



# STAFF REPORT TO THE BOARD

**DATE OF REPORT** January 4, 2024  
**MEETING TYPE & DATE** Regular Session Board of January 10, 2024  
**FROM:** Cowichan Community Centre  
Community Services Department  
**SUBJECT:** Emergency Warming Centre at the Cowichan Community Centre -  
Update  
**FILE:** 7150-20

## **PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the emergency warming centre currently located in the Cowichan Community Centre.

## **RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION**

For information.

## **BACKGROUND**

The CVRD Board approved that the Cowichan Community Centre (CCC) Heritage Hall (HH) be designated as an Emergency Warming Centre (EWC) for the vulnerable population between December 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024. The CCC was the only location available that ensured the CVRD could meet the mandates set out in Bill 31 of the Disaster and Emergency Management Act of BC, as a means to support the unhoused population in the Cowichan region during adverse weather conditions. The overnight (9:00 p.m. until 9:00 a.m.) EWC will be activated when specific weather criteria are met and will be operated by the Lookout Housing and Health Society.

## **ANALYSIS**

The CVRD Board designated the CCC as an official EWC effective December 1, 2023 and it took over a week to prepare for the first possible activation on December 12, 2023. Preparation included: moving or cancelling existing programs and rentals that were booked in the HH; completing various health and safety plans; as well as executing operating and security agreements.

A security contractor was retained to provide specific security services during an EWC activation, in addition to the current Commissionaire security service already provided at the CCC. The specific EWC security hours are 7:00 p.m. until 11:00 a.m. in order to assist the EWC operator and the CCC before, during and after the EWC operating hours.

There have been three EWC activations as of the date of this report. The first activation took place on December 12, 2023 which saw 18 people utilize the EWC service. Although the night went relatively smoothly, EWC patrons exiting the building in the morning quickly formed groups to consume drugs adjacent to the building and on the sidewalk while Cowichan Secondary School

students were arriving for school. Security asked the folks consuming drugs to move along, which most did within a timely manner.

The second and third activations occurred on December 22 and 23, 2023. These two activations were also at capacity with 18 visitors and appeared to run relatively smoothly; security did ask one person to leave the facility prior to the EWC opening due to behavioral issues. Another noted challenge on the second night was that the storage container reached capacity which staff are working to address prior to future activations. It should also be highlighted that these activations occurred on low facility activity days due to the holiday season, helping to reduce the likelihood of impacts to other programs and user groups at the facility. The coming weeks are ramping up with building activities and therefore any activations moving forward may experience additional challenges due to more patrons in and around the facility.

As anticipated with this initiative, the CCC has received or been made aware of various formal (from the Cowichan Valley Capitals and the Cowichan Valley Minor Hockey Association) and informal comments regarding the appropriateness of a warming centre located at this facility. The primary concern raised is around safety for other facility patrons due to the high risk for drug use and associated negative activities that can be present with the vulnerable population utilizing the EWC service. While additional security has been retained to help manage onsite challenges with this service while in operation, there is still perceived risk from staff and patrons based on previous experiences.

There has been a large increase in reported facility incidents by staff and the Commissionaires involving vulnerable persons since the announcement of an EWC at the CCC. More specifically, as highlighted in Attachment A, there have been approximately 50 reported incidents representing the following categories over the month of December 2023:

	<b>Incident Category</b>	<b>Number of Reported Incidents</b>
1.	Evidence of Fire / Drug Paraphernalia / Public Urination	19
2.	Loitering	13
3.	Open Drug Use / Under the Influence	9
4.	Harassment / Violent Behavior	5
5.	Arrests	2
6.	Theft	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>

The sharp increase in incidents has put additional strain on staff, security and the RCMP who are often called to assist with the situation. These incidents also often involve or are witnessed by other facility patrons, including children, validating personal safety concerns.

It is understood that a key factor in the increase in incidents is around information regarding when the EWC is open. There appears to be confusion within the community on the EWC activation criteria and many people think that it is open every night. Another challenge is that the unhoused do not all have access to notifications regarding when the EWC is open and therefore are

positioning themselves at the CCC during the day and night/overnight in hopes that it will open. This then leads to the challenges in and around the building due to the associated activities highlighted above.

CVRD staff continue to look for alternate locations for a designated EWC. However, to date, no other locations have been confirmed and therefore the CCC appears to be the only viable option for the remaining winter season. Finding a more suitable and permanent location must be a priority before the fall of 2024.

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The following is an estimated breakdown of CCC costs associated with the EWC to date:

<b>Cost Item</b>	<b>Amount \$</b>
Cancelled Rentals	\$5,500
CCC Staff Overtime	\$8,000
EWC Security	\$7,000
Building Improvements:	\$21,500
Temporary Storage for EWC Patrons	\$1,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$43,000</b>

It is unclear at this point how much of these costs will be recoverable via the provincial Emergency Management Task Number and/or the Growing Communities Grant Fund; therefore, a budget deficit for 2023 is likely to occur for Function 423 – CCC Arena as a result of this unbudgeted initiative.

### **COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

N/A

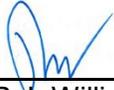
### **STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS**

N/A

Referred to (upon completion):

- Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
- Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
- Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
- Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
- Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

Prepared by:



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Rob Williams, MSc.  
Manager

Reviewed by:

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N/A



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John Elzinga  
General Manager

Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Board:

Resolution:

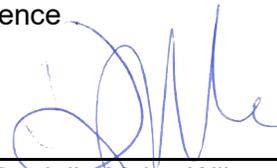
Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

Chief Financial Officer

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Chief Administrative Officer's Comments / Concurrence



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Danielle Myles Wilson  
Chief Administrative Officer

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – Summary of Reported Incidents at the CCC EWC in December 2023

## Incident Report Log

Date	Reported By	Summary	Action Taken	RCMP Called	Janitor Clean-up	Picture
1-Dec	Ticket Centre Staff	Unresponsive man found in main lobby men's washroom. Staff went to check on him while another staff phoned 911. 911 said to kick his hand, which staff did and then he moved and left shortly afterwards.	911 called, staff checked on man	Yes	Not specified	No
2-Dec	CCC Janitor	Man using drugs and sleeping in washroom stall. Security was called to escort out.	Sanitized and cleaned washroom	No	Yes	No
2-Dec	Ticket Centre Staff	Man passed out in MPH washroom during Strikers Martial Arts Tournament. After being asked to leave by staff, the man came to Ticket Centre desk barely coherent and slurring words, drooling on desk. Security guard standing by but took no action until asked.	Security asked to intervene, security and man had a confrontation and guy left	No	Not specified	No
2-Dec	Programs Staff	Staff harassment from unhousted population reported from evening of Dec 1. Staff were notified that there was incorrect info on CVRD Director Facebook accounts about the opening of the shelter that was taken from the CVRD press release.	An email was sent to the Board providing updated info on the anticipated opening of the shelter for Dec 11. No reported incidents the night of Dec 2 and extended security coverage provided the night of Dec 3.	No	Not specified	No
4-Dec	CCC User Group	Uncapped needle found outside doors to James St entrance in the morning. A nurse in training with knowledge of proper disposal with the user group disposed of the needle.	Enhanced security requested in parking lot/entry way between 3:30 - 8 pm which was considered as part of the warming centre planning.	No	No	Yes
5-Dec	Commissionaire	Unhoused woman requested universal washroom to change and refused to come out for 20+ minutes.	Police phoned, resolved on site	Yes	Not specified	No
6-Dec	Commissionaire	Unhoused female loitering in lot. Refused to move when asked.	Police phoned, resolved on site	Yes	Not specified	No
7-Dec	CCC Janitor	Drug paraphernalia found in 3 locations around building (N & E sides): 2 used pipes, used bandages and wipes, and needle package.	Cleaned up items	No	Yes	No
8-Dec	Commissionaire	Female barricaded in washroom stall, refused to exit.	Police arrived and escorted her off site	Yes	Yes	Yes
9-Dec	CCC Janitor	Evidence of fire and drugs use by library.	Cleaned up site	No	Yes	Yes
9-Dec	CCC Janitor	Used needle on back library steps	Cleaned and sanitized, disposed of needle	No	Yes	Yes
10-Dec	CCC Janitor	Found used crack pipe on grass in front of gymnastics entrance	Disposed of pipe	No	Yes	No
12-Dec	Programs Staff	When staff was returning equipment to outside storage they encountered a person smoking an unknown substance.No security in sight. Incident reported to OH&S rep. Rep shared at the OH & S meeting and was told that it is not illegal to smoke crack/inhalent drugs on CCC property.It is only illegal to smoke tobacco and Marijuana and to drink alcohol and that there is no CVRD Bylaw restricting this at this time.		No	No	No
12-Dec	Programs Staff	Unhoused person lit and smoked their crack pipe on retaining wall outside staff office and James St Lobby and smoke wafted towards windows, which do not seal. The man moved along but this is a popular spot to sit and smoke their substance of choice.	Will be reviewed at the OH&S committee	No	No	No
13-Dec	Programs Staff	Working in Arena my supervisor asked me to call security as there werer 3 unhoused people bothering patrons for money. The Commissionaire came right away . There were people hanging around waiting for the warming cantre to open. I also had other people asking when it would be open. We were told it was not open. There should be a sign on the door to say it was not open.	Sign made up for the door	No	No	No
14-Dec	CCC Janitor	Fire and drugs.	Cleaned up	No	Yes	Yes
14-Dec	CCC Janitor	6 crack pipes found and disposed of	Pipes disposed of	No	Yes	Yes
14-Dec	Commissionaire	Attempted theft of Caps jersey by unhoused man. Jersey was recovered but man fled. Man matching description was noted loitering in CAC lobby, went in restroom and locked in there for 40 mins	Police attended and got subject out of washroom stall. As the jersey was returned, no further action taken.	Yes	No	No

Date	Reported By	Summary	Action Taken	RCMP Called	Janitor Clean-up	Picture
15-Dec	CCC Janitor	Evidence of fire and drugs, human feces and dirty clothes found at loading dock.	Site cleaned	No	Yes	Yes
15-Dec	Ticket Centre Staff	Unhoused male and female camped between HH & MPH doors. Witnessed security being verbally assaulted by unhoused male, Security was backing up while male advanced in a threatening manner, then proceeded to punch security and threatened physical harm. High school kids being dropped off in vicinity while altercation took place. Unhoused male started yelling and threatening the kids.	911 called and attended scene and arrested the two individuals but then released them as they eventually cooperated to leave the area.	Yes	Yes	No
16-Dec	Programs Staff	Unhoused male smoking illicit substance at roundabout crosswalk. <u>The subject was visibly under the influence</u>	No action taken	No	No	No
17-Dec	CCC Janitor	Drugs, human feces, and garbage. Some guy observed pulling his pants up all around the building.	Cleaned Up	no	Yes	No
17-Dec	Programs Staff	Unhoused sleeping outside HH entrance, left a mess. Man appeared from around corner by outside storage pulling his pants up and started yelling, staff backed away slowly.	Janitor cleaned site	No	Yes	No
18-Dec	CCC Ops Staff	Fires and Garbage found by MPH exit by storage room. Strong urine smell as well	Cleaned up	no	Yes	Yes
18-Dec	CCC Janitor	Patron has peed numerous times in the library. They know who he is but will not ban him. CCC janitors asked by Library to come spray one day after he left as people were complaining about the smell	Cleaned up	no	yes	No
21-Dec	CCC Janitor	Drugs and Garbage	Cleaned up	no	yes	yes
21-Dec	CCC Janitor	Needles found outside of Library and HH	cleaned up	no	yes	No
21-Dec	Not specified	Unhoused male stripping in arena lobby and stealing from lost and found. Mom who witnessed took a picture	Security staff intervned and took a picture	No	No	Yes
21-Dec	Commissionaire	Outlining average Commissionaire report since warming centre opened: cautioned 3 homeless on rear rink steps, moved along same homeless 2 hrs later, Taco Hole contacted security to move along troublesome homeless man - issue resolved without incident, responded to concern from CAC, call from CAC - homeless persons belongings, call from rink - homeless person, moved along deeply intoxicated homeless man	All resolved with on-site Commissionaire security	No	Not specified	No
22-Dec	Programs Staff	Students reported a homeless person in ladies washroom	Security called, said that he could not enter the ladies washroom. Staff went into washroom to tell homeless person to please leave as there were 100 children coming in for a rental. She did leave after 15 minutes	No	Not specified	No
22-Dec	CCC Janitor	Evidence of fires and drug use. Fire damage on door by outside storage.	Janitor cleaned site	No	Yes	Yes
27-Dec	CCC Janitor	Large encampment outside MPH entrance, obstructing entrance into building. Evidence of fire which had been extinguished. 2 RCMP officers on site while patrons attending tournament in MPH were let in another door. Also found evidence of large fire by MPH exit doors on corner of building.	Person arested and is being charged	No, they were doing their usual round of building	Yes	Yes
28-Dec	CCC Janitor	Man sleeping outside of MPH entrance asked to leave. Pants halfway down, asked to leave multiple times but kept falling back asleep. There were small children arriving for soccer in MPH; Staff again asked him to leave, he then sat up and started smoking crack. Asked to leave again and to stop smoking as there are children around, he eventually left. Also, cleaned graffiti off of walls and post by box office entrance.	Site cleaned	No	Yes	Yes
29-Dec	CCC Janitor	Crack pipe found on stairs by arena	Site cleaned	No	Yes	Yes
30-Dec	CCC Janitor	Evidence of drug use and bathroom use around building	Site cleaned	No	Yes	Yes
31-Dec	CCC Janitor	Drug use at back of building, homeless camp cleaned up by arena entrance, homeless camp found in front of James St entrance to be cleaned when they left.	Site cleaned	No	Yes	Yes