



REPORT

Report Date: May 3, 2021
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Meeting Date: May 18, 2021
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TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: General Manager of Finance, Risk and Supply Chain Management

SUBJECT: Funding Application to the UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Program

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse an application to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Strengthening Communities' Services Program for \$20 Million to help offset costs incurred by the City to support vulnerable populations in its pandemic response.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks Council's approval of a funding application to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Strengthening Communities' Services Program (the "Program") for \$20 Million to help offset costs incurred by the City to support vulnerable populations in its pandemic response.

The Program is part of the federally and provincially funded Safe Restart Program and is meant to address costs related to supporting unsheltered homeless populations and addressing the related community impacts. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been magnified for and disproportionately impacted vulnerable people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. As part of the pandemic response the City has continued to provide supports such as access to food, hygiene and shelter to these vulnerable populations while facing decreased revenues.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

On December 8, 2020, Council approved the 2021 Capital and Operating Budget which included a recommendation that the Mayor write to Premier Horgan and Prime Minister Trudeau to register Council's concern with the Provincial government's November 3, 2020, distribution of Safe Restart Agreement funds. The funding of \$16.4 million to support the City of Vancouver

with COVID-19 2020 operating costs fell short of the total \$57.4 million in restart funds that should have been distributed to the City based on the per capita allocation formula outlined in the Safe Restart Agreement's Appendix.

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

The Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia are providing \$540 million in shared funding to local governments under the Safe Restart Agreement to manage the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic. These investments will help to protect public health and safety, prepare for potential future waves of the virus, and further support the safe reopening of economies.

Within the Safe Restart funding, \$100 million is being delivered through the Strengthening Communities' Services Program (the "Program"), which aims to support unsheltered homeless populations and address related community impacts through an application-based program. This program is meant to bridge the period between the COVID-19 outbreak and the post-COVID recovery period. The funding is being administered by UBCM on behalf of the Province and the Government of Canada.

The Program is intended to assist local governments and Treaty First Nations with:

- Improved health and safety of unsheltered homeless people living in public or private spaces, including reduced risk of COVID-19 or other disease transmission;
- Reduced community concerns about public health and safety in neighbourhoods where unsheltered homeless populations are seeking temporary shelter and services;
- Improved coordination among eligible applicants and health/social service providers, Indigenous organizations and others working on housing, homelessness and service provision; and;
- Increased capacity of eligible applicants to work with homeless persons and Indigenous organizations towards culturally safe and trauma-informed responses.

One of the requirements of the application is a Council Resolution indicating support for the application.

Strategic Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant financial strain on the City, our business community, non-profit partners, and residents.

The impacts have been magnified for and disproportionately impacted vulnerable people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The Canadian Human Rights Association and a number of other human rights organizations have identified people in housing

need as one of the populations experiencing health, social and economic inequalities during the pandemic. This is due to underlying health conditions, lack of access to COVID-19 information and personal protective equipment (PPE) including hygiene materials and face masks as well as limited distancing abilities.

In 2020 City operating revenues at year-end were \$89 million below budget, primarily due to temporary closures of facilities and programs to meet provincial health and safety orders, and suspension or reduction of some revenue-generating activities such as parking fees. To balance the budget, the City implemented measures to reduce expenses including delays to some capital projects, reduced discretionary spending, and compensation adjustments including staff furloughs, deferred merit increases and delays in hiring. There were also temporary layoffs for those working in areas where public-facing services had been suspended.

In 2021, City revenues are not anticipated to return to pre-2020 levels. Senior government funding will allow the City to provide critical services including addressing the impacts on those experiencing or at risk of unsheltered homelessness due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Program Funding Guideline for cities with a population of over 500,000 is a request of up to \$10 Million. However, the Province advised that requests up to \$20 Million may be considered, depending on the availability of funds and number of applications.

In the initial allocation of the Safe Restart Funding the City received \$16.4 Million. Given that this is significantly less on a per capita basis than other major cities in Canada and not sufficient to cover our revenue shortfalls, the City has submitted an application for \$20 Million for this phase of the funding.

Financial

The City has applied for \$20 Million in funding to offset the costs of supporting populations experiencing unsheltered homelessness and the associated impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These costs include costs for temporary shelters and warming centres, peer support and homeless services outreach, additional street cleaning, and additional cleaning and security in community centres and parks, including the Strathcona Park encampment.

Funds received will allow the City to continue to provide these services while reducing the draw on the City reserves.

CONCLUSION

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been magnified for and disproportionately impacted vulnerable people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The City is incurring increased costs to address these impacts while facing significant decreases in revenues. This report seeks Council support for an application for funding to offset some of these costs and reduce the draw on City reserves.

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