

Kamloops Social Plan - Executive Summary

In September of 2006 the City of Kamloops retained the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) to undertake the development of a Social Plan. The goal of this plan is to enhance the well-being of Kamloops residents.

The priorities and actions for the City of Kamloops Social Plan have some significant common themes. Since the City often holds secondary or limited responsibility for social services, many of the options available to the City involve communications, advocacy and partnership building with and between community agencies. While the City does not have the mandate or capacity to function as a front-line social service delivery agency, it does have an opportunity to engage with the community and community agencies to identify community needs and help ensure that the needs of community members are met.

Through the process of creating the Social Plan, twenty-one priority social service elements were identified. An inventory of existing services, and matrices of government responsibilities related to each of the priorities were created to assist community members with identifying gaps in services and resources, as well as the community action necessary to address those gaps. The following main themes are addressed:

- Section 2.1 – Housing & Homelessness
- Section 2.2 – Safe places, alternative transportation & environmental health
- Section 2.3 – Youth Issues
- Section 2.4 – Aboriginal Community
- Section 2.5 – Building Social Agencies & Community Capacity
- Section 2.6 – Children & Families
- Section 2.7 – Health & Addictions

In order for a social plan to be effective, it is essential to regularly assess the needs of the community, to identify emerging issues and to ensure that the City has the capacity to engage with community agencies over time and across a range of issues. The following global recommendations reflect the overarching goals and actions of the Social Plan.

Short-term

- Ensure that adequate staff capacity exists at the City to engage with community agencies and community issues on an ongoing basis. Staff should have specialized skill set that will:
 - Bring a 'social' lens to a variety of municipal and community issues;
 - Work collaboratively with stakeholders;
 - Facilitate community discussions on key social issues;
 - Advocate for social change and community development; and
 - Monitor social trends (eg. Social indicators).
- Work to bring together social service agencies, taking a facilitating role to increase collaboration, cooperation and problem solving, as well as recognizing and building upon successes.
- Develop and establish processes for identifying and responding to emerging social issues.
- Ensure the city retains the capacity to have a role in developing social policy for Kamloops residents.

- Participate in programs that contribute to the understanding of what contributes to a good quality of life in similar sized municipalities.
- Continue to support the role of the Social Planning Council in a grass-roots approach to social planning with a mandate to:
 - “feel the pulse” of the community and provide recommendations to local service agencies and to all government agencies on the allocation of funds (e.g., Service Canada on the National Homelessness Initiative) and the direction of social development programs (e.g., Social Plan Implementation);
 - Assist in the identification of major social trends in the community;
 - Encourage and assist in the development of strategies which strengthen and enhance the well-being of Kamloops; and
 - Provide an unbiased independent perspective that is committed to critical thinking and proactive approaches.

Long-term

- Apply a ‘social’ lens to development and policy planning, to ensure that the social priorities of the community are considered in municipal planning and processes.
- Continue to position the City of Kamloops as a leader in addressing the social issues in the community by serving a partnership building and information sharing role.

Implementation

In order to move forward in a coordinated way in implementing the plan, it is recommended that City of Kamloops staff, in consultation with the Kamloops Social Planning Council and community agencies, develop an annual implementation plan for the Social Plan. It will be important for City staff to monitor progress, and report annually to Council on their achievements.

Many of the recommendations involve working in collaboration with community social service agencies to address issues that have been identified during the planning process. A number of recommendations in the plan involve advocating to senior levels of government to ensure that adequate levels of social services are provided in the City of Kamloops.

It is recommended that City staff work with community agencies to develop a coordinated advocacy effort. While advocacy is usually an ongoing process, Council endorsement of recommendations to senior levels of government will be crucial if advocacy efforts are to be effective. On many issues, the City of Kamloops may wish to encourage other municipalities to join their advocacy efforts, including bringing motions forward to the Union of BC Municipalities.

Social Planning Council Role

The structure of the Kamloops SPC is unique in British Columbia in its focus on independent ‘grassroots’ community volunteers (e.g., persons who are not members of any social group or agency). This requirement was instituted to ensure that members were able to provide a grassroots, unbiased perspective on community issues. As well, limitations on the term of office (maximum 6 years on staggered terms) ensure that the SPC maintains fresh perspectives. The Kamloops SPC also has local and senior government advisors to provide needed expertise as required.

Since its inception in 1993 the SPC has proven to be an effective mechanism for addressing and collaborating on social issues. The Social Plan recommends maintaining this strong 'grassroots' focus and continuing to engage the SPC in the implementation of the new Kamloops Social Plan.