

THE CORPORATION OF THE
CITY OF WHITE ROCK
CORPORATE REPORT



DATE: March 8, 2021

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Eric Stepura, Director of Recreation and Culture

SUBJECT: Warming Shelter for the Homeless Options

RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT Council:

1. Approve \$10,000 from the City's COVID-19 Restart Grant budget to fund rental and installation of a warming shelter tent in the parking lot at Centennial Park from March 15 to April 15, 2021; and
 2. Direct staff to participate in an At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force with representatives of the City of Surrey and other stakeholders mandated to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable people living in White Rock and South Surrey, including those who are food insecure and homeless.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following a Delegation presentation by Cheryl Lightowers and Kathy Booth on February 22, 2021, asking Council to consider providing a warming shelter for people who are homeless, Council made a motion directing staff to provide a corporate report regarding information on a daytime warming shelter to accommodate approximately 25-30 people.

In response to this referral, staff have conducted some research on homelessness in White Rock and provided several options for Council to consider for providing an emergency daytime warming shelter for those experiencing homelessness in the Peninsula.

Given that the Delegation's request for a warming shelter was until the end of March 2021, staff recommend that the only viable option would be to install a tent in the City owned parking lot located at Centennial Park at a cost of \$10,000. If Council supports this recommendation, a warming shelter tent could be up and operational by mid-March and be kept up for a period of one month (to April 15, 2021).

The Delegation has stated in their presentation that all costs relating to providing staff/volunteers for the shelter, and supplying food and beverages, would be provided by either Options or Peace Portal Alliance Church. If approved, the City could loan chairs, tables, and garbage cans, and provide waste removal services within existing operating budgets for the one month period.

On April 2, 2020, the BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General sent a letter to all BC municipalities requesting that local government work in collaboration with BC Housing and their regional health authority to ensure that there are local plans in place to provide for emergency shelter overflow for vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this request

from the province, staff recommend that Council direct staff to participate in an At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force with representatives of the City of Surrey and other stakeholders mandated to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable people living in White Rock and South Surrey, including those who are food insecure and homeless. To date, this task force has not been established, however, staff recommend that discussions be held with the City of Surrey's social planners and other stakeholders to establish one.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

Community members Cheryl Lightowlers and Kathy Booth attended the February 22, 2021 Regular Council meeting and made a presentation requesting Council to consider providing an emergency daytime warming shelter until the end of March 2021, for those experiencing homelessness. The following motion was adopted by Council:

| Meeting Date | Motion Details |
|-------------------------------|--|
| February 22, 2021 2021-079 | That Council directs staff to provide a corporate report regarding information on a daytime warming shelter to accommodate approximately 25-30 people. |

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The purpose of this corporate report is to provide some information on homelessness in White Rock and provide options for Council to consider for providing an emergency daytime warming shelter for those experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness in White Rock

White Rock faith based organizations and community residents have a long history of assisting local people experiencing homelessness. Reverend Joan McMurtry and Peninsula United Church partnered with Options Community Services to provide an extreme weather shelter for homeless people for ten years at the First United Church and for two years following at the Star of the Sea Parish Hall. In the spring of 2020, the Star of the Sea Parish Hall closed, and an extreme weather shelter for people that are homeless was opened at the Peace Portal Alliance Church (at the corner of 152nd Street and King George Boulevard in South Surrey). This facility is operational every night during the winter months between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.

A noon hour take away lunch program was established in White Rock in the spring of 2020 to provide meals to low income people, many of which are homeless. This program is currently operated by the Rotary Club of White Rock (6 days/week) and Peace Portal Alliance Church (one day/week) in a City owned gravel parking lot located at the corner of Johnston Road and Russell Avenue. The City allocated a portion of this parking lot for free, and installed concrete barriers, and social distancing signage to address safety issues at the site.

With the recent cold weather in early February, concern was expressed by volunteers who operate the shelter at the Peace Portal Alliance Church about the need for a daytime warming shelter for local homeless people. These volunteers have written letters to the Mayor and City Council requesting a warming shelter be opened in a civic building suitable for accommodating 25-30 homeless people during the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. until the end of March 2021.

Community members Cheryl Lightowlers and Kathy Booth attended the February 22, 2021 Regular Council meeting and made a presentation requesting Council to consider providing an emergency daytime warming shelter for those experiencing homelessness.

Considerations from the RCMP on a Warming Centre in White Rock

The following information about the local homeless situation and the White Rock RCMP's perspective on a warming shelter in White Rock has been provided by Staff Sergeant Kale Pauls White Rock RCMP Detachment Commander:

“Daytime warming centres are a compassionate response to people experiencing homelessness. They also provide police officers a practical and humane option to offer to people experiencing homelessness that may come into contact with police during a cold day.

The White Rock RCMP officers are the only agency in White Rock that provide a 24-hour outreach to social issues that become visible within the community. The officers interact with people experiencing homelessness due to calls from the public, casual interactions, and wellness checks. These interactions allow the White Rock officers to have familiarity with the complex issues that these individuals face and allow insight into their current and past challenges.

The number of visible person's experiencing homelessness in the City of White Rock fluctuates between 0-3 individuals. These individuals typically have a history in White Rock or were once housed in White Rock. Many people experiencing homelessness that normally reside in South Surrey will identify as being from White Rock for various reasons, including not being familiar with the jurisdictional boundary of North Bluff Road and the confusion of many businesses in South Surrey with storefronts advertising as White Rock in their business name. Some individuals experiencing homelessness from South Surrey come to White Rock in a transitory nature.

The White Rock RCMP currently provides a frontline response to social, substance use, and mental health matters. This is typically achieved without specialized on-scene support from programs such as Car 67 or the Police-Mental Health Outreach Team (both Surrey RCMP based programs), or healthcare system led outreach programs.

A warming centre in White Rock will primarily service people experiencing homelessness that normally associate to South Surrey. During previous winter seasons when White Rock hosted an emergency shelter on cold nights, this service primarily attracted individuals from South Surrey, Newton, and places beyond. Although the shelter was well run, there were predictable calls for service on the nights that the shelter was open, which primarily occurred within blocks of the shelter before opening and after closing. These calls included disturbances, assaults, mental health crisis, and property crime.

The nature of visible homelessness, in most cases, carries with it concurrent issues such as substance use, mental health disorders, health issues, and complex social issues. The location of a warming centre has to factor in a potential increase in frontline services, which will inevitably involve the police of jurisdiction. As the majority of person that will seek the sanctity of a warming centre will be from outside of the White Rock city limits, this will shift the complex needs of a marginalized population from South Surrey to White Rock where local officers do not have specialized support (such as Car 67 and PMHOT) and the officers are already expected to do more than they have the capacity to do.”

Options for a Day Time Warming Shelter in White Rock

Staff have conducted a preliminary review of options for providing a daytime warming shelter (7:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.) for 25-30 people in White Rock until April 15, 2021. The summary below highlights the pros and cons of each of these options.

Temporary Structures

Staff have researched tent size requirements, locations, and costs to accommodate 25-30 people. The most suitable site is the City's parking lot at the Centennial Park. This shelter would be located near an existing washroom building with power.

Due to the Provincial Health Orders (PHO's) regarding social distancing, a 3,600 square foot (i.e. 60' x 60') tent would be required to accommodate up to 30 people. This would provide 10 x 10' spaces for each person plus centre aisles and space for a few food/beverage serving tables. The tent would require power, a heat source such as propane or electric forced air heat, access to washrooms and a hand wash station. The cost breakdown is as follows:

- Tent and forced air propane heater rental - \$10,000/month (Recommended)

Pros

- A tent can be rented and set up quite quickly.
- If a tent is located in the City owned gravel parking lot at Centennial Park this shelter would be located near an existing City washroom facility and quite near where many homeless people congregate in this region,

Cons

- The City has not identified funding for a tent for a warming shelter in the City's Financial Plan.
- Neighboring businesses and residents should be consulted before setting up a homeless warming shelter for homeless people at this location.
- A building permit and stamped engineered drawings for the tent would be required.
- Additional cleaning of the washroom building at Centennial Park will be required.
- Loss of parking revenue on parking spaces used for the warming tent.
- Regular park users may be opposed to a warming shelter for the homeless being located near sports facilities and a playground where kids come to play.

Other options include:

- Tent at the Corner of Johnston Road and Russell Avenue with forced air propane heater, portable washroom and hand sink rental – \$14,500/month (Not Recommended)

Pros

- A tent can be rented and set up quite quickly.
- If a tent is located in the gravel parking lot at this corner, this shelter would be located adjacent to the Rotary Club of White Rock/Peace Portal Alliance Church take-away lunch program.
- This site is quite near where many homeless people congregate in this region.

Cons

- The City has not identified funding for a tent for a warming shelter in the City's Financial Plan.
- This location lacks public washrooms, hand washing sinks and power. These items would have to be rented which would add \$4,000/month to the cost of providing a warming shelter.
- Neighbouring businesses and residents should be consulted before setting up a warming shelter for homeless people at this location.
- A building permit and stamped engineered drawings for the tent would be required.

- Portable Modular Building (Not Recommended)

Pros

- Portable modular buildings can be erected on sites such as the City owned parking lot on the corner of Johnston Road and Russell Avenue.
- Additional portable modular buildings can be added if demand increases.

- Portable modular buildings can come with washrooms built in, but would require water, sewer and power hookups.

Cons

- Staff have researched portable modular building rentals (Atco, Britco etc.) and they will not do short term rentals. They require a minimum one year rental and therefore this option is not currently viable.

- City Owned Buildings - City Hall (Not Recommended)

Pros

- None

Cons

- White Rock City Hall is heavily used by City staff in the daytime to conduct business and provide services to the community. There is no room large enough to accommodate 25-30 people for a daytime warming shelter.
- City Hall is located quite far away from the Semiahmoo Mall where many of the homeless people congregate in this area.

- City Owed Buildings - City Hall Annex (Not Recommended)

Pros

- None

Cons

- The City Hall Annex is heavily used by City staff to conduct business and provide services to the community. There is no room large enough to accommodate 25-30 people for a daytime warming shelter.
- The City Hall Annex is located quite far away from the Semiahmoo Mall where many of the homeless people congregate in this region.

- City Operations Centre (Not Recommended)

Pros

- None

Cons

- The City Operations Centre is heavily used by City staff to conduct business and provide services to the community. There is no room large enough to accommodate 25-30 people for a daytime warming shelter.
- The City Operations Centre is located quite far away from the Semiahmoo Mall where many of the homeless people congregate in this region.

- White Rock Community Centre (WRCC) Presentation Room (Not Recommended)

Pros

- White Rock Community Centre's Halls A, B and C are large enough to accommodate up to 33 people with social distancing measures in place.
- The White Rock Community Centre is located in the Town Centre near where some of the homeless people in South Surrey and White Rock tend to congregate and is near to where the takeout lunch program is being offered.

Cons

- White Rock Community Centre is heavily used daily from 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. on weekdays to host a wide variety of recreation, fitness and arts programs. WRCC is currently closed on weekends due to budget and staffing limitations. Cancelling these activities for the month of March to accommodate a homeless shelter would upset a lot of regular patrons. The impact would be bumping 350 registered participants,

cancelling 31 programs, 250 individual classes and result in a revenue loss of in excess of \$6,000.

- WRCC could not be used both as a warming shelter and for regular recreational programming simultaneously. There is no way of managing where people go in the facility, as there is no ability to secure a group in the presentation room without them wandering into other areas of the facility to access the washrooms etc. Therefore, the entire building would have to be either a homeless shelter or a recreation centre.
 - WRCC patrons include many fragile seniors with vulnerable immune systems and delicate health issues. Odors from smokers, cannabis users and lingering body odor may cause health problems for some of our elderly/frail customers.
 - Recreation staff are not trained to deal with people facing homelessness (i.e. mental illness, substance abuse etc.). If WRCC is to be used as a homeless shelter, six (6) full-time staff plus 3 casual cleaning staff will have to be moved to other work sites.
 - WRCC does not have a food preparation kitchen or shower facilities.
 - Concerns of homeless people loitering around the Centre before & after shelter hours and their effect on regular patrons and Miramar residents perception of safety.
 - Consultation with 3 Miramar Strata's and BOSA Properties and other adjacent residents and businesses has not been done and should be carried out before operating a homeless shelter at this location. Miramar strata's and Bosa Property Management are already experiencing problems with homeless people occupying stairways, at times carrying out drug related activity or committing property crimes. It is unlikely that they will be supportive of more homeless people visiting their neighborhood.
 - Questions regarding who is responsible for providing additional janitorial work, building security/staffing for homeless shelter have not been answered. The City does not have budget to cover this added cost.
- Centre for Active Living (CAL) (Not Recommended)
 - Pros
 - None
 - Cons
 - There is no space at CAL large enough to be used as a warming shelter for 25-30 people. The largest fitness studio can only accommodate 12 people due to COVID social distancing restrictions.
 - CAL is heavily used daily from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. on weekdays for a wide variety of fitness programs and activities. Weekends it is closed due to budget and staffing limitations. Cancelling these programs to accommodate a homeless shelter will impact a number of regular patrons.
 - CAL also is used by tenants that lease space from the City. These tenants include the Peace Arch Curling Club, Fraser Health, the Division of Family Practice, the White Rock South Surrey Stroke Recovery and the Alzheimer's Society of BC.
 - No kitchen available to use (the existing kitchen is operated by a private contractor (Candlelight Cuisine) on a lease basis with the Curling Club.
 - Limited washroom size – (2 stalls each)
 - Washrooms are located in the lower floor lobby. There is no way of preventing homeless shelter participants from accessing other areas of the building. Therefore, the entire building would have to be either a homeless shelter or a recreation centre.
 - Some daytime users are fragile seniors with vulnerable immune systems and delicate health issues. Odors from smokers, cannabis users and lingering body odor may cause problems for some of our elderly/frail customers.

- Concerns of homeless people loitering around the Centre before & after shelter hours and their effect on regular patrons and CAL building tenants' perception of safety.
 - Concerns about an increase of thefts from vehicles.
 - Questions regarding who is responsible for providing additional janitorial work, building security/staffing for homeless shelter. The City does not have budget to cover this added cost.
 - Peace Arch Curling Club and other CAL tenants would have to be consulted before operating a homeless shelter at CAL.
- Kent Street Activity Centre (KSAC) (Not Recommended)

Pros

- Kent Street Activity Centre is located within a ten minute walk from the Semiahmoo Mall where many of the homeless people in South Surrey and White Rock tend to congregate and is near where the takeout lunch program is being offered.

Cons

- KSAC does not have any rooms large enough to accommodate 25-30 people. The largest room is the auditorium which can only accommodate 12 people due to COVID social distancing restrictions.
- KSAC is heavily used for recreation and culture seniors activities from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. weekdays. These seniors' activities would have to be bumped if the auditorium was to be used as a homeless shelter. This will greatly upset our 1,200+ regular senior members.
- Cancelling all March recreation programs and activities at KSAC would require the cancellation of 5 programs, 25 recreation classes and a loss of an estimated \$2,000 in revenue.
- KSAC could not be used both as a warming shelter and for regular recreational programming simultaneously. There is no way of controlling where people go in the facility, as there is no ability to secure a group in the auditorium without them wandering into other areas of the facility to access the washrooms etc. Therefore, the entire building would have to be either a homeless shelter or a recreation centre.
- Questions regarding who is responsible for additional janitorial work, building security/staffing for homeless shelter have yet to be answered. The City does not have budget to pay for this.
- The KSAC community kitchen would have to be closed, (operated by the Kent Street Seniors Society). The upper floor washrooms are adjacent to the kitchen, which would put the kitchen supplies at risk from theft. This kitchen provides pickup meals for local seniors 5 days/week. Frozen meal sales (both in person and delivery) have been very successful at KSAC and has proven that there is a high demand for this service for seniors in the community. Below are some weekly stats:
 - Between 200-250 frozen meals are sold each week.
 - Between 65-70 seniors purchase meals either in person or through volunteer delivery.
 - Revenue each week is between \$1,800-\$2,200.
 - Between 12-15 seniors volunteers help prepare and sell the meals. The loss of this daily meal program in March would be devastating to seniors depending on this meal service.
 - A \$10,000 loss in revenue each week. This revenue goes to the Kent Street Seniors Society, and then back into the centre to meet the needs of Kent Street seniors.

- Over 300 seniors will be unable to purchase meals at a location where they feel safe.
 - Approx. 1,250 meals will not be made for the month of March.
 - Recreation staff are not trained to deal with people facing homelessness (i.e. mental illness, substance abuse etc.). Two full-time staff would have to be relocated elsewhere.
 - Consultation with the Kent Street Seniors Society and the Kent Street Executive Committee and adjacent neighbors would be critical.
- Centennial Park Leisure Centre and Arena (CPLC) (Not Recommended)
 - Pros
 - None
 - Cons
 - CPLC Arena is used by young children every day starting at 5:30 a.m. for figure skating and ice hockey until late March, then children's lacrosse and ball hockey in the spring/summer. The arena cannot be converted for use as a warming during the month of March because it is still heavily used for ice skating and hockey programs until the end of March and it lacks heat. As well, staff strongly oppose mixing children and people with addictions and/or mental health issues at the same facility.
 - CPLC Hall is used for a variety of recreational programs for people of all ages including kids camps, adult fitness and seniors activities. There are seven (7) registered programs, thirty (30) classes and over 100 people would have to be bumped to convert the hall to a daytime warming shelter for the homeless. Cancelling these programs to accommodate a homeless shelter will upset a lot of regular patrons.
 - CPLC Hall is the City's Emergency Social Services Reception Centre, therefore, if an apartment fire, major windstorm or other significant emergency occurs in the community, the shelter would have to be closed so it can be used for assisting evacuees.
 - CPLC is quite a distance away from where the homeless people hang out (i.e. Semiahmoo Mall)
 - Concerns of homeless people loitering around the Centre before & after shelter hours and their effect on regular patrons, park users, CAL users and local residents' perception of safety.
 - Concern also about an increase of thefts from arena and curling rink users' vehicles.
 - Greater possibility of increased thefts from arena users and curling club vehicles etc.
 - Questions regarding who is responsible for additional janitorial work, building security/staffing for homeless shelter has not been answered. The City does not have budget to provide for this service.
- Commercial Space

Staff have made a few inquiries about vacant commercial spaces in White Rock that might be rented on a temporary basis for use as warming shelters for the homeless. Under the current Provincial Health Orders, a building with 2,500 square feet of unencumbered space would be needed for 25 people, and 3,000 square feet of unimpeded space for 30 people. To date, there are no suitable vacant commercial spaces that have been identified in White Rock.
- City of Surrey

The City of Surrey has also been asked by the Peace Portal Alliance Church volunteers to provide a warming shelter for the 25-30 people experiencing homelessness in the

peninsula. To date, no suitable facilities have been offered by the City of Surrey to address this request.

- **Other Options**

To address the need for an Emergency Response Centre and warming shelters for homeless people living in White Rock and South Surrey, staff recommend that Council direct staff to participate in an At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force with representatives of the City of Surrey and other stakeholders mandated to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable people living in White Rock and South Surrey, including those who are food insecure and homeless. Establishing multi-jurisdictional task forces to address the issue of sheltering the homeless has been quite effective in other BC municipalities, and may result in a permanent solution(s) being found to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable people living in White Rock and South Surrey.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If Council endorses staff's recommendation #1 above, they would be approving \$10,000 from the City's COVID-19 Restart Grant budget to fund rental and installation of a warming shelter tent to be located in the parking lot at Centennial Park from March 15 to April 15, 2021.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There may be some added risk to the City by approving a warming shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

White Rock RCMP have had experience with homeless shelters and report that there were predictable calls for service on the nights that the shelter was open, which primarily occurred within blocks of the shelter before opening and after closing. These calls included disturbances, assaults, mental health crisis, and property crime.

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT/IMPLICATIONS

The City's Engineering Department would be needed to approve the location, installation and power hookups for the warming tent, and provide extra cleaning and monitoring of the washrooms.

The City's Development and Planning Department would need to be involved in reviewing the tent's structural drawings and issuing a building permit.

The City's Fire Chief would need to review the heating source and occupancy load for the tent.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This project is not in alignment with any existing Council Strategic Priorities.

OPTIONS / RISKS / ALTERNATIVES

The following options are available for Council's consideration:

1. That Council not approve \$10,000 from the City's COVID-19 Restart Grant budget to fund rental and installation of a warming shelter tent to be located in Centennial Park from March 15 to April 15, 2021; and
2. That Council not direct staff to participate in an At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force with representatives of the City of Surrey and other stakeholders mandated to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable people living in White Rock and South Surrey, including those who are food insecure and homeless.
3. That Council approve \$14,000 for the rental and installation of a warming shelter tent, heat, power and portable washrooms to be located on the gravel parking lot at the corner of Russell Avenue and Johnston Road, adjacent to where the Rotary Club of White Rock/Peace Portal Alliance Church take-away lunch program location.

CONCLUSION

Following a presentation by Cheryl Lightowlers and Kathy Booth asking Council to consider providing a warming shelter for people who are homeless, Council made a motion directing staff to provide a corporate report regarding information on a daytime warming shelter to accommodate approximately 25-30 people.

In response to this referral, staff have conducted research on the extent of homelessness in White Rock and provided several options for Council to consider for providing an emergency daytime warming shelter for those experiencing homelessness in the peninsula.

Given that the delegation's request for a warming shelter is only until the end of March 2021, staff recommend that the only viable option would be to install a tent in the City owned parking lot located at the Centennial Park at a cost of \$10,000. If Council supports this recommendation, this warming shelter tent could be up and operational by mid-March and be kept up for a period of one month (to April 15, 2021).

In addition, staff recommend that Council direct staff to participate in an At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations Task Force with representatives of the City of Surrey and other stakeholders mandated to address the needs of at-risk and vulnerable people living in White Rock and South Surrey, including those who are food insecure and homeless.

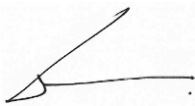
Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Stepura", written in a cursive style.

Eric Stepura
Director Recreation and Culture

Comments from the Chief Administrative Officer

I concur with the recommendations of this corporate report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Guillermo Ferrero", written in a cursive style.

Guillermo Ferrero
Chief Administrative Officer