

NO: R248

COUNCIL DATE: December 24, 2021

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **December 23, 2021**

FROM: **Acting General Manager, Planning &
Development
General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Culture
General Manager, Corporate Services**

FILE: **4815-01**

SUBJECT: **Extreme Weather Response for People Experiencing Homelessness**

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning & Development Department, Parks, Recreation & Culture Department and Corporate Services Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report for information;
2. Approve using space in the former North Surrey Recreation Centre (“NSRC”) for an Extreme Weather Response (“EWR”) shelter from December 24, 2021 to March 31, 2022; and
3. Approve extended daytime hours at the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre during the holiday season as a place for people to warm up and be out of the cold weather.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to:

- open a new EWR Shelter at the former NSRC from December 24, 2021 to March 31, 2022; and
- extend the hours over the holidays at the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre so it can provide a warm place for people during the daytime.

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.

About the EWR Program

The EWR Program operates over the winter months, from October or November to the end of March. EWR shelters are temporary shelters that open overnight. Guests 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.

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 including the weather conditions or criteria for an EWR Alert to be issued. 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."

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

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

More information on HSABC and the EWR Program is available at:

www.hsa-bc.ca/program-outline.html

Current EWR Shelters in Surrey

There are currently a total of 61 EWR shelter mats in five EWR shelter locations in Surrey. The following table provides a list and descriptions of the EWR shelters.

Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Shelters 2021-2022

EWR Site	Address	Community	# of Mats	Population served	Shelter Operator	Hours
Pacific Community Church	5337 180 St	Cloverdale	15	Coed	Options	10pm-7am
Mount Olive Lutheran Church	2350 148 St	South Surrey	20	Coed	Options	10pm-7am
Fleetwood Christian Reform Church	9165 160 th Street	Fleetwood	14	Coed	Lookout	7pm-7am
Atira Shimai House	13327 100A Avenue	Whalley	6	Women	Atira	10pm-10am
PCRS Youth Hub	10453 Whalley Blvd	City Centre	6	Youth	PCRS	7pm-7am

DISCUSSION

The current EWR shelters are generally operating at full, or close to full capacity, on nights when EWR Alerts have been in effect this winter. In addition, while the majority of unhoused people are located in the City Centre area, this neighbourhood does not have a co-ed EWR shelter. For the past several months the HSABC staff have been trying to locate additional EWR shelters in the City Centre, as well as Newton. To date, they have not been successful in finding churches or community agencies willing and able to host an EWR.

Environment Canada has issued winter weather advisories for several parts of British Columbia, including Surrey, in the upcoming week. This includes Special Weather Statements, Snowfall Warnings, Freezing Rain Warnings, and Winter Storm Warnings. These weather conditions could be very dangerous for people who are unhoused. In response, staff are recommending that an additional EWR shelter be set up at the former NSRC; and that the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre extend their opening hours over the holidays to ensure that there is a warm space available during the day in the City Centre.

EWR at the Former North Surrey Recreation Centre

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, the City has had a License Agreement in place with BC Housing for the former NSRC to be used as an Emergency Response Centre (“ERC”) for people experiencing homelessness in Surrey.

Currently, the ERC accommodates up to 96 people in the two ice arenas (48 guests per arena); it operates at full or close to full capacity. Surrey Urban Mission Society (“SUMS”) is contracted by BC Housing to manage the facility. Fraser Health’s Integrated Homelessness Action Response Team (“IHART”) works on-site providing health supports to the guests.

The former weight room space on the second floor is not currently being used. It is proposed that that this space be utilized as a EWR shelter. City staff from Building and Fire Services have inspected the space and fire safety plans are being put in place.

SUMS has confirmed that they have the capacity to operate the EWR shelter. They recommend starting with providing a maximum of 20 mats, and if needed, over time to increase the number of mats available while still complying with public health COVID-19 guidelines, fire safety and other considerations. The shelter hours will be 10pm to 8am. SUMS already has mats and blankets on site, and staff are on stand-by. If approved by Council, SUMS is proposing to open the EWR on Christmas Eve.

BC Housing has confirmed support for an EWR at the former NSRC. While the budget would need to be put in place with SUMS, BCH supports moving ahead with opening the shelter and sorting out the budget later.

Daytime Warming Space during the Holidays at Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre

With inclement weather expected through this holiday season staff are also recommending that additional hours of operation be implemented at the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre to ensure a City recreation centre remains open for public access during the extreme weather. With the extended hours, the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre will remain open throughout the holidays including from December 25 to December 28, 2021 and from January 1 to January 3, 2022 if the cold weather continues into the New Year. The expanded hours at the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre will be accessible to any members of the public seeking relief from the cold and extreme weather with hot chocolate and coffee provided on site. The hours of operation on December 24, 25 and 26, 2021 and January 1, 2022 will be 9am to 8pm to ensure continuity with library hours of operation and closure schedules within Libraries. Hours of operation on December 27 and 28, 2021 and January 2 and 3, 2022 will be 9am – 4pm. The Chuck Bailey facility will also be open for regular hours of operation from 9am – 4pm from December 29, 2021 to December 31, 2021 for scheduled programs.

The City Centre Library also welcomes people inside. The Library hours are:

- Monday to Thursday from 9am to 8pm;
- Friday from 9am to 5pm; and
- Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 5pm.

The City centre Library is closed on December 25, 26 and January 1.

All facilities meet strict health and safety guidelines as set out by the Provincial Health Officer, Worksafe BC, Fraser Health and appropriate industry associations. Many additional COVID-19 safety measures have also been implemented in our facilities to ensure user safety.

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

With extreme winter weather expected through this holiday season, it is recommended that the City support the opening of a new EWR Shelter in the former NSRC from December 24, 2021 to March 31, 2022; and extend the opening hours of the Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre over the holiday season to provide a warm space for people during the day.

Ron Gill
Acting General Manager,
Planning & Development

Laurie Cavan
General Manager,
Parks, Recreation & Culture

Rob Costanzo
General Manager
Corporate Services