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Title of Entry
From tents to homes
Category of Entry
Downtown Leadership & Management
Project Timeframe
From 2007 until now.
Brief Summary (please limit to two sentences)
<p>Since 2015, the Downtown Surrey BIA had an issue with the number of people who gravitated to our area because of the proliferation of services and the lack of housing for people who are homeless. By 2017, 135A Street became a tent city. Businesses that fronted or backed onto 135A Street, were severely affected -- they were not able to access their property, customers shied away from the area, the City would close down the street for thorough cleaning once per week, expense for theft and damage was skyrocketing and staff were leaving and were impossible to replace.</p>
Opportunity/Need
<p>The Downtown Surrey BIA began advocacy work with the City of Surrey in 2007 around the proliferation of small scale pharmacies (AKA methadone clinics) within their boundaries. The City instituted a Bylaw so no new small scale pharmacies could be open within 400 meters of an existing pharmacy within the City of Surrey. In 2015, the DSBIA again presented to the City regarding the proliferation of services within a four block radius - shelters, food services for people who are homeless, needle exchange, money marts, methadone clinics, pawn shops, drop-in centre, showers, etc. The issues continued to grow resulting in the Tent City.</p>
Goal/Objectives
<p>The goal of the DSBIA advocacy was to move people off 135A Street into appropriate housing to serve their needs whether it be help for mental illness, drug or alcohol addiction and a need for supportive housing.</p>
Audience
<p>The audience was the City of Surrey, Fraser Health, MLAs/Ministers at the Provincial level and Ministers/MPs at the Federal level.</p>
Implementation
<p>Once the Tent City was erected, the DSBIA had to expand their advocacy efforts. The DSBIA started to advocate for a purpose-built shelter with supportive housing meeting with MLAs from both sides of the House to gain support. The DSBIA met Ministers at the Provincial-level regarding housing and drug addiction to assist with the problems found on 135A Street and with MP Borden</p>

Sarai and Minister Jody Wilson Raybould at the Federal level.

The DSBIA met numerous times with the Mayor of Surrey, the Manager of Planning and the Manager of Public Safety. In addition, concerns were expressed to Fraser Health and the RCMP.

A plan was hatched by the City. They started the Surrey Outreach Team (SOT) who had a trailer installed on an empty lot on 135A Street. They monitored the street 24-7 and reached out to the businesses initially on a daily basis and eventually on a bi-weekly basis to insure the businesses were not experiencing any further issues. Working with other departments within the City (Bylaws and Engineering), 135A Street had garbage removed every day and thoroughly washed once per week.

At the same time, Fraser Health decided to install a Safe Consumption site beside the SOT office on 135A Street. Although the DSBIA was consulted, the DSBIA was not able to stop it from being located on 135A Street. However, the DSBIA was asked to participate on the Community Advisory Committee to bring any concerns to Fraser Health.

After 16 months, the City and Province announced plans to move the people living in tents on 135A Street into 3 sites of modular housing within the DSBIA area. The modular housing was to be put on development land that had been leased for 2-3 years - in other words, it would not be modular housing forever. The DSBIA was asked to support the initiative.

Some members, particularly those in close proximity to 135A Street were pleased. Those businesses that were scheduled to have the modular housing close by were not very happy.

Results

The week of June 18, 2018, 160 people that had been living in tents on 135A Street were moved into the modular housing within the DSBIA area. Twenty people were moved into Little Place operated by Atira just south of the DSBIA area. Two shelters (Gateway and Parkway) became 24/7 shelters and an EWR shelter became a temporary shelter (people in at 7pm and out at 7am). At the same time, the Front Room, a drop-in centre on 135A Street was permanently closed. By the end of the week, there were no people living in tents on 135A Street.

The DSBIA currently sites on two CACs (Community Advisory Committee) regarding the modular housing that meet monthly. The SOT and the operators of the housing were able to determine which housing units people would move into. One of the modulars has experience no issues and has begun engaging in community activities. One of the modulars has had some problems regarding the way it was built. The walkway has been inviting to people not housed in the unit which has created issues for neighbouring businesses. The third modular has been a magnet for visitors - people not living in the modular housing but visiting and hanging out around the housing when they are unable to gain access. The CAC is looking at ways to mitigate the issues for the businesses who are affected. One long time business sold because of the problems created by people hanging about the area drinking and doing drugs.

At this time, the DSBIA is working with all level of government to find locations for 250 permanent supportive units in five buildings where the people currently living in the temporary modulars will be moved when the lease on the land expires.

The purpose built shelter with supportive housing will break ground in April 2019. What started out as a 3 storey facility will be a 6 storey facility located near the Jim Pattison Outpatient Care Facility.

The move has not been without some concerns but compared with the previous issues the businesses experienced and the living conditions of people living in tents on a street with no heat and porta-potties, this is a much better solution.

Victory Statement

People who are homeless is an international problem. The solution instituted in Surrey with ongoing monitoring by the DSBIA has so far mitigated a number of problems experienced in the area.

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