



**City of Vancouver  
Navigation Center and Homeless Response Assessment**

**SCOPE OF WORK**

The City of Vancouver is seeking the services of a third party consultant to conduct an independent and objective study and offer recommendations regarding its Navigation Center and homelessness response efforts.

Opened in November 2018, the Navigation Center is a 25,000 square foot building located at 2018 Grand Boulevard on a commercially zoned lot and a C-TRAN bus line close to several single-family neighborhoods and businesses. The objective of the Center is to offer a variety of services to individuals experiencing homelessness including a Day Center, mental health counseling services, case management, job search assistance, transportation assistance and limited food service in an effort to help transition homeless people from the streets and into housing.

Similar to many other cities, Vancouver has seen a significant increase in its homeless population over the last several years. The City has been working on several different fronts to manage the impacts of homelessness including revising its camping ordinance, performing homeless encampment clean-ups, hiring a Homeless Resources Manager to lead the City's homelessness efforts, opening a Navigation Center and boosting funding for affordable housing projects and supportive services. While all these efforts are a good start, the area of direct services to address homelessness is new to the Vancouver organization, and the City could benefit from a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to managing homelessness within the Vancouver area.

The goal of this study is to assess existing efforts as well as provide recommendations and strategies on how to improve the City's overall response to homelessness, including the potential for improvements and changes to aspects of the overall system of homeless services that are outside the City's direct control.

**The Day Center**

The Day Center is the first program offered at the Navigation Center. It is a low-barrier facility that offers homeless people a place to go during the day and a variety of services, including restrooms, showers, laundry, toiletries, access to computers, a TV, storage for personal belongings, mail, phone charging stations, clothing and a covered outdoor area with picnic tables and direct access to/from the street. In addition, offices are available for one-on-one or group meetings. This Center replaced the

temporary day center located at the Friends of the Carpenter facility on W. 20th Street in downtown Vancouver. Site limitations, a conflict with a neighboring industrial operation and the discontinuation of local bus service near the site, made it infeasible to operate the Friends of the Carpenter facility as a long-term option.

The current Day Center is operated by Share, a local non-profit that provides an array of services to the homeless including shelters for individuals and families and other supportive services such as free meals and a 30-unit permanent housing apartment complex. (Please see Exhibit 1 for a copy of the City's agreement with Share.) Share has four to five staff members on-hand at all times at the Day Center including a case worker and a housing navigator (who sometimes must leave the building to help connect people to housing resources). Two private security guards provide security for indoor and outdoor spaces. Concerns have been expressed regarding how the Center is managed, availability of staff resources, code of conduct guidelines for clients, visitors and guests, how services are delivered, loitering/criminal activity outside the property gates and the fact that this is a low-barrier facility that has very few restrictions on who can come to the facility.

The Center is open seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Once the Center is closed, many homeless people who visited during the day do not have a place to go after hours due to a shortage of shelter space in the Vancouver area. As a result, people experiencing homelessness tend to walk through, linger or camp in the surrounding neighborhoods which has led to tensions within the affected areas.

Since the Navigation Center opened, it has exceeded expectations in terms of the number of people served. Additionally, police calls have increased significantly in the immediate vicinity. The original expectation was that the Center would serve about 75 people per day. In the first six months, an average of 99 people per day has visited the Center. This has resulted in over 19,000 visits since opening, and services being provided to over 1,400 unique/unduplicated individuals. Some people have been moved into housing and others are searching for housing. (Please refer to Exhibit 2 for more information regarding the total number of people receiving service by service type.) In addition, calls to 9-1-1/3-1-1 have risen from 416 to 962 or 131% for activities in the immediate vicinity of the Day Center compared to the same period last year. Neighbors have reported issues of a variety of increased unlawful conduct that has contributed to a diminished sense of safety in the area surrounding the Day Center. The higher than expected number of homeless people and the increase in crime in the area have negatively impacted trust between local residents and businesses and the City.

The process through which the City sited the Navigation Center has been somewhat controversial. Through the initial permitting process, local residents/businesses questioned the validity of the siting process under the former Human Services Siting ordinance. While a forecasted number of daily patrons of the Center were provided as part of the application, the permit approved by the Hearings Examiner did not include a limit of the number of daily patrons, and the permit was upheld on appeal to the City Council. The ordinance under which the permit was issued has since been repealed and replaced with a new regulatory regimen that has lower permit requirements of facilities such as the Day Center.

In the six months since opening the Navigation Center, City staff and Share representatives met with the five neighborhoods surrounding the Navigation Center monthly to listen to their concerns/issues and

share with them the City's commitment to be a good neighbor. These commitments were memorialized in a Good Neighbor Agreement (Exhibit 3). Based on the first six months of operations, some neighbors and businesses maintain concerns about how operations for the Center have fulfilled the "Good Neighbor Commitment".

### **Council Workshop**

At a recent Council workshop, staff provided an update on the first six months of operations at the Navigation Center including challenges faced and potential solutions for responding to them. Major issues included neighbors' concerns and operational, facility and budget challenges. While the challenges were clearly articulated, there was no definitive action plan presented that identified what could be done along with intended outcomes, resources needed, no timeline of when action would be taken and no funding plan for how these items would be paid for. At the end of the Council workshop, Vancouver councilmembers expressed frustration with how the Center was being managed, lack of services being rendered, delays in making needed facility and security improvements, an increase in crime and people feeling unsafe, and the lack of response in cleaning up trash such as feces and needles on private property. The Council agreed that an independent review of the Day Center was needed to determine:

- 1) Whether the City and Share were following best management and operational practices as they relate to the Navigation Center including the Day Center;
- 2) If the current location is the best site for a low-barrier homeless facility or should this type of facility be located in another area; and
- 3) If not a low-barrier facility at 2018 Grand, what are some other possible uses for the site in the context of a more comprehensive citywide response to homelessness?

For more information regarding the workshop presentation and notes from the workshop summarizing Council comments, please refer to Exhibits 4 and 5.

### **Other Homelessness Efforts**

Over the last 18 months, the City has stepped up its efforts to manage the impacts of the homeless crisis in Vancouver. In addition to the Navigation Center, the following initiatives are underway:

- A Homeless Resources Manager has been recently hired to lead the City's homelessness efforts and improve its homeless response system. This person will be the resident technical expert working with city departments, community partners, stakeholders, the public, elected officials and city and regional governments to combat the impacts of homelessness.
- A Homeless Assistance Response Team (HART) has been created. The Homeless Resources Manager will coordinate an outreach-led approach with this internal team and non-profits to connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness with supportive resources, and address the impacts of homelessness on public and private property. HART activities also include homeless encampment clean-ups, property collection, storage and repatriation of personal property, enforcement of camping laws and restoration and repair of city property and environmentally sensitive lands.

- A Homeless Diversion pilot program has been recently established as a way to reduce barriers for accessing housing and increase an individual's self-sufficiency. The City has engaged an outreach coordinator who collaborates with the Vancouver Attorney's Office, Vancouver Police Department and service/treatment providers to provide information on what services are available and appropriate instead of issuing a criminal citation. The coordinator also keeps track of people who have received a service referral instead of a citation.

As part of these efforts the City is leveraging its affordable housing funds, community development block grants and relationships with the county, state and federal governments, community partners and philanthropic donors to increase housing, shelters and other supportive services to move people from the street into a more supportive environment.

### **Comprehensive Review**

With this as a backdrop, the City is requesting a third party consultant to conduct a comprehensive review of the City's efforts and identify best practices and areas of improvement in responding to the impacts of homelessness within Vancouver. The review should identify and make recommendations on the following:

- 1) Best approach to improve the City's Homeless Response
  - a. Identify how Vancouver should systematically approach and respond to homelessness citywide including the best mix of facilities and supportive services that would help alleviate the impacts of homelessness in the community and move the homeless from the street to supportive services and housing
  - b. Identify existing or prospective innovative partnership opportunities between other public, non-profit and faith based agencies in support of the same.
- 2) Best management and operational practices for the Day Center including:
  - a. Business hours,
  - b. Closure policy,
  - c. Contractor performance,
  - d. Code of conduct for clients/staff/visitors,
  - e. Staffing ratios to clients served, and
  - f. Administration of showers, laundry, storage facilities and other services
- 3) Ways to improve Day Center security in and around the facility including:
  - a. Examine entry/exit procedures,
  - b. Identify structural changes and resources needed within and outside the building to increase safety and decrease loitering
- 4) How the Navigation Center should be built out
  - a. Identify the mix of vendors and on-site services needed including how these services should be delivered to clients, including the potential for an on-site shelter

- 5) Appropriateness of a low-barrier shelter within this location
  - a. Determine whether a low barrier model is appropriate for the Day Center at 2018 Grand or should the City consider another site for this type of facility
  - b. If low-barrier is not a good fit, please identify what other facilities and locations may be better suited and why.
  
- 6) Mitigation of neighborhood/business impacts
  - a. Identify ways to better manage criminal activity occurring in and around the Navigation Center
  - b. Identify ways to better mitigate the impact on residents and businesses when the Day Center closes

Vancouver is very excited about this work and would like for the study to be underway by mid-August 2019. Lenda Crawford, Vancouver's Deputy City Manager will be the point of contact for this work. Lenda may be reached at [lenda.crawford@cityofvancouver.us](mailto:lenda.crawford@cityofvancouver.us) or 360-487-8615.