

NO: R202

COUNCIL DATE: October 2, 2017

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

**TO: Mayor & Council** **DATE: September 28, 2017**

**FROM: General Manager, Planning & Development** **FILE: 5080-01**  
**Director, Public Safety**

**SUBJECT: Operation of the Temporary Shelters Opened in 2017**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Planning & Development Department and the Director, Public Safety recommend that Council:

1. Receive this report for information.

## INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the operation of the two temporary shelters that were opened in the past year in response to the significant increase in the homeless population, especially in the area on or around 135A Street in City Centre.

## BACKGROUND

In the past few years there has been a significant increase in the number of homeless people in communities across Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. In Surrey, since April 2016, there have been people sleeping in tents on 135A Street due to the lack of available shelter beds and supportive housing units appropriate for this hard-to-house population. In response, four new shelter facilities were opened.

There are four types of emergency shelters funded by BC Housing:

- “Permanent shelters” are operated on an on-going basis. They are generally open 24 hours a day. Clients are provided with meals and connection to services.
- “Temporary shelters” have been opened in response to the increase in homelessness in BC. BC Housing has committed to funding these until long-term solutions are put in place. These shelters are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Clients are provided meals and connection to services.
- “Winter shelters” (also called HEAT shelters) are open for six months, generally from October/November to March/April. Winter shelters are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Clients are provided meals and connection to services.

- “Extreme Weather Response” (EWR) shelters provide temporary shelter spaces (generally on mats on the floor), during periods of extreme winter weather (EWR Alerts). EWR shelters operate in churches and community agencies. EWR shelters are only open overnight. No meals or other services are provided.

Prior to 2017, there were two 40-bed low or minimal barrier shelter facilities in Surrey: the permanent Gateway Shelter at 10667 - 135A Street; and the temporary Boulevard Shelter at 10677 Whalley Boulevard. The Boulevard Shelter opened in December 2015 as a winter shelter, but did not close as planned in the spring of 2016 due to the continued demand for the shelter beds.

As an immediate response to the number of street homeless, and the lack of available shelter beds at the Gateway and Boulevard shelters, in 2016-2017, two new shelters were opened in Surrey – the Guildford Shelter and Parkway Shelter.

On October 19, 2016, Council approved the use of the City-owned building at 14716 - 104 Avenue for a 2016 – 2017 winter shelter, known as the Guildford Shelter (Corporate Report No. R229; 2016). This shelter did not close in the spring of 2017, as there was a continued need for shelter beds and the shelter was operating well.

The Parkway Shelter at 10660 City Parkway was opened in late 2016 as an extreme weather shelter. On January 27, 2017, Council endorsed the continued operation of the Parkway Shelter, located at 104 – 10660 City Parkway as a temporary shelter, for four month intervals, and the potential continued operation until no longer required or March 31, 2018, whichever comes first (Committee Report No. P003; 2017).

In order for BC Housing to fund the operations of a winter or temporary shelter in a community, BC Housing requires that the municipality provide the space. Both the Guildford and Parkway Shelters are located in City-owned properties. The City undertook the renovations required for the spaces to function as temporary shelters and is responsible for the on-going maintenance of the buildings. BC Housing is contracting the Lookout Society (“Lookout”) to operate the temporary shelters in Surrey.

## **DISCUSSION**

Both the Guildford and Parkway Shelters are 40-bed, low or minimal barrier, temporary shelters. Low or minimal barrier means that they will accommodate people with mental health and/or substance use issues. The purpose of the temporary shelters is to provide people who are living on the streets with a safe and supportive place to stay where they can stabilize, be connected to services and transitioned into more permanent housing or treatment.

### **Guildford Shelter**

The Guildford Shelter began operations on February 14, 2017. Originally, BC Housing committed operational funding until March 2018. In July 2017, BC Housing staff confirmed that funding for the temporary shelter will continue as needed.

## Building

The Guildford Shelter is a stand-alone, two-storey building with an elevator. The ground floor has six rooms for couples, 8 beds for women, and a large, fully functional kitchen area. The men's bunk rooms, a large amenity space with TV and computers, and offices are on the upper floor. The parking lot on the south side of the building is used as outdoor space. It has a gazebo and outdoor table and chairs. A covered chain-link storage area is provided in the parking lot area for residents to store a limited amount of belongings; each resident is also provided with a small locker inside the building. Privacy fencing was installed on the existing chain link fence around the side and back of the building.

Overall the Guildford Shelter residents and staff are very positive about the physical features of the facility. It is bright, spacious and clean, and provides good spaces for sleeping, socializing and also for the delivery of services and programs. The Guildford Shelter's location away from 135A Street is also considered a positive feature by shelter residents and staff.

## Occupancy

The Guildford Shelter accommodates 40 people: 20 men, 8 women, and 6 couples. The ability of the Guildford Shelter to accommodate couples in private rooms is a unique and innovative feature of this shelter. Pets are allowed.

Since opening in February 2017, the shelter has operated at full capacity. The residents are selected from homeless people living in the other temporary shelters and/or on the street on 135A. Couples and people with the most readiness to move into more permanent housing are selected for the Guildford Shelter. There are currently 32 couples on the wait-list.

As of the end of July, 2017, 46 shelter residents had been moved from the Guildford Shelter into more permanent housing; this includes 7 couples. Finding permanent housing that is appropriate for the shelter residents is challenging, as Surrey has very few units of supportive housing that is appropriate for people who have addictions and/or mental health issues.

## Programs & Services

The Guildford Shelter operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Residents are not required to leave the building on a daily basis which means that there are never line-ups or loitering in front of the facility. There is a curfew of 11:00 pm for shelter residents.

Lookout uses a client-centred case management approach with each resident. In 2017, Lookout has been using the comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) with homeless people living in the shelters and on 135A Street. The VAT assesses a person's level of vulnerability in 10 areas. It provides a consistent method for assessing each resident's needs and helps in determining the most appropriate housing for the individual.

Initially staff works to help a new shelter resident to stabilize, and any immediate health issues are addressed. The next step is to start to connect the resident to other services by providing them with assistance to secure identification, apply for income/disability assistance, access health services, complete a BC Housing application, and conduct housing searches. A mobile caseworker transports residents to view housing and/or assists with the move in process. This includes getting assistance of household items and food from agencies such as

Home Start, WRAGS, and the Food Bank. Staff also provides shelter residents with transport to certain appointments, such as some medical, court, and/or housing-related appointments.

The Guildford Shelter program was modelled after the successful Boulevard Shelter program. A number of services and programs are offered on-site to the shelter residents including:

- Three meals and two snacks a day;
- Fraser Health Mental Health and Substance Use Outreach Workers regularly visit the shelter;
- Sources Community Services advocacy program provides assistance on issues such as legal aid;
- Hearing tests, eye exams and prescription glasses;
- Outreach librarians visit the shelter;
- Life skills programs such as food/cooking classes;
- Laundry is available on site;
- Social events such as special event dinners and movie nights;
- Volunteer services such as “Help on Wheels” visits every Friday and a hair stylist provides free hair-cuts once a month. Community members also donate food, clothing and other items to the shelter (hygiene products are particularly needed by the residents); and
- A “rig dig” program involves residents in looking for and picking up needles in the area around the shelter.

House meetings are held with new shelter residents. The orientation includes information about the shelter’s rules and policies and the responsibility of residents to be “good neighbours”.

Substance use is not permitted in the shelter, but there have been a few overdoses on site which have required the administration of Narcan.

### Community Advisory Committee

In November 2016, a Guildford Shelter Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established. The CAC’s Terms of Reference outline the purpose of the CAC, which is to:

- Monitor the impact of the shelter in the community and provide suggestions to improve;
- Review and discuss complaints received and responses to complaints;
- Act as a liaison between Lookout and the community; and
- Provide support to Lookout in its commitment to providing a well-run emergency shelter program.

Members of the CAC include representatives of: Lookout, BC Housing, Fraser Health, Surrey School District (Hjorth Elementary School), RCMP, and City of Surrey (Planning, Parks, Bylaws, and Realty). Local businesses and residents in proximity to the shelter were invited to participate in the CAC; to date, only one resident has joined.

The CAC has met eight times from November 2016 to the present. Since the shelter opened in February there have been no neighbourhood issues or complaints associated with the shelter forwarded to the CAC. At the July 27, 2017 CAC meeting the RCMP representative reported that Calls for Service in the Guildford Town Centre area declined from 831 calls from January to June 2016 to 634 calls from January to June 2017.

## **Parkway Shelter**

The Parkway Shelter, which opened in December 2017, is located in the back of the City-owned building at Units 103/104, 10660 City Parkway. Shelter residents access the Parkway Shelter from the Front Room/Gateway Shelter property on 10667 - 135A Street.

The Parkway Shelter building had previously been an auto-body shop. In the fall of 2016, the back portion of the building was renovated to serve as a very basic 40-mat EWR Shelter space (only open overnight during extreme weather alerts). This included adding washrooms, showers, and laundry facilities. Due to the urgent need for shelter beds to accommodate people camping on 135A Street, since January 2017 the Parkway Shelter has been operating as a temporary shelter open 24/7.

The Parkway Shelter accommodates 14 women and 30 men (four extra mats were added to the shelter when the extreme weather season ended).

Unlike the other temporary shelters (Boulevard and Guildford), the Parkway Shelter has limited amenity space and no kitchen facilities. Shelter residents eat meals in the Front Room Drop-in, along with residents from the 40-bed Gateway Shelter, people sleeping in tents on 135A Street (approximately 100 people), and other community members. Shelter residents are connected to services including health and housing, but the shelter facility space is not amendable to the provision of the range of services and programs that are offered at the Guildford and Boulevard Shelters.

## **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

This report supports the following Desired Outcomes (DO) and Strategic Directions (SD) of the Sustainability Charter.

### **Inclusion**

- DO2: Surrey is a caring and compassionate city that supports its residents of all backgrounds, demographics and life experiences.
- DO9: Supports and services are in place to prevent and help people transition out of poverty.
- DO12: Everyone in Surrey has a place to call home.
- DO13: Appropriate and affordable housing is available to meet the needs of all households in Surrey.
- DO14: Supports are available to enable all people to live as independently as possible in the community.
- DO25: Surrey has a culture of collaboration and innovation to solve complex social problems.
  
- SD6: Create, enhance and increase awareness of services that support people with economic barriers.
- SD9: Facilitate the development of shelter facilities and supportive housing as outlined in the Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey.
- SD10: Increase and maintain the supply of affordable and appropriate rental housing across all Surrey communities.
- SD11: Ensure development of a variety of housing types to support people at all stages of life.

SD20: Foster a culture of collaboration and the generation of new ideas and methods for solving complex social issues.

### **Public Safety**

DO5: Surrey is recognized and perceived as a leader in establishing and maintaining collaborative partnerships for community safety and well-being.

SD4: Enhance intergovernmental relations, and ensure broad partnerships and collaboration to address multijurisdictional social issues (e.g., homelessness, mental health, addictions, etc.).

### **CONCLUSION**

The opening of the Guildford and Parkway Shelters in the past year has provided an additional 80 no-barrier shelter beds for homeless people in Surrey. In addition to providing a safe place sleep off the streets, the shelters serve to connect homeless people to services and more permanent housing.

It is recommended that Council:

- Receive this report for information.

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