

DATE: April 9, 2021

FILE: 1855-03

TO: Chair and Directors
Regional District Board

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

RE: Strengthening Community Services Grant Opportunity

Purpose

To seek approval to submit a regional application to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) – Strengthening Community Services (SCS) Program under the umbrella of the Homelessness Supports Service (HSS) service (function No. 451).

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT staff be authorized to make an application to the Union of BC Municipalities for grant funding, in an amount up to \$1,250,000, through the Strengthening Communities Service to provide urgent and temporary support to unsheltered homeless populations and address related community impacts;

AND THAT the Comox Valley Regional District send a request to each partnering municipality to provide a Council resolution that clearly states approval for the Comox Valley Regional District, as primary applicant, to apply for, receive, and manage the grant funding on their behalf.

Executive Summary

- On February 18, 2021, the province announced the new SCS funding, as part of the Safe Restart Agreement, to support unsheltered homeless populations and address related community impacts through a grant application-based program.
- UBCM is administering the program on behalf of the Province. The application deadline is April 16, 2021, with approvals expected in spring 2021.
- Staff are recommending that a regional application be submitted on behalf of member municipalities and the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) in order to respond to the increased demand in the services provided by the groups and organizations in the Comox Valley and to demonstrate cost effectiveness and efficiency in providing support services regionally.
- Subject to grant approval, the project aligns with the CVRD Board’s 2019-2022 strategic drivers, community partnerships and fiscal responsibility, and advances some of the recommendations from the recent Homelessness Supports Service review (January 2021).

Prepared by:

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Long Range Planner

Concurrence:

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Government Partners and Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

K'ómoks First Nation	✓
Village of Cumberland	✓
City of Courtenay	✓
Town of Comox	✓
Islands Trust (as FYI)	✓
Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness (as FYI)	✓

Background/Current Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in the visibility of unsheltered homelessness in many communities, and related community health and safety challenges. Some of society's most vulnerable members face challenges that have worsened in the context of COVID-19. This includes groups that are more likely to experience homelessness and are more vulnerable to the health and safety risks associated with living unsheltered, such as Indigenous people, women, and gender diverse people. People who lack adequate housing are more likely to suffer from a range of health challenges, including mental health and substance abuse issues, and are highly vulnerable to COVID-19. Under the Safe Restart Agreement, the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia are providing \$540 million in shared funding to local governments and Treaty First Nations to help manage the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Within the Safe Restart funding, \$100 million is being delivered through the SCS Program, which aims to support unsheltered homeless populations and address related community impacts through an application-based program. The funding is being administered by UBCM on behalf of the Province and the Government of Canada. The goal of this program is to support local governments and Treaty First Nations that wish to take action, understanding that this will complement parallel provincial efforts. The Coalition to End Homelessness has identified numerous activities that are required in the community in order to bridge the gap in support services between the COVID-19 outbreak and the post-COVID recovery period. These key priority actions include:

- Creating an additional emergency overnight shelter;
- Increasing capacity of Connect (a day program that provides a safe, welcoming space for individuals experiencing homelessness);
- Hiring additional community outreach workers;
- Undertaking public engagement and community outreach to educate and increase awareness on homelessness; offsetting costs related to bylaw enforcement during the pandemic (i.e. abandoned camp cleanups, garbage pick-up); and
- Building capacity and providing training for municipal staff that provides services in bylaw, public works, recreation, etc.

This grant application will help address the urgent and immediate needs of our community's unsheltered homeless population and the related community health and safety challenges that we continue to face during the pandemic.

Similar to other grant funded projects with community partners (e.g. Housing Needs Report, Poverty Reduction), the CVRD would serve as the primary applicant and fiscal host, supporting the Coalition to End Homelessness and other key partners to deliver the proposed key activities. Using the Homelessness Support Service (function No. 451), the CVRD will be able to administer the grant funds for the Coalition to End Homelessness to carry out the activities.

Policy Analysis

The board has identified community partnerships and fiscal responsibility as a strategic drivers. This grant application builds upon implementation actions that have been identified in recently

completed and ongoing projects including the 2019 Housing Needs Report and the 2020/2021 Poverty Reduction Assessment and Strategy.

Options

The board has the following options:

1. Authorize staff to make a regional application for grant funding as the primary applicant, or;
2. Direct staff not to prepare an application for grant funding.

Staff recommends option 1.

Financial Factors

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, with \$100 million being delivered through the SCS Program. UBCM is administering the funding program. The SCS Program can contribute up to 100 per cent of the cost of eligible activities. The following limits have been set based on population estimates with a maximum eligibility of \$1,250,000:

Population	Funding Maximum
Under 5000	\$200,000
5,000 - 40,000	\$450,000
40,000 - 75,000	\$1,250,000

Based on the above, a regional application involving all three electoral areas and municipalities would make the CVRD eligible for \$1,250,000. Staff proposes to apply for the full amount for which our regional population is eligible.

Legal Factors

All local governments (municipalities, regional districts, and the Islands Trust) and Treaty First Nations (as defined by the Interpretation Act) in BC are eligible to apply. For regional projects, resolutions from each partnering applicant must clearly state approval for the primary applicant to apply for, receive, and manage the grant funding on their behalf.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

Staff recommends that a collaborative regional approach be taken to the grant application submission in order to provide a regional approach to supporting unsheltered homeless populations and addressing related community impacts emergency response to the homeless. It is a strategic approach that will optimize resources and demonstrate cost effectiveness.

Intergovernmental Factors

CVRD planning staff are leading this initiative in partnership with municipal planning staff and the Coalition to End Homelessness' leadership team under the umbrella of the HSS function No. 451. Staff will reach out to partnering municipalities to request Council resolutions confirming a regional approach.

Interdepartmental Involvement

Planning staff is leading this work. Assistance from finance staff will be sought regarding the grant application.

Citizen/Public Relations

Staff suggest that the key community stakeholder is the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, given their role with the service providers in the community. If successful with the grant application, staff will report back to the board with details on the proposed activities and their roll-out.