

## Council Member Motion For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of February 27, 2025

То:	Committee of the Whole	Date:	February 20, 2025
From:	Councillor Dave Thompson and Councillor Krista Loughton		
Subject:	Our Place – Operating Hours and Storage Grant for 2025		

## Context

*Belonging in BC*, the Provincial Government's comprehensive homelessness plan, correctly points out the decades-old causes of the humanitarian disaster on our streets: short-sighted spending cuts that were ideologically and politically motivated – "years where homelessness tripled, due to a lack of investment in housing, and aggressive cuts to mental health and addictions services and supports for at-risk youth that left an entire generation to grow up without supports."

Belonging in BC outlines billions in spending and includes, among many other things: "supports such as site management and engagement; food; storage of personal items; cultural supports and ceremony; access to washrooms and showers; and transition to housing."

In 2024, the Provincial Ministry of Housing and the City signed the *Memorandum of Understanding* -Homeless Encampment Action Response Teams / Homeless Encampment Action Response & Temporary Housing HEART/HEARTH (MOU). The MOU identifies that the Ministry's role will include, among other things:

- "...Improve access to a range of supports through cross-Ministry coordination, including health, sanitation, income, harm reduction, fire safety, social and cultural supports.
- Through BC Housing, provide unhoused people with access to health and sanitation services, including washrooms and shower facilities; food and drinking water; cultural and social support services; and services to promote safety and security."

## **Our Place Society Request**

The City of Victoria has undertaken a number of stop-gap measures to address the impacts of homelessness on an interim basis, in confidence that the Provincial Government would take up those measures or adopt equivalent or better measures.

One such measure has been support for Our Place Society (OPS), an excellent organization providing essential services: for several years, the City of Victoria has provided OPS with interim, stop-gap funding to support operating hours (\$50,000) and a storage program that the City originally proposed (\$50,000) for a total grant of \$100,000.

Staff at Our Place advise that the City funding leverages significant additional funding, and are essential to ongoing operations:

"The storage facility is currently operating with close to 90 Bins. The individuals using those bins are either living on the street or accessing shelter. Folks are able to access their bin daily. The \$50,000 from the City each year goes towards staffing costs to run the program. Total costs run closer to \$80,000 a year. Without the \$50,000 from the City OPS would not be able to run the program.

The City also has provided \$50,000 towards operating hours of our Community Centre. This is a partnership with Island health and BC Housing who each provide \$50,000 as well. This money allows the Community Centre to open at 7:30am 7 days a week and serve breakfast each morning at 8:30am."

These are valuable services that help to alleviate the impact of poverty and reduce the burden of homelessness and street disorder on the broader community. The Provincial Government has not yet announced how it will take over these specific services or equivalent services.

The interim, stop-gap OPS grants have been brought forward by Council members and approved by Council on an ad-hoc basis. This year, Councillor Thompson was approached as Council's Downtown Liaison to bring the request forward.

## Recommendation

That Council directs staff to:

- 1. add a one-time grant of \$100,000 to this year's budget to fund OPS operating hours and the storage program for one year;
- 2. work with the Provincial Government, BC Housing and Island Health to support the Provincial Government taking over funding the above or equivalent or better services in future years as part of the Heart and Hearth program under the MOU and Belonging in BC.

Respectfully submitted,

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