
MEMORANDUM

April 7, 2008

File: 3381

TO: Mayor and Council
J. Rogers, City Manager
S. Baxter, City Clerk
L. Best, Director of Communications
J. Forbes-Roberts, General Manager of Community Services
J. Bader, Deputy General Manager of Community Services
C. Gray, Director of the Housing Centre
J. Davidson, Senior Housing Planner

FROM: Dan Garrison, Planner, Housing Centre

SUBJECT: 2008 Homeless Count: Preliminary Results

EMBARGOED UNTIL 9 A.M. TUESDAY APRIL 8, 2008

Background

The 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count took place on March 10th and 11th 2008. The count was directed by the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness through a consultant, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC), and funded by the federal Homelessness Partnership Initiative and the United Way of the Lower Mainland.

The purpose of the 2008 Homeless Count is to produce an updated estimate of the street and sheltered homeless populations. A person is considered homeless if they do not have a place of their own where they can expect to stay for more than 30 days. This includes people who have no physical shelter (the street homeless) and those who have a temporary place to stay such as an emergency shelter or safe house (the sheltered homeless). The Homeless Count also provides a demographic profile of this population and identifies trends in relation to previous counts. This information is then used to aid in service planning and inform policy development.

The preliminary Homeless Count data will be released at a media event at 9 a.m. on April 8th 2008. SPARC has completed the analysis of the overall count and the numbers for each Metro Vancouver municipality. Demographic data has not yet been analyzed, but includes home community, health status, sources of income, and other information. The full report, including demographic information, will be ready for release in early September 2008.

As is typically the case with point in time estimates, the homeless count is likely to understate the extent of the problem. For example, it is difficult to count people who are couch surfing and those who are temporarily institutionalized and don't have permanent housing.

2008 Homeless Count Preliminary Results

Table 1: Growth in homelessness in Vancouver (City and Region) 2002-2008

	2002	2005	2008	Change	Change	Change	Change
				2005- 2008	2005- 2008	2002- 2008	2002- 2008
				Number	Percent	Number	Percent
City of Vancouver	628	1,291	1,547	256	20%	919	146%
Rest of Region	493	883	1,045	160	18%	550	112%
Metro Vancouver Total	1,121	2,174	2,592	416	19%	1,468	131%

- The 2008 Homeless Count showed a 20% (255 people) increase the number of homeless people in the City of Vancouver, from 1,291 in 2005 to 1,546 in 2008.
- The number of homeless people in the Metro Vancouver region increased 19% (415 people), from 2,174 in 2005 to 2,589 in 2008.
- The 20% increase, while substantial, is a slower rate of increase than we experienced between 2002 and 2005 when homelessness roughly doubled in both the City of Vancouver and the Metro Vancouver region.

Table 2: Sheltered and Street Homelessness in Vancouver, March 2008

	Street		Shelter		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
City of Vancouver	786	51%	761	73%	1,547	60%
Rest of Region	761	49%	284	27%	1,045	40%
Metro Vancouver Total	1,547	100%	1,045	100%	2,589	100%

- Nearly the entire increase in total homelessness in the region occurred in the street homeless population. This result was expected because sheltered homeless numbers can only rise with the number of shelter beds, and shelter capacity in the region has not expanded significantly since 2005.
- Between 2005 and 2008, the sheltered homeless population remained unchanged in the region and increased by about 8% in the City of Vancouver, while street homelessness increased 37% on a regional basis and 33% in the City of Vancouver.
- Overall, 60% of the regional homeless population was counted in the City of Vancouver in 2008, a slight decrease from the 63% of the regional homeless population counted in the City in 2005.

Analysis of the Preliminary Results

We will be better able to comment on the reasons for the continued increase and the slowing of the rate of increase in homelessness once the full set of homeless count data has been analyzed and released in September 2008.

In the absence of demographic data, we can examine the policy environment over the period from 2005 to 2008 for potential explanatory factors. While housing resources targeted to people who are homeless have not expanded substantially over the past three years, two policy/program changes have occurred that might have helped mitigate the extreme growth in homelessness that we saw between 2002 and 2005:

- Changes in provincial welfare regulations in 2002 made it difficult for homeless people to access Income Assistance that they need to pay rent. The 2005 Homeless

Count showed that these welfare changes were a major contributing factor to the rapid increase in homelessness between 2002 and 2005. Since 2005, the City has worked with the provincial government to mitigate the negative impacts of those changes. The City has worked with MEIA to develop an outreach program to help connect homeless people to Income Assistance. The Province also increased Income Assistance payments. These changes may have helped people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness to access welfare and housing.

- The Homeless Outreach Program that started as a pilot partnership between the City and MEIA has now been greatly expanded through BC Housing. There are now four of these outreach teams in the City of Vancouver and at least one in every community in the region. This program may have helped connect some people who are homeless to the income, housing and services they need. As of February 1, 2008 the Homeless Outreach Program has housed 746 people in the City of Vancouver alone.

The 2008 Homeless Count demonstrates that homelessness continues to be a significant and growing problem in the City of Vancouver and throughout the region. In partnership with the provincial government, we expect over 2,000 new units of social and supportive housing come online over the next few years, in addition to the over 1,000 units of SRO housing recently purchased by the Province in the downtown core. We expect these new units to have a significant impact on homelessness in the City.

A progress report on implementation of the Homeless Action Plan will be sent to Council later this spring.

Suggested speaking notes will be provided separately.

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