

Memorandum

TO: Members of Council
FROM: Dana Earle, Deputy City Clerk
DATE: Monday, December 21, 2020
SUBJECT: **Additional Information/New Business**
Committee of the Whole - December 21, 2020

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Additional Information

1. Correspondence from Mr. D. Brescacin, Thunder Bay Firefighters Association dated October 2020 relative to Report No. R 146/2020 (Development & Emergency Services – Thunder Bay Fire Rescue) Thunder Bay Fire Rescue Strategic Master Fire Plan – Implementation Plan, previously presented at the December 14, 2020 Committee of the Whole. (Distributed separately on Monday, December 21, 2020)

New Business

1. Memorandum from Ms. Cynthia Olsen, Drug Strategy Coordinator – Corporate Strategic Services, Vulnerable Populations COVID-19 Planning Table Chair dated December 18, 2020 relative to COVID-19 Emergency Response – Cold Weather Plan Warming Centre. (Distributed separately on Monday, December 21, 2020)

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Krista Power, City Clerk

FROM: Cynthia Olsen, Drug Strategy Coordinator – Corporate Strategic Services, Vulnerable Populations COVID-19 Planning Table Chair

DATE: December 18, 2020

RE: **New Business – COVID-19 Emergency Response – Cold Weather Plan Warming Centre, Committee of the Whole, December 21, 2020**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memorandum recommends that City Council provide a one-time grant for a community partner to staff a daytime warming centre until approximately the end of March 2021. Administration has been in contact with certain community partners about the ability to fill this gap in service by providing facility space, programming and staffing. The estimated expense to staff the warming centre is \$46,000, and issuing the one-time grant would be conditional upon entering into a funding agreement with the operator. It is further recommended that Council allocate up to \$20,000 in funds in the event that external funding cannot be secured for supplies, transit passes and other operating costs.

The immediate need for a daytime warming space is a result of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic which has created unique demands on those working in and utilizing the emergency shelter system:

- Physical distancing means that not as many people can be served in one location as in past;
- Individuals who are experiencing homelessness need to be supported and provided a space to self-isolate;
- Individuals who are ill, whether COVID-related or not, need to be separated from the general emergency shelter population;
- Formal (shelters) and informal (libraries, malls, and vestibules) day-time warming facilities that are typically available during winter weather for vulnerable populations have been limited.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It has been identified that there is sufficient funding for the warming centre staffing costs in the approved 2020 Community Youth & Cultural Funding Program budget that has not yet been

allocated this year, based on actual applications received to that program. The purpose of the intended grant is aligned with the Community Youth & Cultural Funding Program. This surplus will be recommended to be transferred to the Stabilization Reserve Fund at year-end and is the recommended funding source for this 2021 program.

It is recommended that Council allocate \$46,000 from the Stabilization Reserve Fund as a one-time grant to a community partner to staff the warming centre and that the community partner be required to follow the reporting requirements of the Community, Youth & Cultural Funding Program for this grant.

External funding options are being explored to support additional expenses to effectively support the operation of the warming centre (i.e., supplies, transit passes, etc.). However, additional funds may be required if external funding cannot be secured, in which case it is recommended that Council allocate up to \$20,000 in Stabilization Reserve Funds.

BACKGROUND

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Thunder Bay and Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU) established their Emergency Response Teams, and identified that a pandemic plan was needed to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals in Thunder Bay and reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 among those individuals and the community at large. While diseases can make anyone sick, some Canadians are more at risk of getting an infection and developing severe complications due to their health, social and economic circumstances.¹

To that end, a multi-sector Vulnerable Populations COVID-19 Planning Table (Table) was established at the end of March 2020. The goal of the Table is to plan effective responses to mitigate the pandemic's impact on individuals experiencing homelessness (including those who are rough sleeping), individuals with mental health challenges, people who use drugs, women and children (in particular those experiencing domestic violence), Indigenous peoples, youth, individuals involved in sex work/human trafficking, individuals being released from custody, newcomers/refugees, and seniors.

Through a collaborative approach between multiple community partners, supported illness, isolation, and overflow shelter spaces have been created to meet the needs of individuals who are experiencing homelessness. This work is overseen by the Isolation & Overflow Shelter Operations Task Team (Task Team) of the Table. However, as the colder weather approached and wave two of the pandemic hit Ontario, it was quickly identified that there was a significant gap in service and necessary resources to ensure individuals experiencing homelessness could take refuge from the elements.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, formal (shelters) and informal (libraries, malls, and vestibules) daytime warming facilities that are typically available during winter weather for vulnerable

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada. Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19): Vulnerable Populations and COVID-19. (April 5, 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/vulnerable-populations-covid-19.html>

populations have been limited. Through the Task Team, community partners providing services to local vulnerable populations have indicated that, while overnight shelter is strained, they believe the priority gaps are in daytime warming services, and the ability to respond to winter weather extremes. The partners have been collaborating to maximize existing resources, but are not able to address the daytime and extreme weather gaps with the resources currently available. It is anticipated that winter weather will create significant risks for residents experiencing homelessness or precarious shelter. In addition to personal impacts of cold illness, affected residents seeking care could exacerbate capacity concerns of healthcare providers as the pandemic progresses. Given the community partners' limited capacity to address this gap, this concern has been identified as requiring action under the City's COVID-19 emergency response.

As such, this gap was brought to the City of Thunder Bay Emergency Response Team to determine how the City could address public safety under the broader municipal emergency response and address an emergent risk to vulnerable populations due to COVID-19 related closures and restrictions that would have otherwise provided informal publicly accessible warming spaces.

An internal group is currently developing a COVID-19 Cold Weather Response Plan (Plan) to aid in preventing negative health impacts of cold weather conditions on residents of Thunder Bay during the COVID-19 pandemic response. The Plan includes a particular focus on preventing direct impacts of cold exposure on people experiencing homelessness, will supplement external partners' plans, and be utilized to coordinate responses at various activation levels.

External funding sources are being explored to support additional anticipated costs to effectively operate the warming centre (e.g. transportation needs and supplies). If all other COVID-19 emergency funding avenues are exhausted (i.e., funding not available, or expenses not eligible under funding streams), additional funds from the City of Thunder Bay would be required to support the additional expenses.

RECOMMENDATION

WITH RESPECT to the memorandum from Ms. C. Olsen, Drug Strategy Coordinator, dated December 18, 2020, we recommend that to assist with mitigating risks associated with cold exposure on people experiencing homelessness during COVID-19, funds be allocated to provide a one-time grant for a community partner, to be determined by the City's COVID-19 Emergency Response Team (ERT), to staff a daytime warming centre until approximately the end of March 2021;

AND THAT the grant to cover the estimated staffing cost of \$46,000 be funded from the Stabilization Reserve Fund;

AND THAT the community partner selected to operate the warming centre, as determined by ERT, shall be required to comply with reporting requirements of the Community, Youth & Cultural Funding Program;

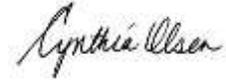
AND THAT if additional funding is required for expenses to effectively support the operation of the warming centre, City Council authorizes that up to \$20,000 in Stabilization Reserve Funds be allocated to meet these needs;

AND THAT Administration proceed as set out in this Memorandum;

AND THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute all necessary agreements;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cynthia Olsen".

Cynthia Olsen
Coordinator - Thunder Bay Drug Strategy
Chair – Vulnerable Populations COVID-19 Planning Table
City of Thunder Bay