Management & Climate Readiness (EMCR) (formerly EMBC). Warming centre operations are coordinated by CVEP staff in partnership with regional emergency program liaisons and associated facility management staff.

Warming centres are temporary low-barrier drop-in spaces activated as a life safety measure during periods of extreme cold (based on temperature thresholds of -4 or feels like -4 and or during active winter warnings). Services are delivered by local service providers to offer a safe, warm, dry place of refuge with access to washroom facilities, a seating area, snacks, and refreshments. No sleeping accommodations are provided. While discussions to date have focused around the provision of warming centres overnight, they can be provided in daytime as well.

CVEP is coordinating the selection and activation of potential facilities for warming centres with each of the local governments in the Comox Valley. The City of Courtenay has offered the following facilities for warming centre activation:

- 1) Preferred option: Lower Native Sons Hall – Dining Room
- 2) Alternative option: Lewis Centre – Meeting Room

The Lower Native Sons Hall Dining room is preferred due to the facility amenities available (washroom and kitchen), ease of facility access, and facility safety and security; it is 900 square feet. If activated as a warming centre, the hours would likely be 10:00pm to 7:00am due to pre-existing rental and programming bookings in the space. Additional costs associated with activating a warming centre will be reimbursed through CVEP and EMCRC.

CVEP has selected Community Cares as the operator for warming centres in the Comox Valley. Before warming centre activation, staff will enter into agreement with the CVRD and or the service provider for the use of City of Courtenay facilities for the purpose of providing a Warming Centre. Staff will also confirm items related to roles, responsibilities, and risk management prior to entering into an agreement.

### ***Extreme Weather Response Shelters***

Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelters are one of three types of emergency shelter that BC Housing funds<sup>1</sup>:

- Year-round shelters (open year-round and generally running 24 hours a day, seven days a week)
- Temporary shelters (time bound shelter, i.e. temporary winter shelters that run every night from November 1 to April 30, regardless of weather)
- Extreme weather winter shelters (EWRs which are weather activated when sleeping outside could threaten health and safety, during the period of November 1 to March 31 annually)

EWRs are governed by BC Housing's EWR Program Framework<sup>2</sup> and the Assistance to Shelter Act<sup>3</sup>. The program is administered through community agencies and based on a community led extreme weather response plan. For the Comox Valley it is the Coalition to End Homelessness and Community Cares that are leading the community extreme weather response plan for individuals who are experiencing homelessness this Winter season. BC Housing provides time-limited funding to communities where there is not sufficient emergency shelter capacity. It also activates the Assistance to Shelter Act Assistance to Shelter Act (gov.bc.ca) which enables RCMP to bring people to shelter.

The terms of the activation (i.e. weather triggers) are outlined in the agreement between the operator and BC Housing. While activation triggers are locally determined, typical weather thresholds for EWRs are 0 or feels like 0, and or extreme weather alerts including but not limited to heavy rain, snow, and or wind.

Staff have been working collectively with other local governments and the Coalition to End Homelessness to identify suitable locations for a potential EWR location. Through this process staff have identified the Tsolum building as an available location. It is a separate building with a kitchen and washrooms, however it would only allow for ten sleeping beds due to size. While it would have minimal program or rental impacts, it is located in an area prone to flooding. Should this location be selected for an EWR clear policies would be put in place regarding relocating the shelter during periods of flooding where access might be impacted by flooding. In these situations, EWR operations would be relocated to the lower Native Sons Hall Dining room.

Before EWR activation could occur in a Courtenay facility, staff would work with Community Cares to ensure adequate and appropriate risk management and liability requirements are on place as per current practices. A facility use agreement would be required between the City and the service provider before the activation of an EWR.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Emergency Shelter Program | BC Housing](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Extreme Weather Response - Program Framework \(bchousing.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Assistance to Shelter Act \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

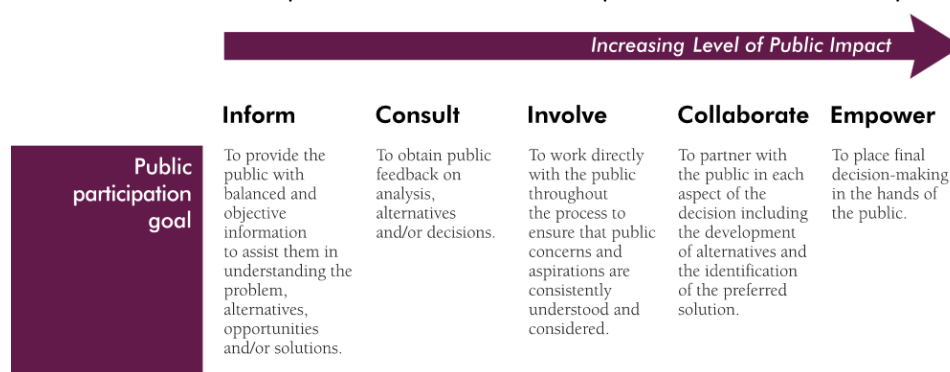
Incremental costs associated with providing space for the operation of a warming centre are reimbursable by EMCR through CVEP and will be approved in advance through preauthorization expense forms.

It is expected that incremental costs associated with providing a space for the operation of an EWR would be reimbursable through either a) the BC Housing EWR operating agreement or b) the funding provided by the CVRD towards the operation of an EWR for non-eligible BC Housing expenses.

Administrative and management oversight of these types of operations will be absorbed within the Recreation, Culture, and Community Services, as well as Fire Services, departments. However incremental costs will likely be incurred related to custodial and facility support which staff expect will be eligible for reimbursement through both programs.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

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



© International Association for Public Participation [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

## OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council approve the use of City facilities for the purpose of providing an Extreme Weather Response Shelter and/or Warming Centre in accordance with the Comox Valley Emergency Program and/or the Extreme Weather Response - Program Framework; and, THAT Council delegate authority to the City Manager to determine the terms and conditions of a facility use agreement as deemed necessary to facilitate the provision of the Extreme Weather Response Shelter and/or Warming Center; and, THAT the City Manager, Director of Recreation Culture, and Community Services, and the Director of Corporate Services be authorized to execute the agreement(s) on behalf of the City.
2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

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

Reviewed by: Kurt MacDonald, Courtenay Fire Chief

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