



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 4940-20

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: September 11, 2024

Subject: Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy Phase Three – Report Back

PURPOSE:

- 1) To provide Council with an update on the Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy (CVSUS) including the draft *Community Substance Use Strategy Phase Three Report*;
- 2) To seek Council approval of a 3-year (\$15,000 per year) \$45,000 grant to the Indigenous Women's Sharing Society (IWSS), subject to execution of a Fee for Service Agreement, in order to support continued implementation of the strategy; and,
- 3) To request that Council direct staff to send a letter to the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) supporting the transfer of unspent CVSUS funds to the IWSS for implementation of the strategy.

BACKGROUND:

City support of work around substance use has been long-standing; commencing in 2002 with the establishment of a Community Drug Strategy Committee, whose focus was primarily prevention through education and awareness activities, to the regional work underway today championed by the Comox Valley Substance Use Collaborative, with its focus on implementing a broad regional strategy aimed at reducing substance related harms.

Progress with the development and implementation of a regional substance use strategy has occurred in three phases, each phase culminating in a report presented to Council. These consecutive reports illuminate the current substance use context, progress with strategy development and implementation, milestones achieved, early impacts, and recommended next steps. Thus far Council has received the *Community Substance Use Strategy Phase One Report* (October 18, 2021), and the *Community Substance Use Strategy Phase Two Report*, plus a companion report *Walking Together: Towards a Stronger. More Integrated Substance Use Network in the Comox Valley* (September 17, 2023). A draft *Community Substance Use Strategy Phase Three Report* is attached for Council's receipt.¹

After receiving the phase one report, Council resolved the following:

1. THAT based on the October 18, 2021 staff report - *Report Back on Phase One of The Community Substance Use Strategy and Request from the Comox Valley Community Health Network for Continued Support*, Council approve OPTION 1 and receive for information the *Community Substance Use Strategy Phase One Report*; and,

¹ The draft Community Substance Use Strategy Phase Three Report is provided as Attachment 1

2. THAT Council direct staff to continue to work in partnership with the Comox Valley Community Health Network (CVHN) to support phase two and subsequent phases of the Community Substance Use Strategy; and
3. THAT annual operating budget funds of up to \$30,000 be included in the 2022 operating budget, and \$15,000 annually in the long-term financial plan to support phase two and subsequent phases of the strategy; and,
4. THAT staff work with the CVCHN to update the memorandum of understanding with phase two deliverables; and,
5. THAT the Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services be authorized to execute the memorandum of understanding.

On February 25, 2022, as directed by Council, staff updated the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and the CVCHN. This MOU:

- Identifies roles and responsibilities between the CVCHN and the City, and
- Requires an annual detailed workplan be submitted by the CVCHN as the facilitator of the project.

The MOU remains in place today on a month to month basis.

It is important to note that since the inception of the CVSUS project, regional work towards the development of a strategy has been overseen by the Comox Valley Community Health Network (CVCHN), with funding provided via multiple sources including but not limited to, the Comox Valley Community Foundation, the CVRD, City of Courtenay, the Village of Cumberland, and most recently the Town of Comox. Given the CVCHN is not a registered society, the CVRD has acted as a fiscal host agency, administering funds on behalf of the CVCHN.

The process has involved the establishment and facilitation of a regional Collaborative Table comprised of key individuals from various sectors including those who were experiencing the day to day realities of substance use. The mission of the Collaborative Table is to work together as a community to develop and implement a fair and equitable plan to reduce substance-related harms, including the prevention of substance use related deaths in the Comox Valley.

As the CVHN has fulfilled the initial request of the City to facilitate the development of a regional Substance Use Strategy, and given the network lacks the capacity for administration of funds and continued coordination of the implementation of the project, an aim of phase three was to secure a local registered society having complimentary vision, values, mandate, and capacity to administer finances and coordinate continued implementation of the strategy.

DISCUSSION:

Following receipt of the *Community Substance Use Strategy Report – Phase Two*, and per the MOU, the City received a detailed work plan for phase three of the project which identified deliverables, project schedule, key project milestones, project community interest holders, public engagement and performance measures².

² The CVHN's *Phase Three Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy Report on MOU Deliverables*, is provided as Attachment 2.

In phase three the Collaborative Table was strengthened, and implementation of recommendations found in the CVSUS began. Significant progress was made in the following four focus areas:

- 1) **Governance:** In this period, to strengthen relationships and trust amongst Collaborative Table members, and to achieve a more concerted cohesive effort towards reducing substance use harm, guidelines for working together and a support plan for peers was developed. Moreover, training opportunities were offered with a focus on working with peers and cultural awareness and humility. Peers were afforded an opportunity for sharing and learning by supporting their participation at two different conferences.

Most notably in this period, the Collaborative Table sought, and secured an expression of interest from the IWSS to take on the responsibility of overseeing continued administration and coordination of the implementation of the CVSUS. That the IWSS take on this role was unanimously supported by the CVCHN and the Collaborative Table.

- 2) **Action Tables:** in this period, two action tables were established to advance *CVSUS Phase Two* and *Walking Together* report recommendations:

- A table focussed on increasing substance use awareness programs for youth and their parents; and
- A table focussed on supporting improvements in safer supply services, overdose prevention sites and services, opioid agonist therapy, and peer assisted care services.
- Each table, coordinated by a Collaborative Table member, has engaged a broader network of community members, minimally communicating what is underway and sharing resources, maximally engaging in bold new innovations to build on existing momentum. The youth table has, for example, hosted two youth expos and is exploring the development of a youth council.

Moreover, in this period seeds were sown to establish two additional action tables:

- A table focussed on healthy public policy and infrastructure related to the location and the sale of alcohol and cannabis, transportation routes to rural places to improve access to services, and engagement of the business community in these discussions; and
- A table focussed on increasing awareness about substance use and services amongst seniors.
- Leads and members for these two additional tables have been identified. Preliminary work to assess the current landscape of activity in each area is underway. With continued leadership and support of the Collaborative Table, it is anticipated that each of these tables will be up in running in the fall/winter months of 2024.

In order to round out support of prioritized *CVSUS phase two* and *Walking Together* report recommendations, a final pair of action tables is desired and outstanding:

- A table to focus primarily on advocacy (for affordable non-market housing, for a safer supply of drugs, and for a services hub); and

- A table to support the creation of a medical detox centre and recovery based supportive housing.
 - Establishment of these two tables will be a focus in the 2025 and 2026 years.
- 3) **Data Collection and Review** – In this period, four data sharing agreements were made, and others are in process. Data collection has begun and is detailed in the Phase 3 report.
- 4) **Informing the Community** – A public event was held engaging 42 people, including those with lived or living substance use experience shared their stories about substance use harms and their journeys towards health and well-being. The event provided a venue to raise awareness, and inform the community about substance use and harms related to such use, the Collective Table, the CVSUS and progress to date.

Future substance strategy work including continued implementation of the recommendations from *the CVSUS Phase Two* and *Walking Together* reports is now dependent on the new lead agency, the IWSS, securing operational funds for the 2024, 2025, and 2026 years.

Based on the operational expenses of 2023, an annual operating budget of \$50,000 would enable IWSS to realize the following (sample deliverables):

- Hire and train/mentor a coordinator.
- Develop Indigenous partnerships with Indigenous peers/ people and organizations ongoingly to participate in collaboration and to create an equitable collaborative and one that is based on cultural safety and humility.
- Continue to facilitate regular monthly meetings of the collaborative, reaching out to community and engaging new members and partners to collaborate as opportunities arise.
- Continue to facilitate/support action tables with a view to have all six action tables underway in the 2025 and 2026 years, each table sharing information and resources, further developing plans and implementing activities to realize the recommendations in the CVSUS reports.
- Review the recommendations annually, to ensure actions are relevant, and a priority, given the rapidly changing substance use context. Make adjustments, adding in, deleting, and/or reprioritizing recommendations as the context requires.
- Continue to develop data sharing agreements, collect data, and to track and share progress.
- Host annual events to celebrate what has been accomplished, strengthen and expand activity, bring in new capacity, knowledge, skills, experiences at the Collaborative Table and Action Tables.
- Explore avenues to continue with cultural awareness and anti-stigma training.
- Continue fundraising activities to raise additional operational funds.
- Provide annual reports on progress.

IWSS anticipates meeting their operational budget goal in the 2024, 2025 and 2026 years with an annual grant of \$15,000 from the City of Courtenay in each of those years (per Council resolution October 18, 2021).

The \$15,000 grant from the City, plus transfer of unspent funds remaining in the CVRD account, plus a recent grant from the Town of Comox will meet the financial needs of IWSS for 2024.

An additional contribution of \$15,000 from the City in each of the 2025 and 2026 years will assist with leveraging additional funds from parties who have supported the strategy since inception. Delegations will

be made to each of the municipal and regional tables to provide an update on the strategy, and with a request for continued annual funding. IWSS will also seek additional grant funding from various sources in order to continue to implement the strategy.

Given the significant progress made to date to create a strong Collaborative Table that has taken charge and has demonstrated success in coordinated action to address substance use harm, and given IWSS requires funding to further the implementation of the recommendations in the CVSUS, staff are recommending that the City allocate the \$15,000 in annual Substance Use Strategy funding to IWSS for 2024, 2025, and 2026. Staff recommend that the funding is provided as a grant and that Council direct staff to enter into a fee for service agreement between the City and IWSS which outlines expectations and deliverables for the parties, as well as reporting requirements. The total value of the grant would be \$45,000: \$15,000 per year for each of the 2024, 2025, and 2026 years. The fee for service agreement would replace the existing MOU with the CVCHN.

It is also recommended that Council direct staff to send a letter to the CVRD in support of the transfer of any unspent CVSUS funds to the IWSS for implementation of the strategy.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

Community Charter

8 (2) A municipality may provide any service that the council considers necessary or desirable, and may do that directly or through another public authority or another person or organization.

Official Community Plan, 2022

Social Infrastructure

Objective 2: Coordinated, inclusionary, and systems-based responses are in place to address evolving complex social issues

- SI 6: Consider social determinants of health and adopt an evidence-based approach to policy formation, community education, advocacy, and decision making, including ensuring equity priority voices are included in the creation, delivery, and evaluation of services.
- SI 7: 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 15: Work regionally to further recommendations of the Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy Phase 1 Report (2021) including identifying an appropriate role for the City.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

A three-year \$45,000 total grant to support continued collaborative implementation of the strategy over the 2024, 2025, and 2026 fiscal years will come from the Recreation, Culture and Community Services Operating Budget. \$15,000 has already been set aside for this purpose in the 2024 financial plan. Moreover, \$15,000 per year for the 2025 and 2026 years has been earmarked for this purpose in the five-year Financial Plan.

If approved by Council, funds to support continued implementation of the strategy will be assigned, subject to the execution of a fee for service agreement between the City and the Indigenous Women’s Sharing Society.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Recreation Culture and Community Services staff will continue to support the substance use strategy by assigning staff to:

- Oversee the administration of the annual grant to ensure deliverables are met.
- Advise strategic planning activities.
- Communicate, and, as opportunity presents itself, engage the Comox Valley Substance Use Collaborative in complimentary City strategies
- Support policy and youth engagement action tables

It is anticipated that staff from Corporate Services (i.e. Bylaw), as well as Development Services will also be involved with this strategy as tables unfold and recommendations are actioned.

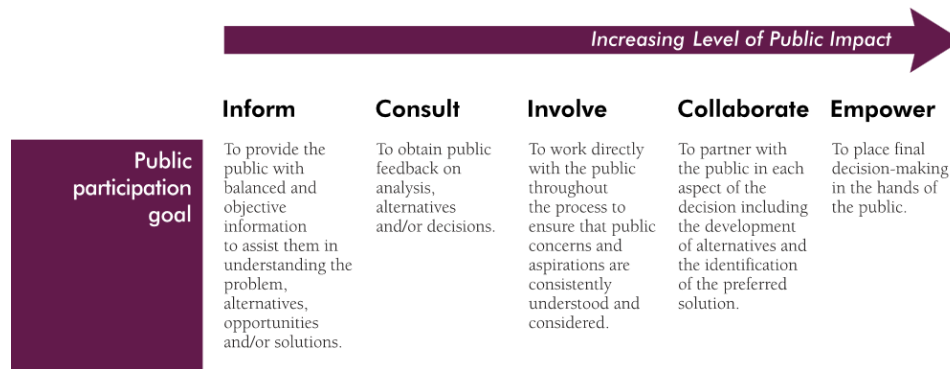
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- 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 ENGAGEMENT:

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



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OPTIONS:

1) THAT Council receive the *Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy – Phase Three Report*.

2) THAT Council delegate authority to the Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services to determine the service and reporting deliverables of a fee for service agreement between the City of Courtenay and Indigenous Women’s Sharing Society for a three year term to support the implementation of the Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy; and,

THAT subject to execution of the agreement the City provide the Indigenous Women’s Sharing Society \$15,000 per year, for a total of \$45,000, funded from tax revenue; and,

THAT the Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services be authorized to execute the agreement on behalf of the City.

3) THAT Council direct staff to send a letter to the Comox Valley Regional District supporting the transfer of unspent Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy funds to the Indigenous Women’s Sharing Society for implementation of the strategy.

4) THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Comox Valley Community Substance Use Strategy Phase Three Report
2. Phase Three Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy Report on MOU Deliverables

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