



COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

Date: January 27, 2026

From: Ron Bowles, Chief Administrative Officer

Subject: **Emergency Weather Response (Warming Bus) Policy No. 0016**

Prepared by: Mark Panneton, Director of Legislative & Legal Services

Reviewed by: Karla Campbell, General Manager of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT “Emergency Weather Response (Warming Bus) Policy No. 0016” be approved.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Strengthen Our Community – We will provide opportunities for the residents of West Kelowna to build connections, celebrate successes, embrace the community's strengths and diversity, address shared needs, and contribute to shaping the community's future.

Foster Safety and Well-Being – We will pursue through direct action, advocacy, and collaboration with local and regional service providers, investments in community health, needs-based housing, emergency preparedness, policing, and other services that foster safety and well-being in West Kelowna.

BACKGROUND

Extreme cold weather presents a significant and immediate risk to individuals experiencing homelessness. As part of its role in supporting public safety and emergency response, the City of West Kelowna participates in Emergency Weather Response (EWR) planning in coordination with BC Housing, homelessness-serving organizations, and health and safety partners.

Historically, faith-based and community organizations played a key role in supporting emergency mat programs and short-term winter responses. Over time, the complexity of needs among people experiencing homelessness has increased, including higher levels of mental health challenges, substance use, and medical vulnerability. As a result, many faith organizations have reduced or stepped back from directly operating emergency programs due to safety considerations, liability, staffing capacity, and the specialized training now required.

In response, homelessness-serving organizations with professional staff, trauma-informed training, and operational experience have increasingly assumed responsibility for delivering emergency weather response services, supported by funding from BC Housing.

Under the *Assistance to Shelter Act*, BC Housing can enter into agreements with community organizations who wish to participate in BC Housing's emergency shelter program. To participate in this program, BC Housing requires that participating organizations file an Extreme Weather Response Plan with BC Housing that includes the following:

- a description of the geographical area to which the plan applies;
- a description of weather conditions that are the basis for issuing an extreme weather alert; and
- a designation of a community representative.

During the winter of 2024/25, the City of West Kelowna (the "City") provided the Warming Bus service. This was intended as a short-term compassionate action in response to extreme temperatures and was not intended to commit the City to the long-term provision of services which it is not resourced to provide. The City's Extreme Weather Response Plan (developed in 2023 for heat and flood response) was modified to incorporate cold weather response in order to comply the legislative requirements outlined above.

For the winter of 2025/26, the provision of the Warming Bus service transferred from the City to the PEOPLE Lived Experience Society ("PEOPLE"). PEOPLE uses the Extreme Weather Response Plan developed by the City, and the City remains involved with certain duties, as outlined below:

- Manager of Bylaw Services – responsible for acting as the community representative responsible for issuing EWR alerts when the activation threshold is met.
- Alert Communication – Staff are responsible for sharing EWR alerts in a timely manner with the Westside HUB, Kelowna Outreach Circle, shelter operators, RCMP, and relevant City departments.
- Community & Social Development Coordinator – serves as the City's staff liaison to the Westside Ending Homelessness (WEH) committee, focusing on providing policy, planning, and coordination support, such as the EWR program and ensuring alignment with broader community and regional homelessness strategies.

PEOPLE is currently responsible for the following operational matters associated with providing the Warming Bus service:

- Managing Warming Bus contract, including procurement of transit operator, security, and portable toilets.
- Maintaining daily contact with service providers to ensure shifts are staffed and responsive to changing needs.
- Providing administrative oversight (invoicing, expense tracking, reporting to BC Housing).

- Liaising with City and community social service agencies, including the Emergency Shelter provider.

ANALYSIS

Emergency Weather Response (“EWR”) programs require operational flexibility to respond to rapidly changing weather conditions, while remaining aligned with Council-approved frameworks and principles. The City’s EWR program operates within a shared governance framework:

- Council provides policy direction, endorses strategies related to public safety and community well-being, and provides policy guidance on the use of City-owned lands where required.
- Staff’s role is to follow approved policies, implement plans, coordinate with senior government and service providers, manage related operational matters, and respond to time-sensitive emergency conditions in accordance with established policies and procedures.

If approved, Emergency Weather Response (Warming Bus) Policy No. 0016 (the “Policy”) would guide and inform staff’s actions relative to the Warming Bus. Staff would update existing City plans and processes to ensure alignment with the Policy, and establish a permitting process to ensure that certain standards (safety, hygiene, etc.) are met by the community organization providing the Warming Bus service. Under the Policy, staff would not be responsible for issuing Extreme Weather Response Alerts, coordinating community organizations, or otherwise assisting with the provision of the Warming Bus service. These duties are not legislatively required and represent a downloading of responsibility to the City by senior levels of government.

From winter 2026/27 onward, staff involvement in the Warming Bus program would be restricted to site selection and permitting only. Staff would also make the City’s EWR plan template available to community organizations to ensure consistency in Warming Bus service delivery. The Policy would require the Chief Administrative Officer (or designate) to consider the following factors when selecting a site for the Warming Bus:

- Proximity to Schools;
- Proximity to Daycares;
- Proximity to Community Facilities;
- Anticipated impact on the neighbourhood, including the availability and cost of mitigation measures, if applicable;
- Potential safety issues, including the availability and cost of mitigation measures, if applicable; and
- Proximity to the unhoused population that the Warming Bus is intended to service, including the resources required to relocate the unhoused population to the site, if applicable.

Once the site for the Warming Bus has been selected, the Chief Administrative Officer (or designate) would communicate this information to Council, BC Housing, the service provider, and any other government or community partner the Chief Administrative Officer (or designate) deems appropriate.

There is no statutory requirement to notify adjacent property owners and occupants.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The role of staff relative to the Warming Bus, as contemplated by the Policy and as otherwise required by legislation, is already accounted for in the current operating budget. Transferring responsibility for Extreme Weather Response alerts and social services coordination to homelessness-serving community organizations that are better equipped to support the unhoused will allow staff to re-focus their efforts on municipal areas of responsibility.

COUNCIL REPORT / RESOLUTION HISTORY

Date	Report Topic / Resolution	Resolution No.
June 13, 2023	The following information was provided in the minutes: The Fire Chief, Fleet Operations and Project Manager, Facilities and Recreation Manager, Parks Manager and FireSmart and Wildfire Mitigation Specialist provided an Emergency Preparedness Update on floods, wildfires, extreme heat, severe weather and other incidents. An update was also given on wildfire mitigation work and the FireSmart Program.	No resolution

CONCLUSION

For winter 2023/24, the City operated the Warming Bus service as a short-term compassionate action in response to extreme temperatures. For winter 2024/25, the Warming Bus service was provided by the PEOPLE Lived Experience Society, and City staff provided support by issuing and sharing Extreme Weather Response alerts and providing policy, planning, and coordination support. Looking ahead to winter 2026/27, provision and coordination of the Warming Bus service will be the responsibility of a community organization, and staff will be responsible for Warming Bus site selection and permitting in accordance with the criteria set out in Emergency Weather Response (Warming Bus) Policy No. 0016.

Alternate Recommendation:

Council could instead defer consideration of Emergency Weather Response (Warming Bus) Policy No. 0016 and request additional information [to be specified] from staff.

PowerPoint: Yes No

Attachments:

Attachment 1 - Emergency Weather Response (Warming Bus) Policy No. 0016