



# COMMITTEE REPORT

NO: **P004**

DATE: **April 10, 2017**

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## **PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE**

TO: **Mayor and Council**

DATE: **April 7, 2017**

FROM: **Assistant Commissioner  
Officer in Charge, (OIC) Surrey RCMP  
Director, Public Safety**

FILE: **7450-30**

SUBJECT: **City Centre Response Plan – Status Report 2**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Surrey RCMP and the City Manager's office recommend that the Public Safety Committee receive this report as information.

## **INTENT**

The purpose of this report is to update the Public Safety Committee on the activities of the City Centre Response Plan since January 2017.

## **BACKGROUND**

Like all municipalities in the Lower Mainland, Surrey is facing increased challenges related to homelessness, mental health, and Fentanyl use. When all of these issues are present for a group of individuals, addressing these needs is a significant challenge. As a result they often become street entrenched. This presents significant related public health challenges. It also brings public safety challenges as these individuals are easily preyed upon by those willing to exploit their vulnerable situation and their dependency. In Surrey these issues play out daily on 135A Street between 106 and 108 Avenues (and in the surrounding neighbourhoods). These issues are especially complex and require integrated solutions which build on existing initiatives in keeping with the priorities of our Public Safety Strategy.

To address these issues in a comprehensive and collaborative manner which addresses both public safety and public health challenges, the City of Surrey, the Surrey RCMP, Fraser Health and several community partners developed the 3 phase City Centre Response Plan, as one of our key initiatives in the Public Safety Strategy. The three phases of the plan are: Emergency Housing First, Enhanced Service Presence, and Consultation and Planning for Future Actions.

The goal of the City Centre Response Plan is clear: To address the challenges in City Centre in a comprehensive and collaborative manner which addresses both public safety and public health concerns without simply temporarily displacing individuals to other areas.

## DISCUSSION

### *Phase 1 Update- Emergency Housing*

In the first few months of this project we sought to ensure an enhanced, more integrated approach to the use of low/no barrier shelter and housing spaces for those resident on 135A Street. Over the course of the winter we increased the number of shelter spaces and available spaces in the existing and new facilities were made available to the 135A Street residents.

#### *Shelters*

Surrey's permanent and temporary no/low barrier shelters operate at or near capacity. In total, four shelters provide 164 beds.

Due to the sudden increase in the number of people in tents in the 135A Street area in April 2016, as an immediate emergency response, BC Housing began to fund 40 overnight mats at three agencies. Thirty of these mats, at two of the agencies, remain open nightly.

BC Housing's Extreme Weather Response ("EWR") program operates from November 1 to March 31. It provides temporary overnight shelter spaces needed during extreme weather conditions. This past winter up to 35 mats were available in the City Centre area during EWR alerts at Surrey Urban Mission (20 mats), and Nightshift Ministries (15 mats). The mats at Surrey Urban Mission were generally at or near capacity; the women-only mats at Nightshift accommodated up to 6 people per night during EWR alerts.

#### *Tracking and Transitioning Individuals Tenting on 135A Street*

While shelters are intended to provide short-term emergency accommodation and help to stabilize people, the goal is to transition homeless people out of shelters and into permanent housing. The lack of appropriate housing options in Surrey for this hard-to-house population is making it challenging to transition shelter residents into housing, and thus individuals in tents to temporary shelters. As well, some of the people living in tents on 135A Street are unwilling to go into a shelter, but are interested in housing.

Recognizing this, as part of the City Centre Response Plan, we have sought to develop a more rigorous plan for housing individuals residing in tents on 135A Street. A Vulnerability Assessment Tool is being used by Lookout and Options' staff and to date 74 detailed assessments have been completed. This assessment acts as the basis for the work of Lookout and Options who are mandated by BC Housing to develop a plan for housing this group. To do this, City staff supported the development of the Housing Tracking Table. This approach allows for the creation of a detailed plan based on the housing and vulnerability needs of each individual resident and then tracking their progress as they get placed in housing.

Through the Housing Tracking process, Lookout is also able to tell us that of the approximately 110 individuals they are tracking as of March 29, 29 were removed from the list as they have been housed or left of their own accord. Of the 110, 27 are willing to accept housing support. More challenging is the fact that 30 of those individuals are resistant to services. The management group is currently working on a strategy to address these hard to serve individuals.

To date Lookout has placed 26 individuals in temporary housing. This includes 8 individuals at the Gateway Shelter, 5 at the Boulevard Shelter and 11 in the Guildford Shelter and 2 at Parkway. In

addition Options Society has recently taken over operation of the Ted Kuhn housing complex and will now start making referrals to that facility.

Given the lack of other available supportive housing units, the majority of people being transitioned out of the shelters or off the street need to be housed in private market rentals. BC Housing provides rent supplements and added 20 ongoing annual rent supplements to Lookout's outreach team in February to help with 135A Street. However, with Surrey's current low vacancy rate (.4%), finding affordable rental units and landlords willing to rent to homeless people has become increasingly difficult.

Of note is the fact that there is no centralized data system that provides information on the movement of homeless people around the region. BC Housing is currently developing a system that will track shelter users across the Province, so this information should be available sometime in the future. While the current movement of homeless people between Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley communities is unknown, the 2014 Homeless Count results showed that the majority of Surrey's homeless population were from Surrey (68% of homeless people in Surrey had been in Surrey for five or more years).

Finally, Surrey is not the only community that is experiencing a significant increase in homelessness. In February 2017, the Metro Vancouver Homelessness Task Force released a position paper that reports "a homelessness crisis is affecting all corners of Metro Vancouver". The paper indicates that there more than 70 homeless camps throughout the region, with an estimated 4,000 people in immediate need of housing,

The most significant challenge going forward is to find or develop more housing stock for the individuals resident on 135A Street. We are learning more about the needs of this population and it is clear their housing needs are significant. Without support to find and maintain housing, many will not access necessary services and will end up back on the street. We are currently working with BC Housing on the development of an inventory of Housing Stock and a plan for enhancing the type of housing stock needed.

## **Phase 2 Update- Enhanced Service Presence – Surrey Outreach Team and Expanded Substance Use Services: A Pilot Project**

### ***Surrey Outreach Team ("SOT")***

One of the challenges in effectively responding to the situation in City Centre is the transient nature of the individuals in that area. In a short time frame, the SOT project has allowed us to gather a more detailed understanding of the individuals in the area. An analysis of the monthly SOT 135A Street resident list indicates a large turnover in residents each month, with only 8% of individuals having been resident on 135A Street for all three months, and 69% of individual's resident for only a single month. SOT members indicate that the majority of the "new faces" each month are individuals familiar to them. For example, people who lived on 135A Street prior to the SOT pilot, had a period of recovery from addiction, followed by relapse and return to 135A Street. As well, people may find some form of accommodation, but without on-going support are unable to successfully maintain their housing.

In addition to the transient nature of this population a number of other factors lead to a fluctuation in the number of tents and residents. Primary among these is that for many of the transient

individuals in the area 135A Street offers a sense of community, support networks, and emergency facilities. In addition:

- The closure of EWR shelters in March in all areas in the region;
- Improved weather conditions; and,
- Difficulty obtaining housing. For example, one individual indicated that nobody would rent property to him after he got out of prison, leaving him nowhere to go but 135A Street.

As a result of these factors the numbers of tents and residents has increased slightly. From 47 on average in January to 51 on average in March. The total number of residents fluctuates from 49-62.

135A Street Residents, 2017			
	Jan	Feb	Mar
Tents	47	49	51
Residents	49	52	66

While there has not been a reduction in the number of tents on 135A Street, anecdotal reports indicate that since the SOT has been in operation there has been a significant reduction in homeless people camping in other areas of City Centre. In the past, enforcement efforts on 135A Street resulted in homeless people being more dispersed.

#### *Surrey Outreach Clients*

To date, 20 individuals have been identified as Surrey Outreach Clients. Eleven clients have been or are in the process of being referred to a partner agency:

- 8 referrals related to housing/shelter
- 3 referrals related to drug/alcohol addiction treatment

Referrals include both circumstances in which discussions between an SOT member and a partner agency regarding an Outreach Client's needs have begun, and circumstances where an Outreach Client has been in direct contact with a partner agency.

#### *Drug Overdoses in the 135A Street Area*

Drug Overdoses in the 135A Street Area, 2017				
	Jan	Feb	Mar*	Total
Non-fatal overdoses	82	85	63	230
Fatal overdoses	-	1	1	2
Naloxone administered by Members	6	6	9	21
Naloxone administered by Lookout staff	44	29	28	101

\*Data to March 29<sup>th</sup>

In addition to Naloxone administered by the RCMP, staff at Lookout administered Naloxone with even greater frequency. To date in 2017, Naloxone has been administered 101 times. In 2016, Lookout staff administered Naloxone 337 times. Given the above, the Surrey Fire Service rarely administers Naloxone on 135A.



There have been 361 overdoses to date in all of Surrey in 2017, 64% (232) occurred in the 135A Street Area. Despite accounting for the majority of overdoses, only 5% of the fatal overdoses (2 of 41) in Surrey occurred in the 135A Street Area. The presence of all partners on 135A, and the administration of naloxone undoubtedly contribute to this. The majority of fatal overdoses in Surrey occur in residences. Unlike the 135A Street Area, a residential setting may be more likely to involve drug use alone, with nobody to contact emergency services or administer Naloxone. The management group is currently reviewing available data to determine a strategy for addressing this situation.

#### *Business Engagement*

To date, the SOT has engaged with 78 businesses in the 135A Street Area, not including contacts initiated via Calls for Service from businesses.

On April 6, 2017 there was a Business Engagement meeting attended by the RCMP, Bylaws, Fraser Health, Lookout, the Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Association, and Surrey Crime Prevention. Businesses in the area expressed concerns regarding needles and the need to do more in the area. At the same time appreciation was expressed and some expressed they noted a positive change coming to the area. This meeting introduced a new business engagement model in which engagement activities will occur three times a week. The priorities of this new approach will be to maintain high visibility, to keep in constant contact with businesses, and to develop solutions to the issues raised by businesses.

#### *Early Interdiction*

SOT had Early Interdiction interactions with ten individuals in March 2017. The Early Interdiction strategy involves immediate efforts by SOT members to identify new people to the 135A Street Area, determine why they have come to the area, and refer them to appropriate resources.

#### *Calls for Service and General Occurrence Files*

With the 24/7 presence of the SOT in the 135A Street Area, Crimes Against Persons have decreased each month in 2017, compared to the same time period in 2016. For example, there has been a 36% decrease in cases of Assault-Common and Assault w/Weapon-CBH, a 40% decrease in Utter Threats-Person, and no cases of Sexual Assault or Sexual Interference in 2017 (compared with four and two cases, respectively, in 2016).

<b>Crimes Against Persons in the 135A Street Area*</b> (UCR 1000 Level Offences)			
	2016	2017	% Change
January	42	35	-17
February	35	28	-20
March*	42	29	-31
Total	119	92	-23

There has been an increase in total Calls for Service in the 135A Street Area in March 2017 compared to March 2016 due to a 140% increase in proactive, officer-generated files. Public calls (emergency and non-emergency) and front-desk service requests have decreased.

Since the SOT has been operational, fewer members are now dealing with a greater proportion of the files in the 135A Street Area. In 2017, the top 12 members (by file-load) have dealt with 48% of the files, compared to 26% for the top 12 members for the same time period in 2016.

### *SOT Trailer Update*

The SOT operated out of the Surrey Command Centre until March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017, when the permanent SOT Trailer arrived (civic address: 10681 - 135A Street, Surrey). An opening ceremony for the new SOT Trailer will be held on April 27<sup>th</sup>. Mayor and Council will be invited. Details are currently being confirmed. The trailer has a reception area, telephones, and internet landlines. Members will work from portable Mobile Work Stations in the trailer. The daily briefings that currently take place at the temporary Command Post will take place at the trailer. The facility will allow for enhanced coordination and mechanisms for tracking individuals.

### *Portable Toilet Update*

Given significant public health concerns in the area, three portable toilets (port-a-potties) were installed in early March. The bathrooms on 135A Street are being managed by the Lookout Society, who have indicated satisfaction with the current process with regards to the maintenance of washroom cleanliness and availability. The toilets are serviced three times per week.

Additionally, Bylaw staff, alongside the RCMP, have been conducting well-being checks on all individuals and tents in the area. Daily clean-ups are being conducted and individuals are encouraged to keep the area clean. All tents are now relocated to one side of the street, thus allowing pedestrian use on the opposite sidewalk. Bylaw staff are also working with Surrey's Fire Services to address fire safety concerns associated with open flame sources. Business engagement is ongoing and initial feedback is positive. Bylaw staff continue to conduct daily displacement patrols to minimize any displacements in the area. To further strengthen business engagement in the surrounding area, Community Patrol Officers are going to be leveraged to enhance the current business engagement process by providing additional dedicated business engagement. These findings will be shared with the Surrey Outreach Team and/or assigned to other Bylaws/RCMP staff for the appropriate follow up.

### *Fire Response to Risks of Open Flames*

Over the past several years, there has been an increase in the occurrence of 'tent cities' in local communities. Accompanying this there have been numerous incidents both in Surrey and in nearby communities where injury or death has occurred as a result of fire. This was most recently reported in Squamish on January 22<sup>nd</sup> where a man was found dead as a result of an apparent explosion in his tent.

### *Risks and Response*

Health Canada recommends that open flames, smoking materials, and fuel-powered lanterns or heaters never be used inside a tent. Since December 2016, we have been educating tent occupants about the dangers of burning in tents. In situations where tent occupants continue to use open flames or fuel powered devices for heat and light, we have requested that occupants surrender these hazardous items.

Since February 2017 we have offered tent occupants safe solar or crank-powered LED lights, good quality wool blankets and hot water bottles that can be filled at Lookout's Front Room Drop-in ('Safe Heat & Light kits') in exchange for open flame devices. BC Housing funded the initial purchase of such items and Lookout Society coordinated distribution of these items to the residents as part of their Outreach. The Surrey Fire Service is coordinating purchase and distribution of ongoing subsequent targeted exchanges.



Fire Activity Summary: January 1st to March 29th, 2017		
Measure	#	Method
Inspections to date this year	25	total
Frequency rate of inspections	2	weekly
Average # of tents found per inspection year to date	48	
Average # of open flame devices found per inspection	14	
Average # of tent clusters too close together per inspection	6	
Number of 'Safe Heat & Light' kits initially distributed	100	packages
Number of 'Safe Heat & Light' kits exchanged for compliance	2	packages

The offer to exchange safe items for hazardous ones has been well received and appreciated as a compassionate humanitarian effort. In spite of this, however, there has been general push back around the surrendering of the open flame devices during regular inspections. Inspection records from this year to date do not indicate a reduction in the incidence of burning inside of tents. Compliance has not improved as a result of either education efforts or the exchange of safe alternatives.

### ***Expanded Fraser Health Participation***

#### *Operational Aspects of the Fraser Health Approach*

In addition to the SOT project, Fraser Health is expanding Substance Use Treatment Services through an integrated, treatment-focused approach. They are seeking to develop more options to access multiple services for opioid dependent populations through a continuum of care that can move from urgent intervention to engagement to substance use treatment to recovery. Fraser Health began implementing their aspects of the plan in December 2016. Detail of the expanded services Fraser Health has put in place around 135A Street:

- Additional OD prevention outreach workers 12 hours per day.
- Staffing of the winter shelter 12 hours per day.
- 2 outreach nurses per day as needed during OD volume peaks.
- ACT Team and housing outreach workers during OD volume peaks.
- St. John Ambulance volunteers responding to high volume of ODs.
- EHS presence responding during high volume OD periods.

Fraser Health has submitted its application for S. 56 Exemption for Supervised Consumption Services to Health Canada and is awaiting approval. Consultations with stakeholders have taken place and feedback was submitted to Health Canada. A report containing anonymized and aggregated feedback is posted on the Fraser Health website. Current timelines indicate a likely Spring 2017 implementation; however, the start date is contingent on Health Canada approval.

Fraser Health has signed a formal Letter of Intent with Britco, allowing them to produce drawings of the trailer which will house Supervised Consumption Services. Target date for site installation is May 4, 2017; however, the start of services is still 'to be determined' as it is contingent on acceptance of the S.56 exemption from Health Canada described above.

Fraser Health indicates the following positive outcomes since the implementation of expanded services on 135A Street:

- Since December there has been a decreasing trend in the number of suspected overdoses presenting to Surrey Memorial Hospital but in recent weeks there appears to be a slight increase. This increase is being monitored closely.
- Since expanding Opioid Agonist Treatment (“OAT” - formerly known as Opioid Substitution Treatment) at the SHOP Clinic in January, approximately 50 individuals have started OAT and a total of 180 individuals throughout all of Surrey have begun treatment. It is important to recognize that Opioid Agonist Treatment is the first line of treatment for individuals who suffer from opioid addiction.
- Core Addictions Practice training provided by Fraser Health for RCMP has resulted in enhancing interactions with homeless individuals.

Fraser Health’s Homeless Outreach and Assertive Community Treatment teams attend 135A Street at least 4-7 days/week to support several individuals with assessment and/or treatment needs. They work closely with the RCMP and Bylaws regarding services and resources and take referrals from the shelters.

Fraser Health is addressing inappropriately discarded needles with the following investments:

- The Rig Dig program has been expanded to 6 hours of service, 7 days a week.
- Increased funding has been allocated to Lookout’s Outreach Van which also does needle pickups,
- Fixed Harm Reduction Site on 135A Street is now operational 7 days a week where individuals can return used needles.
- Currently working with the City to make available additional needle disposal boxes on 135A Street.

### **Phase 3 Update - Consultation and Planning for Future Actions**

#### ***Create a City Centre Public Safety Management Group***

The third prong of the City Centre Response Plan calls for continual engagement and consultation with community stakeholders to review and evaluate what is working and what can be improved on. The Management Group meets weekly and provides oversight to all aspects of the City Centre Response Plan. It involves senior internal staff (City Manager, Public Safety, RCMP, Surrey Fire, Engineering, Planning) and external partners (Fraser Health, BC Housing, Lookout). Key deliverables from this group have been the development of a Housing Tracking approach which is creating detailed plans on the housing and vulnerability needs of each individual resident and then tracking their progress as they get placed in housing. Additionally, we have begun a process for creating an inventory of all available housing stock so that we can place individuals in available housing and plan for creating additional, appropriate housing spaces. The Management Group is working closely with BC Housing to better address this need. It is clear that to meet our goal of removing tents from 135A Street without significant displacement requires an enhanced developmental and funding role for BC Housing in acquiring appropriate forms of housing.

The group will continue to review the current situation, consider multiple perspectives on the related challenges and recommend future actions to Mayor and Council in order to improve health, social wellbeing and public safety.



## SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

This initiative assists in achieving objectives related to two themes in the Sustainability Charter 2.0 – Public Safety and Health and Wellness. More specifically, it supports the following Desired Outcomes:

- Public Safety DO1: Residents are safe and have a strong sense of security in all neighbourhoods and throughout the City.
- Public Safety DO3: There are minimal community safety issues in the city, and the public is fully engaged in preventing and reducing crime.
- Public Safety DO4: Local residents and businesses are connected and engaged within their neighbourhoods and with the broader community - including police, public safety partners and social service agencies - to enhance safety.
- Public Safety DO5: Surrey is recognized and perceived as a leader in establishing and maintaining collaborative partnerships for community safety and well-being.
- Health and Wellness DO4: Residents understand the services and programs available to them, and are empowered to act in their own health interests.
- Health and Wellness DO5: Services and programs are responsive to shifting health and social needs, and local and external factors.

## OTHER STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

The City Centre Response Plan complements efforts to enhance public safety in Surrey, and with a focus on collaborative partnerships, increased visibility and outreach, and enhanced support for vulnerable persons, directly supports the City's Public Safety Strategy and the Detachment's 2015-2017 Strategic Framework.

## CONCLUSION

The City Centre Response Plan addresses public safety and public health issues in the City Centre area, particularly as it relates to the unresolved housing, addictions and mental health challenges of several people in the area. The challenges inherent in proactively responding to this population are significant. As a result of our approach there are many early positives: the partnership is strong and improving, we have a robust understanding of the situation of the individuals in the area, several individuals have received housing and other services; crimes against persons are down, 50 individuals began opioid replacement therapies and liaison with local businesses has increased. In short there would be many more tents on 135A were it not for our efforts.

We continue to focus with our partners on the goal of eliminating the presence of tents in and around this area, without displacing tents to other areas in the City. Comprehensive plans will continue to be developed and will be reported to Mayor and Council through the Public Safety Committee at regular intervals.



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TW/mc