

NO: R159

COUNCIL DATE: October 19, 2020

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **October 19, 2020**  
FROM: **General Manager, Planning & Development** FILE: **4815-01**  
SUBJECT: **Update on the Homeless Extreme Weather Response for Winter 2020-2021**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Planning & Development Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report for information; and
2. Authorize the Mayor to send a letter to BC Housing requesting special attention to ensure that additional EWR locations are made available within the City.

## INTENT

The intent of this report is to provide an update on the status of Extreme Weather Response (“EWR”) planning for 2020-2021. It includes information on confirmed locations for 2020-2021 EWR shelters; EWR in 2019-2020; and background about the EWR Program. The report outlines the requirements for additional EWR locations in Surrey and request special attention from BC Housing in ensuring that enough EWR locations are funded and made available in Surrey.

## BACKGROUND

The Provincial EWR Program is intended to provide time-limited, temporary, overnight shelter spaces. EWR sites open in response to inclement weather events during which the health and safety of homeless people living outside is at risk. BC Housing funds EWR programs in communities such as Surrey, where the number of homeless people exceeds the number of available shelter beds.

EWR shelters generally operate in churches and community agencies. People are provided with a mat and bedding. BC Housing’s EWR funding covers the cost of:

- overnight shelter staff;
- food (a snack for the shelter guests);
- cleaning and first aid supplies;
- daily cleaning; and
- laundry.

## **Surrey-White Rock EWR Plan**

Since 2005, BC Housing has contracted the Homelessness Services Association of BC (“HSABC”) to manage the EWR program in Vancouver and Surrey. A local EWR Plan outlines the operating structure for the EWR. This includes: the weather conditions or criteria for an EWR Alert to be issued; the procedures for implementing EWR; the roles and responsibilities of the Community Representative and the agencies; and the EWR shelter operations. It also includes a list of the approved EWR locations and the maximum number of mats to be provided at each location.

The EWR Community Representative is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the EWR. This includes updating the local EWR Plan; identifying and liaising with community agencies and faith-based organizations to secure EWR shelter sites; determining when to activate EWR Alerts; and overseeing the implementation of EWR.

### EWR Alerts

The Surrey EWR Community Coordinator decides when to issue an EWR Alert, determines which locations will be open, and the number of spaces which will be available.

The Surrey-White Rock EWR Plan defines extreme weather as:

“Conditions deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of homeless people such as:

- Temperatures at or below zero degrees Celsius.
- Significant snow accumulation or sleet/freezing rain conditions.
- Significant windstorms that may present danger to persons living in wooded areas and/or makeshift shelters (cardboard boxes or lean-tos).
- Periods of extended heavy rain creating conditions of ground saturation which make it difficult for people to keep dry.”

Notification of the activation and deactivation of an EWR Alert is sent out by the Surrey EWR Community Representative via e-mail. The EWR contact list includes RCMP members and City staff from Bylaws, Libraries, Parks, Recreation & Culture, and Planning & Development (Social Planning).

### **EWR in 2019-2020**

Last winter:

- Nine locations served as EWR shelters.
- 143 EWR adult spaces and 10 youth spaces were available in Surrey/White Rock.
- EWR Alerts were called on 99 nights between October 29, 2019 and March 25, 2020.

The table below provides a summary of the EWR shelter usage during the 2019-2020 winter. Of note is the range in the number of mats occupied per night. This is due to several factors, including often low occupancy when a new shelter location opens, and people are unaware of it. Also, occupancy increases depending on the severity of the weather and the length of time the shelter is open during a single EWR Alert. The youth-only and women-only shelters have consistently had lower occupancy during EWR as compared to co-ed adult shelters.

SHELTER	POPULATION	MAT CAPACITY	# NIGHTS OPEN	RANGE IN # MATS OCC. PER NIGHT	BED OCCUPANCY 2018-2019
<b>WHALLEY</b>					
FRAFCA	Men & Women	12	93	0-15	87%
Phoenix (94A Street)	Men & Women	15	89	0-22	79%
Phoenix (100 Street)	Men & Women	13	12	0-7	26%
Nightshift	Men & Women	15	61	1-19	74%
PCRS	Youth	10	88	0-2	1%
<b>FLEETWOOD</b>					
Fleetwood Church	Men & Women	28	63	0-6	4%
<b>GUILDFORD</b>					
Guildford Shelter	Men & Women	10	59	1-13	75%
<b>CLOVERDALE</b>					
Pacific Church	Men & Women	25	99	0-27	46%
<b>SOUTH SURREY / WHITE ROCK</b>					
Peninsula United	Men & Women	25	75	2-27	56%

**DISCUSSION**

**Surrey-White Rock EWR Plan**

In Surrey, the HSABC is contracting Ms. Jonquil Hallgate to serve as the local EWR Community Representative. The 2020-2021 Surrey-White Rock EWR Plan has not yet been finalized because COVID-19 safety protocols need to be included in the Plan for this winter. The 2017-2018 Plan is available at <https://hsa-bc.ca/community-plans.html>.

**Confirmed Locations for 2020-2021 EWR Shelters**

To date, five locations have been identified for EWR shelters. These EWR shelters will provide a total of 52 mats for adults and six mats for youth. The EWR Coordinator is continuing to search for additional EWR shelter locations. The table below provides information on the five confirmed EWR shelters for 2020-2021.

SHELTER	ADDRESS	POPULATION	#MATS	HOURS
<b>CITY CENTRE</b>				
Nightshift Ministries	10635 King George Blvd.	Women	6	9pm-7am
PCRS	10453 Whalley Blvd.	Youth (< 19 years)	6	8pm-8am

SHELTER	ADDRESS	POPULATION	#MATS	HOURS
<b>FLEETWOOD</b>				
Fleetwood Church	9165 160 Street	Men & Women	15	8pm-7am
<b>CLOVERDALE</b>				
Pacific Community Church	5337 180 Street	Men & Women	15	8pm-7am
<b>SOUTH SURREY / WHITE ROCK</b>				
Peace Portal Church	15128 27B Avenue	Men & Women	16	8pm-7am

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the EWR in Surrey, with fewer locations and spaces secured for this year as compared to last winter. In some locations, the number of mats that can be provided has been reduced to ensure physically distancing. Also, some community agencies that previously hosted EWR are unable to do so, to keep existing residents and staff in their facilities safe. As a result, if no additional EWR locations are secured, there will be 95 fewer EWR mats available this winter as compared to last winter (see below for more details on the 2019-2020 EWR).

Of particular concern is that there is no co-ed or men’s EWR shelter location confirmed for City Centre. Also, once again, there is no EWR shelter location in Newton.

### **Estimated Number of EWR Spaces Needed**

The 2020 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count conducted over a 24-hour period on March 3 and 4, 2020, found 644 homeless people in Surrey. Of these, 173 were unsheltered and 68 were in EWR shelters on the night of the count. (Please note that 24-hour point-in-time homeless counts are considered to represent an undercount.) The Olive Branch Shelter, which will be ready to open at the end of October, will provide an additional 46 shelter beds. Given this information, a rough estimate of the total number of EWR spaces required in Surrey is 195. This means that an estimated additional 137 spaces are needed (195 – 58 confirmed spaces).

Based on the above information, City staff will collaborate closely with BC Housing staff, their contractor at HSABC with the common goal of securing additional EWR shelter spaces in Surrey as we prepare for the winter season.

### **SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS**

The EWR Plan supports the objectives of the City’s Sustainability Charter 2.0. In particular, this work relates to the Sustainability Charter 2.0 themes of Inclusion and Public Safety. Specifically, these projects support the following Desired Outcomes (“DO”) and Strategic Directions (“SD”):

- Diversity and Accessibility DO2: Surrey is a caring and compassionate city that supports its residents of all backgrounds, demographics and life experiences.
- Housing DO14: Supports are available to enable all people to live as independently as possible in the community.

- Social Infrastructure and Innovation Do25: Surrey has a culture of collaboration and innovation to solve complex social problems.
- Housing SD9: Facilitate the development of shelter facilities and supportive housing as outlined in the Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey.
- Community Safety and Emergency Services 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.
- Community Safety and Emergency Services SD4: Enhance intergovernmental relations and ensure broad partnerships and collaboration to address multijurisdictional social issues (e.g., homelessness, mental health, addictions, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

The EWR is a crucial program that ensures the safety and well-being of some of Surrey's most vulnerable people during each fall and winter season, when below-freezing temperatures and precipitation volume makes living outdoors not only uncomfortable, but potentially life-threatening. At this time, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the EWR by limiting the number of available beds and mats due to physical distancing measures, as well as reducing the number of facilities which can open their doors while keeping current staff and patrons safe, although it is possible that alternative solutions may come to light which will alleviate the present shortfall.

City staff will collaborate closely with BC Housing staff and HSABC staff to fund and secure additional EWR shelter spaces in Surrey. It is recommended that Council authorize the Mayor to send a formal request to BC Housing for additional EWR spaces in Surrey for the upcoming winter season.

*Original signed by*  
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