

LATE DISTRIBUTION FOR COUNCIL - DECEMBER 12, 2006

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CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

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TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: The General Manager of Community Services in consultation with the Director of Facilities Design and Management and the Chief Constable

SUBJECT: Lease of City-owned Capital Asset at 334 Alexander Street to WISH Drop-In Centre Society

RECOMMENDATION

- A. *THAT the Director of Real Estate Services negotiate a lease for the upper floor of 334 Alexander Street, legally described as: Parcel Identifier 015-605-493, Block 40, District Lot 196, Plan 184, for ten years to the WISH Drop-In Centre Society for nominal rent, subject to the following terms;*
- *Lease to be a fully net lease to the City of Vancouver, subject to Building Services funding set-out in Recommendation C;*
 - *Tenant to obtain and maintain Tenant's insurance satisfactory to the City of Vancouver;*
 - *Tenant to be solely responsible for all non-structural repairs and maintenance identified in the Tenant/Landlord Service Level Agreement to be appended to the Lease;*
 - *No right to sublease, assign or change use without prior written approval from the City of Vancouver;*
 - *Tenant shall be wholly responsible for the consumption of any and all utilities;*
 - *Any and all work, renovations or alterations to the premises are the sole responsibility of the Tenant, including appropriate permits and licenses; and*
 - *Other terms and conditions acceptable to the Director of Legal Services, General Manager of Community Services and the Chief Constable.*

Approval of Recommendation A is a grant and requires eight affirmative votes of Council.

B. THAT, subject to the following conditions, Council authorize the Director of Legal Services to execute the lease:

- *Council approval of an alternative location for the Police evidence currently occupying the space based on a report back from the Chief Constable and General Manager of Corporate Services identifying an alternative location and a funding source for the relocation and any ongoing costs; and*
- *Development Permit approval;*

AND THAT no rights or obligations hereby arise or take effect pursuant to this resolution until the agreement has been executed by both the City and WISH.

C. THAT, Council authorize the allocation of \$24,000 to Building Services to provide for base building maintenance and property insurance services in accordance with the terms of the Tenant/Landlord Service Level Agreement; source of funds to be 2007 Operating Budget without offset; approval and funding to be deferred to the 2007 Operating Budget.

D. THAT the Chief Constable and General Managers of Engineering and Community Services, in consultation with nearby residents and business people, report back on measures that can be undertaken to improve public safety in the vicinity of 334 Alexander.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Managers of Community and Corporate Services and the Chief Constable recommend approval of the foregoing.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

COUNCIL POLICY

In June, 1993 Council directed that City-owned properties occupied by non-profit organizations be held as assets in the Capital Fund and be charged a nominal rental rate. The lease/sublease/license of City assets below market value constitutes a grant and requires eight affirmative votes of Council.

On July 28, 1998, Council confirmed principles to provide general guidance to actions and planning in the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, Gastown, Strathcona and Victory Square

which include encouraging legitimate commercial activity, improving conditions at the street level, improving low income housing, reducing crime, and helping community people to find allies and seek a common future.

In 2000, the City entered into the Vancouver Agreement (VA) with the Federal and Provincial governments to collectively address housing, economic revitalization, health and safety issues facing the Downtown Eastside. In 2005 the all three partners renewed the Vancouver Agreement.

In July 2003, Council approved the inclusion of all City-owned buildings occupied by social service, community or cultural tenants as Capital Assets in the City's structural and Physical Plant Upgrading Program in future Capital Plans.

In June 2005, Council approved \$250,000 toward the development of the WISH Wellness Centre as a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week facility.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

This report recommends Council approval for a series of actions to help relocate the WISH Wellness Centre from the First United Church to 334 Alexander Street, so it can expand services for women working in survival sex in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). 334 Alexander is a City-owned capital asset which currently serves as a portion of the Vancouver Police Evidence Warehouse.

An extensive process was undertaken by staff, in consultation with WISH, the Police and community stakeholders, to seek a location for this facility so that it could serve approximately 200 survival sex workers, more than 90% of whom live in the Downtown Eastside, while minimizing impacts on neighbouring residents and businesses. More than 18 potential sites were given serious consideration before it was concluded that 334 Alexander was the most feasible and acceptable location.

Developing the Wellness Centre at this site will require that the VPD relocate its crime evidence storage currently located on the upper floor at 334 Alexander Street. It is noted that the department is independently seeking alternative storage facilities and will be bringing a report to Council in the new year. Once a permanent site is developed, WISH would expand its occupancy to include the lower floor of the building.

BACKGROUND

Since the 1980's there has been a significant increase in the number of survival sex trade workers in Vancouver, many of whom are in the streets and alleys of the Strathcona - Oppenheimer area of the Downtown Eastside. In 1987, the WISH established a small drop in facility at the First United Church at the corner of Gore and Hastings Street.

Over the last decade more than sixty women have been reported missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, many of whom were involved in the survival sex trade. WISH plays an important role as a safe haven for women and in helping track those who may have gone missing. In response to the urgent need for services, in 2003, WISH was selected by the VanCity Credit Union's membership as the recipient of a \$1 million dollar award to non-profit groups providing community services. This was granted to help WISH establish a Wellness

Centre that could provide a fuller array of services, including a safe refuge as well as linkages to other health and employment opportunities, for survival sex workers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

WISH Programming and Service Delivery

The WISH Drop-In Centre Society has been delivering services to women working in survival sex in Vancouver since 1987. Over the years, WISH has demonstrated the ability to raise sufficient operating budget with funding from government, and through fundraising events and donations.

The primary service provided by WISH is the Drop-In Centre where, 6 nights a week from 6 pm to 11 pm, women go for a hot meal, showers, clothing, nursing care, referrals, resources and various other programming. WISH currently serves approximately 100-150 meals per night, in addition to all of the other services provided, and the Centre operations rely heavily on the support and commitment of volunteers.

In addition to the drop-in Centre, WISH provides a variety of other services and programming, including:

- a literacy program;
- the Maka Project which is focussed on HIV/AIDS prevention and harm reduction;
- Emerging Voices, a skill building program for women to become involved in Board committees of WISH;
- Health and Safety for Aboriginal Women Working in the Sex Trade, a partnership with Vancouver Native Health; and,
- the Mobile Access operates a van that is on the street from 10:30 pm to 5:30 am nightly, supporting women where and when they work by providing a safe place of respite, referrals, connections to emergency services and supplies. The program is run in partnership with PACE and is funded by the Vancouver Agreement.

WISH estimates that they serve approximately 400 women through the Centre and other programs offered. Many of their clients are homeless or live in unstable housing, are marginalized within the community or have serious health issues and may suffer from drug dependency. Each of the programs that WISH provides is specific to women survival sex workers and focuses on their health and safety in a low-threshold, non-judgemental, respectful manner.

WISH has many successes spanning the many years of service to women in the community. The greatest success is that women survival sex workers have a consistent, reliable place of respite where staff and volunteers welcome them and assist in meeting their most basic needs. WISH has grown from an organization that served coffee to a few women each night to a place where women know that they can come and be accepted in whatever condition they might be as long as it is safe for them, the participants, staff and volunteers. For many women, WISH is their only point of contact off the street and is a place where they know they will be connected with nursing care, emergency services, referrals to shelters, and other appropriate service providers.

DISCUSSION

The WISH Wellness Centre

WISH programming is currently spread out in three locations due to lack of space at First United Church. Staff from the three levels of government under the Vancouver Agreement

have concluded that it is more practical, efficient and financially beneficial to have all WISH programming delivered from a single location at the WISH Wellness Centre. Survival sex workers will be able to access all appropriate programming through a central delivery point, facilitating their connection with relevant activities and services. WISH has developed a trusting relationship with many women working in survival sex in the DTES community. More than 90% of women who come to WISH live and work in the DTES and rely on the services and programs WISH provides.

As the numbers of women requiring services has increased, WISH facilities have become extremely cramped and have necessitated alternate venues for administration and program delivery. First United Church would also like to use their space for other urgently needed services for the homeless and is looking forward to the day that WISH is able to move into a facility of its own.

One of the key goals of the WISH Wellness Centre is to have primary health care for women within a safe, women-only environment, because many women are reluctant to access currently available health facilities. Of particular importance is that the clinic will be able to dispense antiretroviral drug therapy for women with HIV/AIDS without stigma and without having to disclose their status to anyone except the clinic staff.

Another goal of the WISH Wellness Centre is to provide space for other service providers and agencies to offer programming to women survival sex workers. These activities could include one-on-one support, alcohol and drug counselling, art therapy, self-defence, and advocacy as well as employment-related skill development programs and other options for exiting the street scene.

WISH Wellness Centre Site Search

WISH began looking for a site in 2003 when it won the VanCity \$1 million award. It requires a 6000 sq. ft. facility, preferably with some outdoor space. Since early 2005, WISH has been working closely with staff from Current Planning, Social Planning, Real Estate Services and the Vancouver Police to secure an appropriate site. Agreement was reached on the following criteria for site selection:

- Located North of Hastings, east of Main, west of Heatley
- Not in a retail shopping area
- Not adjacent to Oppenheimer Park or near the local schools

WISH and staff have also reviewed these criteria with representatives of a variety of community stakeholders including local business, residents, other social service agencies and schools. Through this process, WISH has committed to working with the Police and others in the community to reduce any neighbourhood impacts and to actively participate in a proposed campaign of "Public Safety for All" to help improve conditions for those who live and work in the area.

While there is agreement on the part of most partners that finding a long-term location for the Wellness Centre is a community priority, securing a site that meets the criteria has been extremely challenging. Real Estate Services and several private realtors have reviewed more than 18 potential sites in detail.

In the autumn of 2005, WISH made an offer to purchase a building at 418 East Hastings. Although reluctantly endorsed by the Police, this site did not conform to all the agreed upon criteria in that it was not north of Hastings and was perceived as being too close to

Strathcona School and was met with significant community opposition. In an effort to ensure more positive ongoing relations with the community, WISH agreed not to pursue this option and renewed its efforts to secure another site.

Proposed Facility at 334 Alexander Street

The City-owned building at 334 Alexander meets all the locational criteria noted above. For WISH, this two-storey, 6000 square foot building is ideal and can be renovated to reflect the needs of the organization. In addition, the site has a fenced, outdoor space at the rear where women can be outside in a safe, protected area. It is also away from the retail area and Oppenheimer Park and adjacent to other facilities serving the low income community - Evelyn Saller Centre and the Lookout Emergency Shelter.

334 Alexander is currently attached to 344 Alexander and together they function as the Vancouver Police Evidence Warehouse. A forthcoming report will review options for relocating all or a portion of the Evidence Warehouse.

Interim Facility: Upper Floor of 334 Alexander

Because it has been challenging to find an appropriate site for WISH and because of the time it will take to construct the new Police Evidence Warehouse, staff have explored options for WISH to move into a portion of 334 Alexander as soon as possible. The lower floor of that building currently contains high tech equipment that is not feasible to move on a temporary basis. However, the upper floor contains bicycles and other evidence that can be relocated. The longer term plan is for WISH to expand to occupy the lower floor of the building when the space becomes available.

Community Building Process and “Public Safety for All”

WISH has received a great deal of support within the community from residents, service agencies, health care providers and church groups. This is in part because it has been a respected service provider in the Downtown Eastside for many years and in part because it was granted the VanCity \$1 Million award. WISH also has active partnerships for service delivery with PACE Society, Vancouver Native Health, BC Centre for Disease Control, Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Capilano College and has links with many community organizations that serve women working in survival sex.

As noted above, the initial proposal to locate the Wellness Centre at 418 E Hastings generated much community concern from the nearby residents and community organizations. However, in the process of looking for an alternative location, WISH has begun to establish new relations with these groups and has demonstrated it is prepared to work with others to help address existing neighbourhood safety and security issues as well as impacts the proposed facility may have. It is proposed that this be part of a campaign of “Safety for All” that would include involvement from the City, Police and Vancouver Agreement partners.

To help implement this, WISH has agreed to apply for funding for a peer volunteer program which will engage women survival sex workers in operations of the WISH Wellness Centre, including security teams that work to help keep the area around the centre clean and to address issues of street disorder. The peer volunteers will also be responsible for escorting volunteers and staff to access transit, if requested. In addition, staff will review lighting, gating and other physical security issues in the vicinity of the new facility with representatives of WISH and its neighbours and report back on needed improvements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is the recommendation of this report that WISH be given a lease on the premises at 334 Alexander at nominal rent for 10 years. This represents a grant and requires eight affirmative votes of Council.

In 2005, Council approved a capital grant of \$250,000 to WISH to assist with establishing a new wellness centre.

Once a lease is signed, WISH will pay the costs of renovating 334 Alexander. It will cost about \$550,000 to renovate and furnish the upper floor. This will include installing an elevator and carrying out excavation in the rear yard work that will provide access to both the upper and lower floors.

Under the proposed lease, the City will retain responsibility for base-building preventative and routine maintenance of the building and building insurance. It is recommended that \$24,000 be added to the Building Services operating budget; source of funds to be 2007 Operating Budget without offset, approval and funding to be deferred to the 2007 Operating Budget. The building is included in the City's Facilities Strategic Plan and will have access to major maintenance through the capital plan process.

The 2006 - 2008 Capital Plan includes funding to consolidate and relocate the Police evidence storage facility. The Chief Constable, Director of Real Estate Services and Director of Facilities Design will report in the new year on the alternative Police evidence warehouse options and costs. If possible, a longer term solution will be identified to avoid the costs of a temporary relocation to accommodate WISH. Funding for this and other capital work related to Police Facilities was provided in the 2003 - 2005 and 2006 - 2008 Capital Plans.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Women work in survival sex as a result of inter-related social problems including poverty, abuse, family breakdown, low literacy, sexual exploitation, homelessness, racial discrimination and more. By the time a woman finds herself working on the street, she has experienced many of these social problems which have been exacerbated through stigmatization and rejection by mainstream society. Her ability to cope and maintain a stable lifestyle becomes increasingly limited as she may succumb to the use of drugs, associate with others who exploit her desperation, lose her place of residence and lose a sense of who she is and who cares about her. Every day she faces violence and trauma on the street through her work and she faces many members of the community who do not want to see her on the street, in their stores or near their children. As a woman, her options for women-only services are limited and she must face many of her abusers, exploiters and others that she fears just to meet her basic needs for survival.

WISH helps address this situation by providing meals, clothing, showers, appropriate programming and referrals in a caring, gender specific, non-judgemental environment. Women are safe at WISH from the trauma and violence they face on the street and they can rely on consistent service delivery that can help them cope with daily life as well as let them experience a balanced, welcoming space where the barriers are very low and acceptance is high. Through programming women have the opportunity to develop skills that can help them in their daily lives, enabling them to self-advocate, build up their self-esteem, or to connect with others who can assist them with housing, health care and counselling.

WISH addresses the health and safety of women in the immediate context as well as within the social network. Ultimately the efforts of WISH, in partnership with others, working with women to make healthier choices for themselves translates to having a healthier community.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. Processing of a development application to permit WISH Wellness Centre at 334 Alexander.
2. Approval of an alternative site for the Police evidence currently stored in the upper floor of 334 Alexander.
3. Approval of lease for WISH to rent the upper floor of 334 Alexander from the City for 10 years at \$1.00 per year.
4. Installation of storage equipment and relocation of evidence to the alternative site.
5. Renovation of the upper floor of 334 Alexander for the first phase of the WISH Wellness Centre.
6. Initiation of a campaign of "Public Safety for All" in the vicinity of 334 Alexander.
7. Construction of the permanent Police Evidence Warehouse and removal of evidence and equipment from the lower floor of 334 Alexander.
8. Renovation of the lower floor of 334 Alexander for Phase II of the WISH Wellness Centre.

CONCLUSION

WISH is a well respected organization that has provided services for survival sex workers in the Downtown Eastside for more than 20 years. It serves more than 400 women, almost all of whom are from this area. Four years ago it won the prestigious VanCity \$1 Million Award to move from the space it has outgrown at First United Church.

After a considerable search by WISH, community partners and City staff, only one site has been identified that meets the requirements of WISH, its clients, the Police and representatives of neighbouring residents and business people. This site at 334 Alexander is owned by the City and used as the Police Evidence Warehouse. However, the lower floor of the building may not be available for several years.

This report recommends the site be leased to WISH for the Wellness Centre, subject to development approvals and develop of an alternative location for some of the evidence currently stored in the building. It also proposes that staff work with the Police, WISH and other community partners and report back on a campaign of "Safety for All". With the upcoming trial concerning the missing women, this project can demonstrate that the City, Police and our senior government and community partners have learned a great deal from that tragedy and are working to improve the lives of all the people who live, work and visit our city.

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