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MEMORANDUM

July 5, 2021

TO: Mayor and Council
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

CC Paul Mochrie, City Manager
Donnie Rosa, General Manager of Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Theresa O'Donnell, Director of Planning, and General Manager of Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability
Sandra Singh, General Manager of Arts, Culture, and Community Services
Lon LaClaire, General Manager of Engineering Services
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Chris Robertson, VCPC Liaison

FROM: Vancouver City Planning Commission

SUBJECT: Climate Emergency: Extreme Heat and Air Quality Mitigation

The Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC) urges Mayor and Council, and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation to act to save lives by addressing the municipal policy gaps between acknowledging the reality of the climate emergency and the policies necessary for people to survive it. To this end, these points must be acknowledged:

1. We were aware of the existence of climate change and well warned that the extreme heat and poor air quality we have been experiencing and which appear to have contributed to a number of deaths of residents of Vancouver, would and will continue to occur.

2. We know the impact of extreme heat and poor air quality on the human body and we further know that some people will respond more negatively than others and are at risk of death if means to mitigate those things is not available.
3. Physical vulnerability to heat and poor air quality are part of the human condition. That some variation within the human condition exists and therefore should be expected and planned for is a matter of science and human rights. Policies that fail to acknowledge and account for this variation are discriminatory.
4. Historical and ongoing systemic discrimination plays a major role in creating and worsening individual vulnerability and risk.
5. Planning decisions that have caused or worsened spatial injustice against disabled, racialized and/or poor people contribute to the creation of urban heat islands and poorer air quality on arterials are one of many ways that municipal decision-making has resulted in a disproportionate burden of the impact of climate change being placed on groups who have the least means to mitigate the effects and are already vulnerable to negative health impacts from it.
6. Policy must be built from the sociological awareness that socio-economic status is more of a reflection of current and historical social, economic, and political policy than the presence or absence of personal responsibility.
7. Structural inequity causes people living at the same longitude and latitude to, in essence, live in different cities due to their very different experiences of that place.
8. Solutions need to take a holistic and logical approach and reduce harm rather than creating new sources of it. People who are unhoused need cooling stations. At same time cooling stations are not a reasonable, viable or harm reduction solution to disabled and/or elderly people living in poverty but who are housed. People who are at heightened risk of mortality or harm from the impacts of these should not be told to go out to seek relief during air quality and heat alerts that warn them to stay inside.
9. Failing to act and create policy that reflects the reality of people's lives can and will cause people who would otherwise be alive to die.
10. Please remember at one time central heating and indoor plumbing were considered luxuries only available to the wealthiest. It is time we make maintaining high indoor air quality and energy efficient air conditioning part of our standard expectations of housing just as we do toilets, bathtubs, and heat.

Recommendations

Based on the above points, the Vancouver City Planning Commission makes the following recommendations to help mitigate the effects of extreme heat and poor air quality on the residents of—and visitors to—Vancouver.

The VCPC would appreciate a report back from staff on progress towards the implementation of these recommendations within six months.

1. All Work Based on Equity and Accessibility

- All measures mentioned in this document—such as trees, placement of water fountains, pools, waterparks and other infrastructure and services and measures undertaken in the short and long term—should prioritize historically under-served areas and populations that have been harmed by systemic oppression and inequitable policies and wealth inequality. Research shows that these groups are disproportionately harmed by climate change and have the least means to personally mitigate the impact of extreme heat and poor air quality and thus suffer disproportionately from the impact.
- Applying an intersectional disability analysis is part of equity.
- *Short term:* Undertake to map out street accessibility, availability of accessible washrooms, water fountains, neighbourhood parks, waterparks, seating, shade trees (identifying their proximity to seating, sidewalks, housing), pools, etc. Use this data for decision-making for budgeting and planning for emergency responses to extreme heat and poor air quality mitigation.

2. Shade

- *Short term:* Ensure that all public parks, beaches, pools and public washrooms are open and remain open 24 hours a day during periods of extreme heat wave. This will require planning for proper staffing and perhaps installing additional sources of lighting. Take immediate measures to improve accessibility of these.
- Ensure ALL tree-planting (and other) programs are equitable. This means prioritizing planting immediately in the most impacted low-income and racialized neighbourhoods suffering from the urban heat island effect, so that the city budget for any tree planting initiatives is exhausted where the need and impact is greatest. The shady parts of a park are often not wheelchair accessible.
- *Long term:* While large parks such as Stanley Park are important destinations in a city, residents need small parks in close proximity to where they live. Disabled and/or elderly people, particularly those who are poor and without access to a vehicle, may not be able to travel very far and thus placement of small accessible parks with accessible seating and shade is essential.

- De-couple the planting of trees from the development process, specifically in neighbourhoods that suffer greatly from the urban heat island effect due to systemic discrimination and class exclusionary histories of urban planning policies.
- The roots and grates of trees planted along sidewalks can be significant barriers to accessibility. Therefore, widen sidewalks significantly and provide adequate space for trees and seating (benches) in medians and boulevards alongside.
- Create policies that mandate larger overhangs on buildings to provide shade and weather protection.
- Invest in pop-up cooling and clean-air tents.

3. **Cold water**

- *Short term:* Accessible, multi-height water fountains should be placed all over the city during periods of extreme heat. These could include fountains and misting stations that are connected to fire hydrants. Each fountain should include a side tap that would allow access to fill containers and/or wet articles of clothing. Misting stations should be also set up across the city (including near bus stops). Low pressure sprinklers should be turned on at peak times of the day.
- *Long term:* Water fountains should become an essential part of public infrastructure and added to outside of all public buildings, transit stations, etc. Accessible water features should be encouraged as part of multi-tenant housing landscaping design.
- Create more waterparks with emphasis on areas where none currently exist and their accessibility.

4. **Washrooms**

- *Short term:* People should not be avoiding fluid because of lack of reliable availability of accessible public washrooms. Temporary accessible washrooms with no time limits (which are biased against and barrier to wheelchair users and others) and which are private with no exposure of occupant to the public, should be placed all over the city.
- *Long term:* Addition of substantially more accessible public washrooms, including those at the standard of changing places that include lifts and adult-sized change tables. A standard should be established outlining how many washrooms are required based on population use of area and distance between them.

5. Charging stations and internet access

- *Short term:* Provide charging stations for mobility equipment and phones for people who are outside in the shade to keep cool. Ensure these charging stations are in covered areas, with WIFI hotspots and have seating and water fountain nearby.

6. Poorly housed

- *Short term:* People in social housing, people who are inadequately housed or living in congregate care face particular risks as the units are often small and lack private outdoor access. People with particular health conditions who face extreme risk during periods of extreme heat and/or lowered air quality are not properly housed if they are not provided with air conditioning and air purifiers.

The City of Vancouver needs to advocate for and work with the province and Vancouver Coastal Health to ensure that air conditioners and air purifiers are provided to these residents immediately by expanding the BC Medical program or by other means. Lobbies and lounges should be established as cooling centres. Sprinklers or portable misting set up outside the building.

- *Long term:* Disability rights are human rights. Accessibility is a disability rights issue and therefore a human rights issue. Housing standards and new accessibility standards must include air conditioning because air conditioning is an accessibility need.

7. Unhoused

- *Short term:* Cooling stations located throughout the city, ensure people have cool places to sleep and rest with access to cold water and washrooms.
- Relocation plans could be considered for some extreme heat events for those for whom relocation is an accessible option. This should include hotel unit expropriation to support the unhoused (many of whom are also seniors or living with a disability). Ensuring that accessible public buildings (schools, recreation centres, libraries, museums) with air conditioners can be set up as cooling centres and that there is transportation and support available to assist those who require assistance getting to these sites.
- *Long term:* End homelessness.

8. Tenant rights

- *Short term:* Advocate for amendments to the provincial *Residential Tenancy Act*, through the Government of British Columbia's Residential Tenancy Branch, to include the following protections for renters:
 - Tenants must not be threatened with verbal or written warnings or eviction notices for operating fans or air conditioning units in their rented dwellings during hot weather events.

- In buildings, or sections of buildings, where heat is not controlled by tenants, landlords and building managers must ensure that all heating is turned off during periods of hot weather.
- Landlords and building managers must be required to post information pertaining to relief measures distributed by local health authorities in common areas of the property in large print and in multiple languages during extreme hot weather events and other emergencies.

9. Check-ins and Support

- *Short term:* Many disabled and/or elderly people are isolated and have no one to call if they need supplies they can't get out for on their own during these periods of extreme weather. The City of Vancouver needs to assist with facilitating matching of need to people and places willing to assist and while doing so track and create data to identify gaps and future areas of policy.
- Ensure that any barriers that exist in planning policies that prevent mutual aid through the form of fridges and pantries on streets—especially for water etc.—that do not prevent the mobility of those that use sidewalks should be permitted and allowed.
- At the beginning of the pandemic some cities organized staff into emergency teams that were dedicated to checking in on, and delivering supplies to, seniors and other populations at significant risk. The City of Vancouver should formalize and expand these programs and explore partnerships with public libraries, health authorities and local community groups and non-profits to conduct wellness phone calls checking on those who are most impacted during times of extreme weather and/or poor air quality to ensure they are aware of the situation and have a plan and are aware of resources. Contact and information should be available in a variety of languages and accessible options such as texting.
- As part of their Climate Emergency Plan, an annual course should be developed for multi-family housing, apartment, SROs, group homes, temporary housing operators, providers and landlords on extreme weather events, disasters, and emergency planning. This course should be tied to the Business Licensing process.
- Work with landlords to ensure that primary and secondary emergency response wardens are trained and assigned to multi-family buildings and apartments and are updated on emergency plans and protocols.

10. Seating

- *Short term:* Make more covered and shaded outdoor seating available on sidewalks, in parks and parkettes.

11. Clean air

- *Short term:* Wildfire season and periods of extreme heat overlap and create particularly hazardous conditions. The City of Vancouver should help ensure that air purifiers are provided to low-income residents with priority given to those who are disabled, and seniors with health conditions that would put them at heightened risk of poor air quality and for whom traveling to cooling rooms is either not feasible, hazardous, will worsen their condition or a combination of all of these.
- *Long term:* Policies to build multi-family residents ONLY on arterial roads are exacerbating our climate change impacts across our region and making the most vulnerable bear the brunt of pollution and poor air quality. This is not only discriminatory and a human rights issue, but also accelerating our climate change impacts. These requirements should be amended as an urgent climate change mitigation policy.
- Make the ability to maintain high indoor air quality—even during times of poor outdoor air quality—a requirement of building standards, especially for housing.

12. Communication

- *Short term:* Develop emergency plans and details in languages other than English. These should be shared publicly as soon as officials are made aware an extreme weather or poor air quality event is expected. This means there needs to be understanding which languages are spoken widely within the city but also that are specific to neighbourhoods across the city.
- Public information material should be printed in regular and large font and some made available in Braille. It should include image descriptions for any images that are used and follow accessibility guidelines about contrast and spacing and style. It should be written in plain language and be available online.
- Public information material should also be co-located in a diverse and wide variety of spaces and locations including:
 - retail and grocery stores; bus stops; corner stores; parks and other areas in the community where targeted populations are known to gather.
- Communication emergency alerts should be sent to phones in a variety of languages. They should also be coordinated with local and national broadcasters through public emergency alerts on television and radio and direct people to emergency and support service details available in multiple languages.
- Additional communication plans and methods must be developed for communicating emergency response information to people who do not own either of these items. There are many people living in social and lower rent

housing who do not have cell phones or televisions and for whom the radio is not accessible. For example, a community toolkit could be developed for multi-tenant buildings encouraging them how to establish an in-building response team to alert neighbours who would not receive emergency alerts.

- Cities (communication departments) should work in collaboration with TransLink to create public safety announcements (heat wave alerts and details, information about cooling centres and how to stay safe etc.) in multiple languages (again those most appropriate to the population demographics) in buses and on Skytrain's.
- The City of Vancouver should generate and send material in multiple languages to landlords and housing providers to post and distribute in their buildings.

13. Unintended Consequences

- *Short Term:* Review current policies to ensure they are not causing unintended consequences which will lead to harm and death in extreme heat and poor air quality such as: hostile architecture.
- Research (with involvement of disabled low income and/or racialized people) barriers and harmful consequences that may arise out of policies that are intended to address climate change such as reducing vehicles on the road. Consider whether the absence of private vehicles has been part of emergency evacuation plans and even the number of ambulances necessary during extreme heat and poor air quality.
- Identify buildings that consist entirely or almost entirely of tenants who would be particularly vulnerable during heat wave sand periods of poor air quality. Work towards creating teams that will respond and provide support as emergency warden model will be appropriate in these congregate living situations. These buildings are very high risk during fires and other emergencies.
- *Long Term:* Find solutions that move away from this model of housing vulnerable people in this way. Work towards building more inter-generational housing.
- Create more opportunities and remove barriers to permit intergenerational housing models for seniors housing and standards for social housing that do not result in hundreds of disabled and/or elderly people housed in one complex.

14. Mobile and Flexible Solutions

- *Short term:* Use public buses as cooling stations. They are visible and able to respond to areas of need.

- *Long term:* Continue the use of buses for cooling. Work with Health Authority and Province to explore permanent and pop-up community nursing and first aid stations.

15. Collaboration and Community Building

- *Short term:* Establish a Vancouver extreme weather equitable response work group consisting of city staff, representative from Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Housing and community members particularly who are disabled, poor and racialized.

16. Design standards:

- *Short term:* Encourage via grants and other policy, the retrofitting of existing housing to improve cooling and air quality via the addition of heat pumps, air conditioning, ceiling fans and other equipment.
- *Long term:* Design standards that create cover including shade, cooling and improve air quality such as overhangs, landscaping and air conditioning.