



## CITY OF VANCOUVER

### OTHER REPORT

Report Date: May 31, 2006  
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Phone No.: 604.871.6399  
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VanRIMS No.: 01-1500-10  
Meeting Date: June 27, 2006

TO: Vancouver City Council  
FROM: Advisory Committee on Seniors Issues  
SUBJECT: Support for Regional Seniors' Advocacy Offices

#### RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS there are no coordinated seniors' advocacy services funded by any level of government;

AND WHEREAS the senior population is increasing dramatically at the same time that government funding cutbacks are severely impacting seniors;

AND WHEREAS this gap in social policy is leading to potential abuse of seniors, causes unnecessary anxiety to seniors and their families, and places additional stress on municipalities;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT the Advisory Committee on Seniors' Issues RECOMMEND to Council THAT

- a) the City of Vancouver supports in principle the establishment of Regional Seniors' Advocacy Offices (RSAO) as proposed by the Seniors' Advocacy Steering Committee as a means of providing security and protection to seniors by ensuring they have an independent voice to advocate for seniors' rights in accordance with federal, provincial and municipal legislation;

- b) this resolution be forwarded to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) for endorsement;
- c) this resolution be forwarded to the provincial government requesting support for this BC initiative; and
- d) the City of Vancouver will collaborate with other municipalities in the UBCM and the FCM to lobby the federal government for support of this initiative.

#### **CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

The City Manager submits the foregoing for Council's consideration.

#### **COUNCIL POLICY**

There is no applicable Council Policy. The above recommendation was adopted by the Advisory Committee on Seniors' Issues at its meeting on May 26, 2006. The mandate of the Committee is to work to enhance access to city services for seniors, and to identify and suggest solutions to gaps and barriers that impede their full participation in all aspects of city life.

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to request Council support for Regional Seniors' Advocacy Offices (RSAOs), to request notice of this support be forwarded to the UBCM and the FCM for endorsement and to the Provincial government requesting support for the RSAO initiative, and to request the City of Vancouver collaborate with other UBCM and FCM municipalities for support of the RSAO initiative.

#### **BACKGROUND**

In March, 2006, the Seniors' Advocacy Steering Committee sent a letter to Councils throughout British Columbia, requesting formal support for RSAOs (Attached as Appendix A).

At the Seniors' Advisory Committee informal April 28, 2006, meeting, a representative from Seniors' Advocacy Project was in attendance to answer questions about the request for a resolution in support of the establishment of Regional Seniors' Advocacy Offices. At the May 26, 2006, Committee meeting, the Committee approved the resolution set out in the recommendation above.

#### **DISCUSSION**

In BC today, seniors have no formal advocates. With massive changes in health and housing programs for seniors in British Columbia, seniors' organizations, along with many groups and

individuals, have raised numerous concerns about the impact of these changes on the health and well-being of seniors in communities across the province. Once established, the Seniors' Advocacy Network can serve as a venue for seniors to provide valuable feedback to all levels of government regarding the impact of respective policies and legislation to effectively protect seniors' health and quality of life in British Columbia.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Advocacy aimed at securing services and protecting rights is one of the priorities within the City's Community Services Grants program. Subject to an application meeting other program criteria, this type of work could be eligible for grant funding.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Advisory Committee on Seniors' Issues requests Council support for the RSAO initiative.

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## Seniors Advocacy Project

March 13, 2006

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

In BC today, seniors have no formal advocates. With massive changes in health and housing programs for seniors in British Columbia, seniors' organizations, along with many groups and individuals, have raised numerous concerns about the impact of these changes on the health and well-being of seniors in communities across the province.

In May 2003, fifteen seniors' organizations in British Columbia formed the Seniors' Advocacy Steering Committee to discuss concerns about the state of advocacy services for seniors and seniors' ability to advocate on their own behalf. Appendix A provides a description of the Seniors Advocacy Project that emerged out of these discussions including subsequent developments regarding multi-cultural communities and Seniors' Advocacy Offices. The Seniors' Advocacy Steering Committee's long term goal is to secure provincial and federal funding to establish and maintain community-based advocacy offices.

We are asking municipalities to endorse the concept of regional Seniors' Advocacy Offices by:

- 1) Passing a motion of support in principle for Seniors' Advocacy Offices in municipalities across the province (See Appendix-B);
- 2) Forwarding their expression of support of this resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) convention in the Fall of 2006;
- 3) Requesting the UBCM to obtain the provincial government's support for this initiative; and
- 4) Forwarding their resolution to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to obtain the federal government's support for this B. C. initiative.

Many of the issues described in the appendices also impact people with disabilities. Due to the mandate and membership of the Seniors Advocacy Steering Committee, this proposal is for the creation of Seniors Advocacy Offices, however, a similar initiative involving people with disabilities may be appropriate and easily integrated in the seniors' advocacy network. We have already submitted funding proposals to Vancouver Foundation, Vancity Foundation and New Horizons to set up infrastructure for establishing these bureaus throughout the province.

Your assistance is essential to ensure that seniors can obtain, from all levels of government, the entitled services and supports mandated by existing legislation and policies. Your support can provide the leverage to bring forward a resolution at the UBCM and ultimately at the FCM. Once established, the Seniors' Advocacy Network can serve as a venue for seniors to provide valuable feedback to all levels of government regarding the impact of respective policies and legislation to effectively protect seniors' health and quality of life in British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Joyce Jones  
Chairperson  
Seniors' Advocacy Steering Committee.  
411 Dunsmuir St  
Vancouver, BC., V6B 1X4  
[www.411seniors.bc.ca](http://www.411seniors.bc.ca)

## Seniors Advocacy Project

### Appendix-A: Summary of Seniors' Advocacy Research Project

#### Article I. Phase One - Research

The research portion of the Seniors' Advocacy Project, was sponsored by Health Canada through the VOICES Program and was completed between December 2003 and August 2004. This phase investigated two questions: 1) what supports do seniors in B.C. (and those who work with them) need to become full participants in policy development; and 2) how can seniors' organizations be strengthened to collaborate on advocacy.

Between January and March 2004, over 230 people from 17 communities representing five regions in B.C. participated in 24 focus groups and 11 interviews. Four themes were discussed:

1. The current status of advocacy supports for seniors;
2. Barriers to effective participation in public policy development;
3. The extent to which seniors' issues are identified and brought forward to decision-makers in government; and
4. Ways to build networks and linkages that will strengthen voluntary organizations working in health in B.C. to influence key policies affecting seniors.

Findings from the focus groups indicate that seniors in British Columbia feel they do not have meaningful input into developing the public policies that affect them. The ability of individual seniors to either self-advocate or be involved in policy development is limited by their personal or social circumstances and the lack of political will of the decision-makers. Seniors are more likely to have their concerns heard if they join others in organizations with compatible goals.

In addition, the research shows that while voluntary organizations provide a wide range of advocacy for seniors, the ability of these organizations to respond to increasing demands is limited by funding reductions and the consequent loss of knowledgeable staff. These additional constraints also limit the time and resources available to work on policies that affect seniors. Participants feel it is crucial for voluntary organizations to build skills in public policy development. Collaborating with other organizations and all levels of government is both necessary and desirable.

Key recommendations, based on the general views of participants, call on all levels of government to provide active support to voluntary organizations that will allow them to collaborate in policy development. This support must include:

1. Promoting the process of collaborative public policy development;
2. Financial resources for collaboration in the organizations' core budgets;
3. Development of policy expertise in the non-profit sector;
4. Ensuring that equity and ethnic groups are present at the policy table; and
5. Developing a variety of ways to reach citizens in both rural and urban communities.

### **Phase Two (A) - Advocacy Training Materials (September 2004 - December 2005)**

In September 2004, Phase Two of the Seniors Advocacy Project was launched. The intent of Phase Two was twofold: 1) build community capacity through more effective and more accessible advocacy for seniors, and 2) initiate a structure to facilitate the self-advocacy of seniors so that they can increase their involvement with community development in their regions.

A primary outcome of Phase Two was the development of seniors' advocacy training materials. These materials addressed knowledge and skills applicable to self-advocacy, peer advocacy delivered through seniors-serving organizations, and advocacy at the public policy level.

The development of the training manual included consultation with seniors' advocates across the province of British Columbia to identify both general and regional training requirements. The training modules, including the information gathered through these consultations, were piloted in four regions of BC. An email list-serve was also established in order to provide the trained advocates with a forum to discuss their activities and experiences as they proceed with the work of advocacy for seniors.

### **Phase Two (B) - Multicultural Advocacy Training**

Early in 2005, the Seniors Advocacy Steering Committee and 411 Seniors Centre applied to and received funding from Vancity Foundation to translate the training modules into culturally and ethnically appropriate language format. Given the amount of material and timeline of the grant, the Seniors Advocacy Steering Committee chose to translate the material into three languages: Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese. The manuals can be translated into other languages in the future, as further funding opportunities are explored.

### **Phase Three - Creation of Seniors Advocacy Bureaus**

The need for a third phase of the Seniors Advocacy Project emerged from the research done in Phase One. Seniors and seniors' advocates want assurance that the development of training materials and a first round of training are only the preliminary steps toward the establishment of permanent advocacy services for seniors throughout the province of British Columbia.

The vision for Phase Three is to implement volunteer-delivered advocacy services that are linked to existing community services for seniors. The Committee plans to examine which supports, structures, and mechanisms community seniors' organizations across the province may require in order to provide advocacy services for seniors, particularly those who are frail and vulnerable. The role of the volunteer advocates would be to assist seniors in dealing with a broad range of institutions, service providers and government organizations. The approach would be solution-oriented and focus on developing effective strategies for addressing issues and problems as they arise.

In addition, Phase Three will involve the ongoing training of more seniors' advocates, training for seniors' advocates in the Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese communities, and the

strengthening of advocacy networks established in Phase Two. The Committee has also applied for separate funding from Vancity to create a health advocacy training model, which would be developed in conjunction with the BC Health Coalition and administered by the 411 Seniors Centre. This model will focus specifically on dealing with the health care system and the means of 'navigating' through the system

## Seniors Advocacy Project

### Appendix B: Sample Resolution:

WHEREAS there are no coordinated seniors' advocacy services funded by any level of government;

AND WHEREAS the seniors population is increasing dramatically at the same time that government funding cutbacks are severely impacting seniors;

AND WHEREAS this gap in social policy is leading to potential abuse of seniors, causes unnecessary anxiety to seniors and their families, and places additional stress on municipalities;

AND WHEREAS [*insert name of the City/Municipality*] has previously expressed concerns to the Province regarding legislation such as the Community Care and Assisted Living Act - specifically with respect to the legislation's narrowness of application and lack of provisions for accountability and monitoring for facilities supplying housing, care or services to seniors;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

- a) [\_\_\_\_\_ municipality] supports in principle the establishment of Regional Seniors' Advocacy Offices (RSAC) as proposed by the Seniors' Advocacy Steering Committee as a means of providing security and protection to seniors by ensuring they have an independent voice to advocate for seniors' rights in accordance with federal, provincial and municipal legislation;
- b) this resolution be forwarded to the UBCM and the FCM for endorsement;
- c) this resolution be forwarded to the provincial government requesting support for this BC initiative; and
- d) [\_\_\_\_\_ municipality] will collaborate with other municipalities in the UBCM and the FCM to lobby the federal government for support of this initiative.