



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Briefing Note

To: Council
From: Director of Development Services
Director of Recreation, Culture and Community Services

File No.: 3005-01
Date: April 10, 2024

Subject: Update on Temporary Shelter Housing Options

PURPOSE:

To provide an update regarding Council's motion from the regular council meeting held on March 13, 2024 requesting a staff report on a range of temporary shelter options and preliminary considerations of operational impact, budget estimates, number of individuals supported, partnerships for provision of services and other impacts or considerations.

BACKGROUND:

Temporary sheltering options are funded under various provincial and federal housing programs which provide capital and operating. The form and value of the funding depends on a variety of factors including the structure of the arrangement, as well as things like land and building availability, and in-kind support. Courtenay currently has one temporary shelter, Connect (33 beds) operating on municipal lands by the Comox Valley Transition Society. The Pidcock House Shelter (36 beds), is operated by the Salvation Army, is moderate barrier and operated every day of the year, 24 hours a day.

Temporary shelters require a building and or land that can support the program requirements, and meet fire safety and any BC Building Code requirements. BC Housing and the Ministry of Housing look for partnerships with municipalities and non-profits to provide land or a building that can operate a temporary shelter and then can/may be able to provide capital and or operating funds. The pace at which temporary sheltering solutions can be acted upon depends upon the availability of land or buildings as well as availability of operating and capital funding. Provision of municipal land can be a key factor in speeding up the development process.

The 2023 Homeless count identified 272 individuals experiencing homelessness, an increase from 132 in 2020. 95 of these individuals are considered unsheltered, meaning they are typically living outside. Despite the addition of the Connect Temporary Shelter in recent years, the increase in homelessness in the Comox Valley has led to shelter operators turning people away on a nightly basis and a subsequent increase in visible encampments and outdoor temporary sheltering in the City.

At the regular Council meeting held on March 13, 2024, Council made the following rise and report resolution:

THAT Council direct staff to write to the Minister of Housing requesting that the City of Courtenay be identified as a priority community for Encampment & Homelessness Response: HEART & HEARTH program funding due to the urgent need for shelter space and supportive housing, and

THAT Council rise and report this resolution at the February 28, 2024 Council meeting.

A second resolution was made at the regular Council meeting held on March 13, 2024:

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WHEREAS, in consideration of ongoing challenges with sheltering and congregation in the downtown core and the negative impacts to those unhoused having to pack up and move; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to bring back a report at the April 10th, 2024 Council Meeting, outlining a range of temporary sheltering options including but not limited to: managed encampments, temporary modular housing and other options identified by staff; and

THAT the report include preliminary consideration of the following details for each option presented:

- Anticipated operational impact
- Budget estimates
- Potential number of individuals supported
- Potential partnerships for the provision of services, and
- Any other impacts or considerations.

On March 28, 2024, BC Housing announced the purchase of 925 Braidwood. BC Housing has shared that this land purchase will be used to facilitate the development of permanent, purpose-built supportive housing and temporary shelter, including potential Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelter beds. BC Housing has indicated that there will be approximately 60 units of supportive housing and 33 shelter beds in the development and they expect construction to begin in early 2025. This presents an opportunity for the City to work with BC Housing and the CVRD through functions 450 and or 451 to develop a plan for temporary shelter while the project is under development.

The City of Courtenay participates in two functions of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) that play a role in housing and shelter development:

- Function 450: Emergency Shelter and Supportive Housing Land Acquisition Service
 - As per the 2024-2028 CVRD Financial Plan, there is \$834,661 in the property acquisition reserve fund for emergency shelter and supportive housing land purchase.
 - This budget includes \$20,000 for CVRD to complete a land inventory as part of the Housing Action Plan.
- Function 451: Homelessness Supports Services
 - As per the 2024-2028 CVRD Financial Plan, the operating budget for this function is proposed at \$413,500 for 2024
 - Function 451 provides to one or more local nongovernmental organizations based on a board approved five-year action plan to address homelessness in the Comox Valley.
 - The 2024 strategic priorities include completing a Homelessness Needs Assessment and Community Plan.
 - \$100,000 has been allocated to the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness for allocation of funds towards community homelessness initiatives in March 2024.

DISCUSSION:

In response to the March 13, 2024 Council resolution, staff have begun reviewing municipal land for potential accommodation of temporary shelter options and partnership with BC Housing, the Ministry of Housing, CMHC, and the non-profit sector.

Temporary Shelters in Buildings

Currently the City is providing access to Native Sons Hall for warming centres activated under the Comox Valley Emergency Program, but does not have another building that can support an ongoing overnight temporary shelter. As such, other buildings such as religious institutions, organizations that have halls like the Legion, or vacant buildings that may be leased must be considered. During the search for an Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelter location, all known vacant buildings or properties were explored however a suitable location was not identified by community partners.

Temporary Shelters on Vacant Land

Staff have reviewed vacant municipal land that may be appropriate for development of temporary sheltering options. Considerations of use include flood plain impacts, as well as current site servicing. In order to be access Provincial funding to support the capital and operating costs of temporary shelters, the City would require funding through the HEART / HEARTH program or the Federal Reaching Home program to install buildings such as, trailers or tiny homes.

Staff have reviewed the capital costs per unit for modular, ATCO Trailers or tiny shelters that have been installed in other municipalities (such as Port Alberni and Kelowna). The average cost per unit is \$30,000 per tiny shelter to \$100,000 per trailer. These costs do not include site upgrades or required infrastructure to support the temporary shelters like washrooms, offices, laundry and storage. Partnerships with BC Housing, CMHC or Ministry are required to fund assistance for capital works.

The publicly available information regarding the tiny shelter development in Port Alberni is below, and is on par with recently released information regarding the Kelowna tiny shelters.

- Port Alberni Tiny Shelters (30 shelters)
 - Annual operating costs approximately \$850,000
 - Capital costs approximately \$965,000 (including \$165,000 grant from City), plus costs for connection fees and site preparation and ongoing in-kind fees (i.e. utility operating costs)

Temporary Modular Housing, either through renovated containers or pre-fabricated modular units, average approximately \$100,000 to \$150,000 per unit for all total construction costs excluding connection fees and any other in-kind contributions. Examples can be found in Vancouver through the Temporary Modular Housing (TMH) program and Kelowna.

In all cases, operating funds are required by BC Housing through its program allocation (i.e. Temporary shelter, HEART/HEARTH, or Extreme Weather Response shelters). The operational funds are dependent upon partnerships with municipalities on land or buildings or supporting another building that may be owned by a non-profit, service club or religious institution. Securing funding through BC Housing takes time and requires a secured capital plan for the shelter.

Managed Encampments

Council's resolution also included exploration of managed encampments as a temporary sheltering solution. In review of managed encampments experienced in B.C., the average direct costs for managing an encampment are \$100,000 per month (based on publicly availability information from Kelowna and Vancouver). Direct costs include such items as security, on-site sanitation such as garbage and porta-potties, daily site clean-up, and warming facilities. This monthly cost does not account for costs associated with

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bylaw, fire, or police support to the location, nor other in-kind City costs such as additional staff time. Additionally, site remediation costs following an encampment range from approximately \$500,000 for the land to \$750,000 for any impacted buildings.

As per BC Housing's "Homeless Encampments in British Columbia" paper, municipalities are required to provide sanctioned encampment residents with sanitation, electricity, and storage options in addition to first aid supplies, fire extinguishers, professional pest control, collection and disposal of needles, and daily fire inspections.¹

The City would need to identify a suitable piece of vacation land to move ahead with this option. It is important to note that it is difficult to access provincial or federal funding to support managed encampments.

Next Steps

With the announcement of the purchase of 925 Braidwood by BC Housing, and the City's letter to the Province requesting support through the HEART / HEARTH program, staff will continue to work with BC Housing and the Ministry of Housing to identify opportunities to work together on addressing the significant gap in shelter in the Comox Valley and Courtenay, including pursuing interim temporary shelter options.

Staff will continue to review the municipal land inventory for consideration as potential interim temporary shelter locations as well as work with BC Housing, the non-profit sector, and the CVRD on further exploring options. There is an immediate need to work with the CVRD through functions 450 and 451 to discuss interim temporary shelter options, advocate for the development of a winter shelter response strategy, and review existing temporary shelters operated by local non-profit organizations consider additional locations. With the upcoming work the CVRD is conducting regarding the Homelessness Needs Assessment and Community Plan as well as Regional Housing Action Plan, it is imperative that the City of Courtenay play a significant role on these projects to support those experiencing homelessness and the impacts on the broader community.

Staff will provide an update to Council in late Spring 2024.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The OCP identifies affordable housing policies that provide guidance to this work.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

As a participant in CVRD functions 450 and 451, Courtenay residents contribute taxes towards these services and will continue to do so in 2024.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Significant work is required from staff in Development Services and Recreation Culture and Community Services in order to proceed with this resolution and could impact other strategic priorities in 2024.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Affordable Housing - Explore approaches to develop affordable housing: Review potential of city property for housing partnerships with BC Housing

¹ [Homeless Encampments in British Columbia \(bchousing.org\)](https://www.bchousing.org), pg.6.

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- Affordable Housing - Explore approaches to develop affordable housing: Develop strategy for housing amenity fund

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