

**STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING & PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2007**

SUBJECT:

Homelessness in the Capital Region.

PURPOSE/ISSUE:

To report on the Regional District's involvement and progress and to request that funds be allocated from Section 20(3) Health Facilities Budget to be partnered with funding from other agencies to prepare a Regional Homeless Action Plan.

HISTORY/BACKGROUND:

This report follows last month's approval of the Regional Housing Affordability Delivery Framework including a Regional Homelessness Secretariat.

The Regional Housing Affordability Strategy (RHAS) includes the following recommendations for dealing with homelessness.

1. The CRD establish a Regional Homeless Task Force (RHTF) as successor to the Victoria Steering Committee.
2. The RHTF review and update the Victoria Community Plan for Homelessness and recast it as Regional Homeless Plan.
3. The RHTF continue to build partnerships to provide safe, affordable housing, enhance support services, improve coordination and communication and increase the capacity of service organizations.

There are at least two formal committees currently dealing with homelessness and likely a few informal groups. The two formal Committees are the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness and the United Way's Community Impact Council on Housing for the Homeless, Low Income and Working Poor. The United Way also has another Community Impact Council on Mental Health and Addictions which pertains to homelessness.

At the time of writing of this report staff had set up meetings with members of the Victoria Steering Committee and United Way groups and other key players to propose the formation of the Regional Task Force. There could be some limitations on municipal participation depending on eligibility requirements under the new Federal Homeless Partnership Strategy. The previous federal program required eligible communities to have a "significant homeless problem", a characteristic not necessarily found in all member municipalities.

Staff at the City of Victoria and Services Canada, administrators of the former Federal Homeless Initiative program (Supportive Community Partners Initiative—SCPI), have agreed to work with the CRD and other partners to resolve any outstanding issues to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

The decision to approve the Regional Housing Affordability Strategy Delivery Framework with the Housing Affordability and Homelessness Secretariats reallocates staff resources to assign two senior managers to head these secretariats. Prior to last month's approvals there was no full-time District staff working on the Regional Housing Affordability Strategy and no local government, with the exception of the City of Victoria's Social Housing and Policy Division, working on homelessness. There is a lot of catch-up involved in these two secretariats. Staff will be consulting with other government, community and

business sectors around the work plan and what resources each sector or agency can supply. However, in support of identifying the levels of investment required for the region, it is important to immediately proceed with the preparation of Regional Homeless Action Plan.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Receive the report on the progress toward establishing a Regional Homeless Task Force (RHTF) and preparing a Regional Homeless Action Plan.
2. Receive the report allocate \$75,000 from the 2007 Section 20(3) budget as a contribution, along with funding from other agencies, toward the cost of producing the Regional Homeless Action Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The cost of completing the Regional Homeless Action Plan is estimated at \$150,000. Half of the funding is available from the 2007 Section 20(3) budget. Other agencies will be encouraged to provide funds.

From discussions with other agencies and partners the Regional Homeless Action Plan will take about a year to complete. The time invested in getting it right in terms of a blueprint for action corresponds to the expectation that eliminating homelessness in major urban centers is a ten year task.

REGIONAL HOMELESS ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS

The only formal plan dealing with homelessness in the region is the Victoria Community Plan for Homelessness. It was first prepared in 2000, updated in 2003 and is now in the midst of an evaluation and an asset and gap review. The Victoria Community Plan does not provide the content to define exactly what needs to be done to eliminate homelessness in the Capital Region. The Regional Homeless Action Plan will need to be much more specific. The Regional Plan will need to have better information about the scale and composition of homelessness, specific goals and objectives to eliminate homelessness, the costs of proposed actions, (and the costs of inaction or partial inaction), priorities, responsibilities assigned to different levels of government, business and the community sector and multi-year budgets.

The remedies for eliminating homelessness are more social housing, adequate personal income and more support services for the mentally ill, the addicted and others prone to disadvantage and homelessness. These areas are the statutory responsibility of the federal and provincial governments. The property tax as local government's primary revenues source is neither appropriate nor sufficient to raise the large amounts of money required to eliminate homelessness.

The primary role of local/regional governments in housing is the supply of serviced land and the regulation of land uses. The District and member municipalities have gone further by creating subsidiaries to produce social housing (the Capital Regional Housing Corporation), to contribute small amounts of capital to incent social housing projects (the Regional Housing Trust Fund and the City's Housing Trust Fund) and to produce planning reports like the RHAS.

The preparation of the Regional Homeless Action Plan will not preclude action ahead of its completion. The RHTF will be able to recommend priority actions under the federal and provincial programs. It will also be able to work on other short term priorities and opportunities while it defines the long term plan. The RHTF will be responsible for preparing the 10 Year Plan and also its implementation, monitoring and reporting.

Attachment One contains a high level summary of the next steps in moving forward on both the Regional Homeless Task Force and the Action Plan.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff has researched other Homeless Action Plans and the initiatives of other cities. The City of Vancouver's Homeless Action Plan (2005) has most of the attributes that are referred to above. They have described the broad causes and remedies to homelessness through an assessment of various social policy trends which also apply locally. Although the Regional Plan will be more than slotting Victoria numbers into the Vancouver framework, the advantage of following Vancouver's (and the GVRD) lead will be very helpful. It is noted that the GVRD receives the lion's share of federal homelessness funding which allows them to fund a number of staff but also the City of Vancouver and GVRD have a history of greater involvement in housing policy, planning and implementation.

Attachment Two outlines the current range of functions provided by the City of Vancouver Housing Resource Centre, their current staff complement and similar information for the GVRD on their Regional Homeless Plan.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS:

Homelessness and a serious shortage of affordable housing are major problems for the Region. Recent public opinion surveys in Vancouver show homelessness (25%) and affordable housing (17%) clearly outranking other issues such as transit (7%), crime/policing (7%) and traffic congestion (6%) as Vancouver's top priorities. There is a strong perception that homelessness is getting worse. Similar results would likely be found if public opinion in the region was surveyed.

Homelessness is devastating for the homeless, wasteful for society in the added costs it imposes on the health system, police/courts and corrections and deleterious to the safety and attractiveness of communities. The evidence is clear that it costs more to accept homelessness than to eliminate it. Strong moral and economic grounds exist for eliminating homelessness.

The primary causes of homelessness occur in poverty and the disadvantages of being poor. Aboriginal people are over-represented amongst the homeless, significant proportions of the homeless have health problems including mental illness and/or addictions and homeless youth tend to have foster home experience originating from family conflict.

The solutions to homelessness are rooted in how society thinks and acts, particularly towards the less able and vulnerable. The three common means to eliminate homelessness are; the creation of more supported housing, the provision of adequate income for persons with disabilities and the marginalized and increases in support services for the mentally ill and the addicted.

The federal and provincial governments have the legislative mandate and the primary responsibility to fund the main remedies for homelessness. Local and regional governments have a minor financial role but are best placed to organize and facilitate solutions by pulling together senior governments, business and the community. The local co-coordinating role has been performed by the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness. The Regional Homeless Task Force, currently being formed, will assume this role. The 2003 Victoria Community Plan for Homelessness needs a significant upgrade. There is a strong public demand for immediate action on these issues.

The formation of the Regional Homeless Secretariat is a positive first step but unlikely to be sufficient in the longer term. Prospective parties in the new Regional Homeless Task Force will be asked to confirm what staff resources they can supply to the Homeless Action Plan and the related work of the Task Force. In order to proceed with the work necessary to identify the levels of investment required for the region it is important to immediately proceed with the preparation of Regional Homeless Action Plan and therefore staff recommend that \$75,000 from the 2007 Section 20(3) budget be set aside as a contribution, along with funding from other agencies, toward the cost of producing the Regional Homeless Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning & Protective Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional Hospital District Board:

1. That \$75,000 from the 2007 Section 20(3) budget is set aside as a contribution, along with funding from other agencies, toward the cost of producing the Regional Homeless Action Plan.

Jeremy Tate, Senior Manager
Health Facilities Planning Division
Report Writer

Robert Lapham, General Manager Concurrence

Kelly Daniels, CAO Concurrence

COMMENTS: