

Minutes of the Abbotsford Homelessness Task Force meeting held Wednesday, May 15, 2014, at 11:30 am in the Room 530 of Abbotsford City Hall

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Task Force Members Present: Councillor Ross – Co-Chair, Councillor Smith – Co-Chair, J. Burkinshaw, S. Kuperis (part), L. Loh, K. Matty, R. Siemens, L. Talvio and R. Van Wyk

Council Present: Mayor Banman (part)

Staff Present: G. Murray – City Manager, J. Rudolph – Deputy Manager, S. Bertelsen – General Manager, Planning and Development Services (part), Deputy Police Chief, R. Lucy, A. Martens – Continuous Improvement Coordinator, R. Livingstone – Communications & Design Specialist and L. Ganske – Recording Secretary

Facilitator: C. Enns – Social Planning Consultant

Public Present: 13+-

1. CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Councillor Ross, called the meeting to order at 11:30am

2. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Moved by K. Matty, seconded by R. van Wyk, that the minutes of the May 6, 2014, Homelessness Task Force meeting be adopted.

HTF10-2014

CARRIED.

3. BUSINESS OUT OF MINUTES

.1 2014 Homeless Count - verbal report R. van Wyk and J. Wegenast

R. van Wyk and J. Wegenast spoke to a Power Point presentation regarding the 2014 Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD)/Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Homeless Count. They advised that the purpose of the count was to determine if homelessness is increasing or decreasing in the region. The methodology used for the count is the same one used for similar counts throughout North America. They advised that the count is merely a snapshot of the homeless in the Fraser Valley, from Boston Bar to Abbotsford, and west through the Lower Mainland to Bowen Island. It was determined that 346 people in the Fraser Valley are living homeless and a similar survey in 2011 found 345.

While the amount of those without housing in most areas has remained stable, numbers have risen in Mission and Abbotsford with the Abbotsford numbers increasing most: up 29% to 151 from 117 in 2011 (but still considerably less than the 235 high in 2008). A total of 34 more people are homeless now.

Clarification was made regarding criticism expressed at the May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting regarding the job Abbotsford did of homeless count: There was not a lot of buy in from the City itself, but service

providers and volunteers did an excellent job, despite last minute changes in the coordination of surveyors. Very meaningful data was collected.

The notion that Abbotsford is "inheriting homeless" from the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) was debunked, as most homeless in Abbotsford have lived here for over two years (and 50% of these have been homeless for less than two years); and prior to that came from out of province, or elsewhere in British Columbia (BC) or the FVRD, with only 25% coming from Metro Vancouver. Only one in ten has lived here for less than six months.

A disproportionate number of youth are homeless and 60 percent of all those living on the streets are males. A significant portion of homeless are on welfare or disability income and it was noted that the majority of homeless persons view the lack of income and affordable housing as a barrier to becoming permanently housed. Also worth noting, is the fact that even if we had unlimited affordable housing at \$375 per month, only those on some sort of income assistance (52% of the homeless) would be able to go into it. It was recommended that in considering solutions to homelessness, some focus be directed toward those who are not on regular subsidized income, as it is virtually impossible to house them.

Many of those surveyed reported having multiple health concerns (addiction, mental illness, physical disability and/or medical condition). It was noted that all reporting was self-identified and not the observations of the surveyors. Better access to healthcare is crucial. Too many barriers currently prohibit those who desire to obtain assistance. For instance, doctors cannot verify a person's disability or mental health issues if they do not have a sufficient relationship with them and the client cannot obtain financial assistance without his report.

A full report (more detailed) will be available in July or August. A review is planned to identify funding gaps and opportunities. The Social Housing Inventory (of available options) for each community will be updated (last done in 2009).

Members asked questions and discussion ensued. In asking what solutions they would recommend, J. Wegenast advised that no new services need to be added, but emphasized that the City of Abbotsford and the Homelessness Task Force should hold Fraser Health Authority (FHA) accountable to deliver what they are mandated to in an efficient manner. He cited the campaign "A GP for Me" that launched in April, whereby everyone who wanted a family doctor would have one; yet no one in our region has heard of it.

R. van Wyk, noted what services are available are good, but they are not enough. He suggested one more street nurse would be sufficient. K. Matty noted physicians travel around the world to donate time, perhaps a program could be set up here. If a physician is what we need, then a physician is what we should have. This is a practical solution. An action plan to work in this direction, beginning by talking to The Division of Family Practice, would be a good place to start.

K. Matty opined that Rotary sends doctors around the world, perhaps they could assist. R. Siemens suggested that mental health assessment nurses are desperately needed in the downtown area. In referencing the youth health clinic, he felt a mobile clinic would be optimal. Surrey has a street front, free walk-in clinic with a mobile clinic attached, which is funded by FHA. S. Kuperis advised that many communities in BC have primary care clinics staffed with nurse

practitioners and physicians. There are a well-researched, evidence-based number of models to look at.

Councillor Smith advised that Vancouver Coastal spends 3.4 times per capita more than the FHA, on health care and Vancouver Island spends twice as much. He has researched this information and is familiar with the FHA challenges in this regard, and he advised the City get behind FHA. He feels homelessness is primarily an FHA and a BC Housing issue. S. Kuperis stated that a business case is ready to go whenever funding is announced. Members discussed that other sources of revenue within the community, who support causes overseas, could be accessed.

Mayor Banman explained that when he was working on his doctorate in Portland, student practitioners worked with the homeless population as interns. He noted that the FHA budget is \$9,800,000 and that there are less than 500 homeless people in the region. He believes that given this ratio, resources could be better managed to address mental health and addiction issues, especially when you consider the collateral damage to every other system these 500 people are causing. He suggested thinking outside the box and utilizing interns and other solutions more creatively.

C. Enns inquired what options are available for the difficult-to-house 48% currently, until more permanent ones can be found? J. Wegenast advised that Nate McCready of the Salvation Army is in touch with BC Housing regarding a twelve month rental subsidy that is available. For those who are unable to responsibly care for a rental unit, he felt a facility, similar to the The Lion, run by the Lookout Society in Vancouver, would be ideal. It has doctor visits, suite checks, and a manager on site. There are some creative models out there.

A member of the public, in observing the disconnect between solutions and those we are trying to help, suggested a practical idea would to have a staffed, 24/7, adult drop-in centre with:

- Welfare advisors
- Medical staff
- Rapport-building staff/volunteers
- Housing assistance
- Resources

Ward Draper of 5&2 Ministries advised that all service providers in Abbotsford are onboard with the concept of a drop-in facility, and that all that is needed is a location/building. It was suggested that non-profits be invited to participate, as they can get twice as much done with half the money. The Warm Zone was mentioned as an example of a very effective drop in centre; though it is only for women and is not open 24/7.

When asked if the Salvation Army operation could be expanded to work as a 24/7 drop in centre, Ward Draper opined that it would not work there, but that 5&2 would be willing to operate this type of facility if the City would provide the building and land to them for \$1 a year.

When asked by the facilitator, L.Talvio gave an overview of how the Cyrus Centre functions as a drop-in centre for homeless youth in Abbotsford.

.2 Workplan Committee Structure – C. Enns

The facilitator, C. Enns, circulated sample municipal action plans; a meeting schedule with proposed areas of focus for each date; and work plan timelines with proposed sub-committee structure. Task Force members discussed.

Deputy Chief, R. Lucy commented on the targets that various communities had set for themselves:

- Kamloops – “to eliminate homelessness by 2015”
- Nanaimo – “to eliminate chronic homelessness”
- Fredricton – “five year plan to eliminate homelessness”
  - Their definition of homelessness is “anyone without housing for more than fourteen days”

In pondering how well these cities might be doing with their targets, Deputy Chief Lucy was curious as to what goals Abbotsford should set for itself and noted that a fully supplied drop-in centre is a realistic goal.

C. Enns advised that one of the main authors for several of these plans, Jim Richter, would be at the June 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Task Force, to discuss them and to advise on access to Federal funding. Mr. Richter will be bringing a colleague from Lethbridge, Alberta, as they are similar in size to Abbotsford and are currently working on their action plan.

Ms. Enns suggested that the two sub-committees: ACT (Assertive Community Treatment Team)/Drop-in and Housing Continuum, be self-organizing within their broad topic area. She solicited specific direction from the sub-committees that her students can assist with beginning next week. Their timeline is tight, finishing at the end of June.

Councillor Ross advised that sub-committees should discuss the pros and cons in their meetings to determine which outweighs the other in their considerations.

Councillor Ross suggested Shayne Williams, Executive Director, Keys: Housing and Health Solutions, who spoke at the recent Local Government Administration (LGMA) conference, be invited to speak to the Task Force, and Ms. Enns advised that he has agreed to present at the July 10<sup>th</sup> meeting.

C. Enns solicited feedback on the BC Housing Community Partnership Initiative Program Brief. Ms. Enns requested members propose tour sites and advised that trips could be arranged for Nanaimo and Portland if members were interested. She advised that the July 24<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held in Jubilee Park with 5&2 Ministries and members of the homeless community.

Moved by K. Matty seconded by S. Kuperis that items 3.1 and 3.2 be received.

HTF11-2014

CARRIED.

4. DELEGATION

None.

5. REPORTS

None.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

None.

7. MEDIA

- .1 May 7, 2014 Abbotsford News Article regarding the May 6, 2014 Homelessness Task Force meeting
- .2 May 10, 2014 Abbotsford News Article regarding the clean-up of homeless camps along Gladys Avenue

Moved by R. Lucy seconded by L. Talvio that the media distributed, be received.

HTF12-2014

CARRIED.

8. NEW BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Moved by J. Burkinshaw that the May 15, 2014, Homelessness Task Force meeting be adjourned (2:00 p.m.)


HTF13-2014

CARRIED.

The next meeting of the Homelessness Task Force is scheduled for Thursday, May 15, 2014, at 1:30 pm in Room 530.

Certified Correct:

  
Co-Chair, Councillor Ross

  
Recording Secretary, L. Ganske