



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 2380-20

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: October 23, 2024

Subject: 685 Cliffe Avenue – Lease Renewal and Temporary Washroom and Storage Update

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 to provide Council with an update regarding the addition of temporary washroom facilities and improving the storage area beside Connect.

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 temporary 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. 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. CVTS has exercised three renewal options to date, including the current one, therefore one one-year renewal option remains. The third year of the term will expire on October 31, 2024. CVTS has requested a one-year renewal of their lease from November 1, 2024 to October 31, 2025 as per the attached letter (Attachment 2) and as such staff are seeking Council's approval of a one-year lease renewal (Attachment 3).

Per council resolution on July 31, 2024, staff, CVTS, BC Housing, and the surrounding community have been engaged in preliminary discussions about locating a temporary washroom facility and improved storage facilities next to Connect in order to address the a) insufficient washroom and storage facilities available inside the facility and b) address concerns related to the impacts of public urination and defecation.

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. 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 included those temporarily living in what was previously the Travelodge.

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 Community 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 as supported by grant funding.

CVTS was a recipient of funding through the UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Grant (SCG) administered by the City on behalf of the region, to provide supports for people experiencing homelessness. Between January 1, 2021 and August 31, 2024, CVTS received funding to support services and wrap around supports that are not funded through the shelter Operating Agreement with BC Housing. Services included referrals to medical care, social, legal, and housing services; provision of survival and harm reduction supplies; additional daytime staffing; and security; peer work, and other critical services as outlined in the terms of the grant.

Final metrics from CVTS illuminate the significant impact the Connect Centre has had on the health and safety of populations made vulnerable by homelessness. In the 2024 year alone, Connect staff assisted on average 100-150 people daily, recording 34,250 service interactions, including 25,391 meals, 821 showers, distribution of 8,390 harm reduction and 356 survival gear items, and responding to 491 overdoses. One of the most impactful aspects of the project, was the hiring of people with lived experience to build relationships with those living on the street as well as the surrounding businesses and community who resided in the area. Peers conducted clean sweeps of the street three times daily collecting 426 needles. Peers also assisted with rousing and moving their peers from business alcoves and other locations on 1437 occasions and responded to 61 overdoses.

With the conclusion of Strengthening Communities' Grant funding, CVTS has been able to secure a limited amount of additional funds from BC Housing to boost staffing in order to continue to operate, six days per

week, with some reductions in services such as reduced food and supply provision, reduced access to storage, and reduced security.

While Connect has demonstrated a significant impact on health and safety of people without shelter, it is important to acknowledge that the location of Connect and the services it provides are associated with rising community concerns with homelessness and related impacts of mental illness and substance use harms. Concerns have been raised about a number of issues from increased congregation of people in the area to discarded belongings, needles, and biohazards.

As the 2023 Homeless Count for the Comox Valley demonstrates, the Comox Valley has seen an overall increase in homelessness 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. Exacerbating concerns, 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, only one publicly accessible washroom, lack of storage, and inadequate facility design for the current temporary use.

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.

To address some specific concerns with the use of 685 Cliffe Avenue for the purposes describe above, the 2021 Lease Agreement stipulates:

- 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.

- Article 5.2: Community Advisory Committee [CAC] - ... the Tenant will establish a Community Advisory Committee
 - o CVTS has recently established a CAC whose members include City staff (Bylaw and RCCS), RCMP, VIHA, and Connect Staff.
 - 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.
 - o The aim is to expand membership to include a member of the DCBIA, a representative of the Arts Community, and people who live in the downtown core.
 - o 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.

The third Lease Renewal Agreement includes a change to section F.3.(b) regarding the minimum notice required for CVTS to request a one-year lease renewal. Previous Lease Renewal Agreements required a minimum of 180 days' notice to the City by CVTS of a renewal request, however the third Lease Renewal Agreement has amended this notice period to not less than 60 days prior to expiration to better reflect the realities of both parties' situations as it relates to requesting and approving a one-year lease renewal term.

BC Housing's purchase of 925 Braidwood for the purpose of developing purpose-built shelter and supportive housing will provide much needed additional shelter and housing capacity for those experiencing homelessness. It is expected that its opening will assist in alleviating many community concerns related to congregation, substance use, and mental illness through the provision of day services, shelter, and housing that are intentionally designed and built and include wrap around services to support individuals experiencing homelessness.

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 support their plans for a purpose-built shelter and to ensure that a new facility will adequately meet the needs of individuals who are unhoused in the community.

Temporary Washroom and Storage Facilities

Staff, CVTS, BC Housing, and representatives from the community surrounding Connect continue to engage in discussions about locating and operationalizing temporary washroom facilities and improving the storage area next to Connect. A consultant has been hired to develop a site plan and oversee the installation of utility services (hydro, water, and sanitary) while coordinating with the operator, City staff and addressing concerns of the surrounding business owners. Operational funds are still required for the washroom trailer and as per Council's resolution from July 31, 2024 staff will report back at a future meeting of Council on the status of the operational funds for the washroom trailer.

The design of storage areas needs to consider fire safety and operational requirements which the consultant is engaged with CVTS on and working through to develop a safe, viable location and design. The funds for this will come from the \$150,000 that Council passed a resolution for on July 31, 2024. Visual aesthetics will be considered in this design. Costs for this storage area are being identified with the Consultant and CVTS with the assistance of staff. An application to the Comox Valley Community Foundation was made in partnership with CVTS and the Coalition to End Homelessness to support implementation and operations of improved day storage at Connect.

Staff is focused on supporting CVTS by breaking this initiative into two phases. The first being a staff trailer (funded by CVTS) and the storage with appropriate fencing. While undertaking this staff is identifying the budget for the installation of the washroom trailer and working on operating funding for this washroom trailer for clients of Connect. This will form a future report to Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

CVTS as the 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 would continue this subsidy. The annual rent due from CVTS for use of the building is \$24,000

per year. If approved, the City would be providing \$48,000 per year in assistance via a rent subsidy (based on current market rental rates).

Staff will return with an update on financial implications for the temporary washroom facility and storage area improvements 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 Properties and Corporate Services. This work includes lease management, repairs, renovations, and other administrative tasks. Development Services is leading the work regarding locating a temporary washroom facility, and to improve the outdoor storage facility at the site.

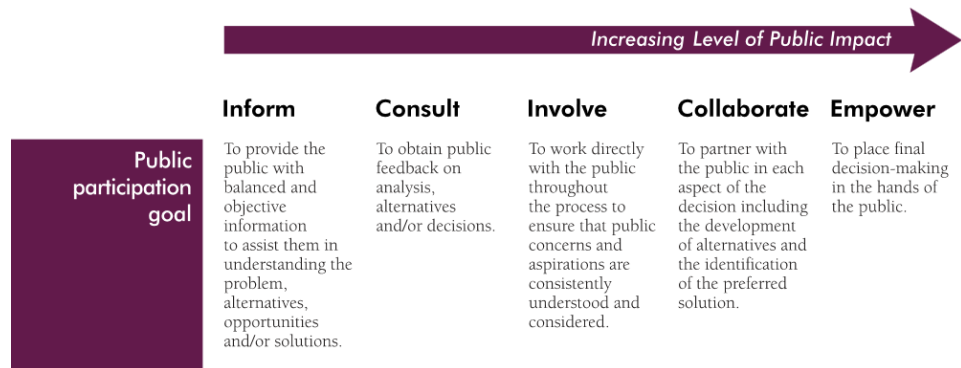
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

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 related to the one-year lease renewal per Section 24, 26 and 94 of the *Community Charter*.

When details regarding the lease area expansion to accommodate the temporary washrooms and storage area are known, staff will publish notice as required through the Community Charter before an amendment is executed.

OPTIONS:

Option 1:

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; and, THAT Council authorize the Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services to execute the attached third Lease Renewal Amendment agreement between the City of Courtenay and Comox Valley Transition Society to continue to provide day centre services for individuals experiencing homelessness and temporary shelter (Attachment 3) .

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. CVTS Letter to the City of Courtenay
3. Third Lease Renewal and Amendment Agreement

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