



Committee of the Whole Report **For the Meeting of December 12, 2024**

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: December 5, 2024

From: Kerrilee Jones; Advisor to the City Manager
Peter Rantucci, Director of Strategic Real Estate

Subject: Enforcing the Legal Prohibition of Daytime Sheltering in Victoria

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council directed staff to provide an estimate of what resources and related costs would be required to engage in the enforcement of the legal prohibition of daytime sheltering in Victoria parks and on City streets, sidewalks, and boulevards. Current Bylaw Services resourcing levels are insufficient, and the City would be required to increase its front-line bylaw officer staffing and related supports by more than double the current levels. The increases would be necessary to provide sufficient site and service day patrol coverage and additional resources focussed on community level rapid response to incidents.

While enforcement is a necessary part of an overall strategy to end sheltering, and the only role for the City to play, it does not address the underlying causes of homelessness that result in sheltering. Without significant intervention and coordination of the Provincial ministries of health, mental health and addictions, housing and poverty reduction, to address addiction, mental health, trauma, systemic racism, and systemic issues in the criminal justice system, the issue of sheltering will not be solved by enforcement alone.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on the estimated additional costs to enforce the legal prohibition of daytime sheltering in Victoria parks and on City streets, sidewalks and boulevards.

BACKGROUND

On July 18, 2024, Council directed staff to report back on an enforcement resourcing plan and estimated related costs to enforce the legal prohibition of daytime sheltering in Victoria parks and on City streets, sidewalks, and boulevards.

In the specific context of enforcement, the City of Victoria Bylaw Department (Bylaw) currently does not have the capacity or resources to address the enforcement of daytime sheltering as contemplated within the Council's request.

Bylaw officers deploy 7 days per week, 362 days per year. In addition to patrol deployment that contends with sheltering and street disorder relating to Bylaw enforcement, this contingent of officers is also responsible for Bylaw investigations that include work without permit, licensing, graffiti, neighbourhood disputes relating to various bylaws, derelict boats, and noise complaints to name a few.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

As a first step, staff looked at what an enforcement model would entail which is intended to end daytime sheltering in Victoria parks and on City streets, sidewalks and boulevards.

Patrol Response

For the City of Victoria to effectively enforce the legal prohibition of daytime sheltering while also serving the more traditional bylaw investigation areas, the Patrol Response model would need to expand both in scope and in length of service day. To do this, new bylaw staff would need to be hired to provide coverage as well as additional operating budget for equipment and training.

On Demand Community Response

An additional team of officers focussed on daily community response and visible presence in the downtown would also be required to enable response to in-progress community complaints. Bylaw patrol response officers do not have the flexibility to respond to these types of calls as their mandate is to attend to the geographical areas within the City and these deployments are triaged and planned to ensure the appropriate coordination with VicPD and other City of Victoria divisions.

Prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic, most community bylaw complaints relating to social disorder, sheltering, nuisance complaints, and addiction related safety concern issues were directed to Victoria Police, despite the specialized skills of police not always being necessary or required. With the transition of this responsibility to bylaw post pandemic, bylaw faces more resource challenges and the flexibility to respond to select in-progress community complaints more challenging. Having a visible response capacity from bylaw to deploy to community complaints such as chattel in doorways or on the sidewalk, people sleeping or unresponsive, is critical given the police no longer have the capacity to respond to these types of calls.

When not actively responding to calls for service, their mandate is visible uniform presence in the downtown core proactively engaging with the community. Visible uniform presence, whether it is police or bylaw, increases the community's perception of safety as well as positive community connection.

Implementation Issues

Time Required to Implement

To hire, train, promote and implement this program would take 8-12 months.

Cost

The projected additional cost for the proposed enforcement model is approximately \$4.7 million annually, of which the vast majority is staffing costs as reflected in the table below. In addition to

staffing costs, other new costs would be related to officer equipment (telecoms, protective clothing etc.), patrol vehicles and related fuel and insurance, training costs and additional space. The estimated \$4.7 million would be in addition to the existing City budget for Bylaw Services. Given the large magnitude of the increase, most of which is operating costs, without a property tax increase, the City would have to scale back on other services to offset the ongoing annual costs.

Additional Labour Costs			
Total			\$ 4,130,000
Additional Equipment Cost			
Total			\$ 150,000
Additional Other Cost			
Total			\$ 420,000
Total Annual Operating Increase			\$ 4,700,000

CONCLUSIONS

Based on current Bylaw Services resourcing levels, achieving the proposed enforcement model would require the City significantly increasing its front-line Bylaw staffing and related supports by more than double the current levels. The increases would be necessary to provide sufficient site and service day patrol coverage and additional resources focussed on community level rapid response to incidents. It should be noted that enforcement alone will not likely resolve all the issues experienced by the City related to sheltering as it does not impact the driver's causing homelessness. While there would be some visible improvements in some locations and an increase to the perception of safety, as a tool on its own enforcement is unlikely to end the City's issues with sheltering without a more comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness

Respectfully submitted,

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Advisor to City Manager

Peter Rantucci
Director of Strategic Real Estate

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager