

As part of the EOC preparedness for the pandemic, staff started to collaborate with BC Housing and the Fraser Health Authority (“Fraser Health”) to establish an ERC at the North Surrey Recreation Centre (“NSRC”) to ensure there was a plan in place to support Surrey’s priority populations, which are at a higher risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus infection and are unable to self-isolate and/or recover while living in a shelter or being unhoused.

Given that the NSRC had already been closed and internal decommissioning begun in preparation for an upcoming demolition associated with the re-development of the site as part of the Surrey Central Business District, staff proceeded with some remediation within the facility to create the ERC. BC Housing supplied personal pods for guests, and contracted Surrey Urban Mission (“SUMS”) to operate the facility. Finally, a team of nurses from Fraser Health were assigned to work on-site to provide COVID-19 testing and wrap-around health care services to the guests, as well as manage all the referrals to the ERC (referrals are made by shelters and Surrey Memorial Hospital). The ERC opened on April 7, 2020, thus offering a safe and supportive place for Surrey’s priority populations during the pandemic.

The ERC has proven to be successful, both at managing the safety and well-being of the guests during the pandemic, as well as being a starting point to recovery and stable housing for some of them.

DISCUSSION

There is a recent COVID-19 outbreak that has been declared at the Cove Shelter (“the Shelter”), which is located at 10607 – King George Boulevard. The Shelter was already at half capacity to allow for physical distancing and to help minimize persons infected, should an outbreak occur. Following this event, all infected people have been moved out of the Shelter and into hotels around the region, and Fraser Health staff did a walk-through at the Shelter to ensure proper sanitary protocols are in place, with one of the recommendations being that BC Housing considers installing personal pods in the Shelter – which is what was done at the most recent shelter that opened, the Olive Branch Shelter – and re-opening with guests that are free of COVID-19.

With winter weather now at our doorstep, BC Housing and its contractors are scrambling to ensure there are sufficient EWR locations in Surrey. This year, the EWR Program is experiencing serious difficulties in providing enough spaces to meet the anticipated demand for safe spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the physical requirements for distancing, cleaning, and staffing. As such, some of the facilities that were available in previous years are not available for the 2020-2021 winter season.

In collaboration with BC Housing and Fraser Health, staff have been in discussion about possible alternatives that could be implemented to help provide more EWR spaces in Surrey, especially in the City Centre area.

The table below lists the presently confirmed EWR and winter shelter locations, with their capacity adjusted for COVID-19 safety protocols.

CITY CENTRE					
SHELTER	ADDRESS	POPULATION	#MATS	HOURS	OPEN
Nightshift Ministries	10635 King George Blvd.	Women	6	9pm to 7am	EWR Alerts
PCRS	10453 Whalley Blvd.	Youth (13 to 21 years)	6	8pm to 8am	EWR Alerts
Atira (Shamai House)	N/A	Women	4	8pm to 7am	EWR Alerts
FLEETWOOD					
SHELTER	ADDRESS	POPULATION	#MATS	HOURS	OPEN
Fleetwood Church	9165 160 Street	Men & Women	15	8pm to 7am	EWR Alerts
CLOVERDALE					
SHELTER	ADDRESS	POPULATION	#MATS	HOURS	OPEN
Pacific Community Church	5337 180 Street	Men & Women	20	10pm to 7am	Every night until Mar. 31
SOUTH SURREY / WHITE ROCK					
SHELTER	ADDRESS	POPULATION	#MATS	HOURS	OPEN
Peace Portal Church	15128 27B Avenue	Men & Women	20	8pm to 7am	Every night until Mar. 31

Emergency Response Centre as Extreme Weather Response Location

Based on present conditions, there are 65 EWR mats currently available in Surrey. In previous years, pre-COVID-19, there were approximately 80 additional EWR mats that were available; using the ERC as a potential EWR location could provide EWR spaces equivalent to prior years. It should be noted that on most nights during an EWR Alert, in prior years not all the EWR locations operated at full capacity. This year is likely to be different due to physical distancing required for safe operation, resulting in fewer spots available.

Since the last EWR update was provided to Council, the new Olive Branch Shelter at 10732 – 135A Street was opened in the former building of the Surrey Food Bank, in City Centre. This new facility was then able to host guests that had been temporarily hosted at the ERC. The move of guests to the Olive Branch Shelter from the ERC has resulted in the ability of the ERC to accommodate potential guests requiring wrap-around support.

In discussion with BC Housing and Fraser Health, staff were advised by Fraser Health that the ERC would be an ideal site to host EWR guests for this winter season, with its full wrap-around services that are available to guests of the facility. It would allow Fraser Health nurses to work with the priority populations using the facility, and to extend to a new cohort the successes

realized with the former ERC guests that are now at the Olive Branch Shelter. Services provided at ERC include medical health care, opioid agonist, managed alcohol program, food, and social service support, which is not provided in typical EWR locations, where guests would simply come in at night and leave in the morning. Fraser Health has suggested to use the second decommissioned ice rink in order to safely operate an EWR within the facility, while keeping the ERC functioning in its current state. Fraser Health staff believe this would greatly help in reducing the risk of widespread COVID-19 infections within Surrey's priority population.

The recommended approach, by Fraser Health and BC Housing, of using the ERC for EWR services is not a typical approach, and cannot be considered a long-term solution, given that the NSRC is slated for decommissioning in 2021; however, using the ERC for dual use – supporting priority persons needing care due to COVID-19 infection, as well as allowing Fraser Health nurses to work with guests through an EWR location – would ensure further reach of health care and social services for those priority populations, and would help minimize the impact of COVID-19 within that segment of the population.

BC Housing has indicated they would cover the additional operating costs of a dual service ERC location, while Fraser Health has confirmed they would have nurses on-site, along with other non-clinical staff such as mental health and social workers, during regular working hours in order to provide much needed health care, harm reduction, and support services to the guests.

With the announcement of upcoming COVID-19 vaccines that are likely to be available in 2021, the planned opening of the three modular supportive housing projects currently under construction along with the commissioning of the Green Timbers facility will greatly help address the current situation as it relates to EWR and shelter availability in Surrey. Staff are actively working at identifying two additional sites in Surrey to host supportive modular housing, which will further help with housing uncertainty in Surrey.

Council has approved the use of the NSRC as an ERC location, and at the time it was not envisioned to also be offering EWR mats. Staff have identified potential other locations in City Centre, within private property, that could be considered to be used as EWR for the 2020-2021 winter season, should Council prefer keeping ERC and EWR services at separate locations; however, for those alternate locations, lease agreements would need to be successfully negotiated and completed, fit-out of the space would have to be in place, and staff would have to be hired to operate the facility. This would take several weeks but is believed to be possible to achieve for the new year.

CONCLUSION

With the current COVID-19 pandemic situation exacerbating the number of Extreme Weather Response mats that are available for the 2020-2021 winter season, Council is asked to offer direction to staff for their preferred course of action, as discussed above.

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