



**Council Member Motion**  
**For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of April 16 2020**

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** April 14 2020

**From:** Mayor Helps, Councillor Loveday, Councillor Potts

**Subject:** Requisitioning Transient Accommodation to Provide Indoor Sheltering  
Options during COVID-19

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**BACKGROUND**

Like many major cities in North America, the City of Victoria is currently facing compounding health crises: the COVID-19 pandemic along with housing shortages, mental health, addictions, and overdose deaths. Despite limited funding and capacity, the City of Victoria, working with BC Housing and Island Health, has taken steps to ensure the health and safety of residents and to protect against the spread of COVID-19. These steps have included renting hotel rooms, setting up designated outdoor sheltering spaces, and shifting municipal human resources to deal with these intersecting crises.

The City has been following the direction of Island Health Medical Health Officer, Dr. Richard Stanwick, and has also been directly in touch with Provincial Medical Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry (Please see attached memo to Dr. Henry and relevant attachments.)

Island Health has identified that the best and safest option for people without homes is to be indoors in rooms with their own showers and bathrooms. All British Columbians are being asked to follow the directions of Dr. Henry: wash your hands, keep social distances, and stay at home. None of these critically important health measures are available to people without homes who are living outside. The rooms that have been secured to date are not sufficient in number to house all of the people who remain outside on Victoria's streets and in our parks.

It is therefore recommended that Council request that the Mayor write to the Provincial government, requesting that the Province exercise its emergency powers under the Emergency Program Act to requisition transient accommodation units to shelter unhoused people. If the Province is not prepared to exercise its own powers, that the Province authorize the City of Victoria to declare a local state of emergency and exercise emergency powers to requisition the required units and that the City work with BC

Housing and Island Health to provide those units to people who are asymptomatic but at risk of contracting COVID-19 because they cannot currently follow health orders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council request that the Mayor write, on behalf of Council, to the Premier of British Columbia, the Solicitor General, and the Ministers of Housing, Health, and Mental Health and Addictions, copying Members of the Legislative Assembly representing constituencies in the Capital Region, requesting that the Provincial government utilize its emergency powers under the Emergency Program Act to requisition hotel and motel rooms for all unhoused people in the Capital Region.
2. Further, that if the Provincial government is unwilling to take this action, the City of Victoria requests the authority to declare a local state of emergency to use emergency powers to requisition hotel and motel rooms for people who are unsheltered in the city and that the City work with BC Housing and Island Health to provide those units to people who are asymptomatic but at risk of contracting COVID-19 because they cannot currently follow health orders.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Helps



Councillor Loveday



Councillor Potts

## APPENDIX A

**From:** Lisa Helps

**Date:** Saturday, April 4, 2020

**To:** Dr. Bonnie Henry and Dr. Brian Emerson

**Cc:** Dr. Richard Stanwick

**Subject:** Letter from Province re: Vulnerable Populations and Victoria Update

Good morning Drs. Henry and Emerson,

I just got off the phone with Dr. Stanwick and he suggested I send the attached letter directly to you. Please see in particular the highlighted parts.

We are in a crisis situation here in Victoria with respect to vulnerable populations. I also attach some pictures for your consideration. On Pandora Ave in downtown Victoria there are over 120 tents, not socially distanced. Many people moved here when their shelters cut the numbers to accommodate social distancing. These people, as Dr. Stanwick told you, have complex needs including mental health and addictions challenges. The City has secured 35 hotel rooms and BC Housing has secured 160 hotel rooms. Because these have been voluntarily contributed by hotels (not requisitioned through Provincial order) hotel owners have said very clearly that they don't want people with mental health and addictions moving in.

In the interim the City has set up one orderly outdoor sheltering opportunity (see Topaz Park photos attached) and is looking to BC Housing to set up another. We hope that you would agree that outdoor sheltering of vulnerable populations in a health emergency in which vulnerable populations are being disproportionately impacted is not good enough. At last count we have about 275 people currently living outside.

And, to add to our frustration and quite frankly our despair, when the City applied to Emergency Management BC to fund a shower trailer and indoor handwashing stations at Topaz Park, our request was denied.

This is not good enough. It is setting us all up for failure and in particular it is risking the spread of COVID-19 through this vulnerable population which will of course impact the availability of health care for the rest of the community as well. Maybe the Province should issue an order to all motel owners noting that they must make their facilities available to BC Housing for whatever purpose BC Housing deems necessary. We know BC Housing can pay for these so motel owners won't be out of pocket. The issue is the lack of exercise of Provincial authority in a DOUBLE Provincial Health Emergency. We have hit a wall and we need your help.

I am happy to provide any further detail about the situation that you might require.

With gratitude and a willingness to do whatever is necessary,

Lisa



Pandora Ave



City Staff setting up tents at Topaz Park



Topaz Park Tenting Area being set up.





April 2, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

This letter is intended to provide clarity to local governments that are working with the Province on strategies to meet the needs of the most vulnerable citizens in their communities. Emergency Management BC (EMBC) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing request that all local governments work in collaboration with BC Housing and their regional health authority to ensure that there are local plans in place to accommodate emergency shelter overflow and vulnerable populations that require isolation spaces.

The aim of the Province is to find appropriate shelter for vulnerable populations who lack the living arrangements to meet the physical distancing measures recommended by the Provincial Health Officer. If we don't find safe shelter and housing that meets this need, we risk the rapid spread of COVID-19 in a population highly vulnerable to the effects of the illness.

The Provinces will work collaboratively with local governments, through BC Housing, and as supported by regional Health Authorities and Emergency Management BC's Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centres (PREOC) to implement plans that will best meet the needs of the local population. The primary aim is to work together to identify publicly owned properties that can serve as temporary shelter and reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread among people experiencing homelessness. The Province will make every effort to cover the reasonable incremental costs incurred in using municipal facilities for COVID-19 response through direct BC Housing funding, contributions from the non-governmental sector, and augmented by emergency funding through EMBC. Working together and clear communication remains the foundation to success.

While a provincial state of emergency was declared on March 18, 2020, under the *Emergency Program Act* (EPA), there is no desire or need to use the powers of the EPA to implement a plan to meet the needs of vulnerable populations at this time.

*To clarify any misunderstanding, a ministerial order has not been issued that would empower the provincial government to requisition local government facilities. The voluntary use of any facilities for local and provincial response to COVID-19 still qualifies for cost recovery.*

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Through the regional PREOCS, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has started to distribute a survey for municipalities to identify facilities that could be used for this purpose. We recognize that some municipalities have already started working with BC Housing and have already identified facilities. We still request you complete the survey so we can collect consistent information across the province. If asked to complete the survey, please prioritize the identification of indoor spaces for this purpose. Any facility that BC Housing or a ministry of the provincial government uses for COVID-19 response is eligible for cost recovery, and the process for this is the same as it would be in any other emergency — submit your facility-related expenses for approval to your PREOC, and in all cases we will endeavour to work together to clarify cost reimbursements and any terms and condition of use.

BC Housing will work with EMBC PREOCs to ensure communities have a clear understanding of the Province's resources and roles in any facility requested, and that BC Housing has a clear understanding of the capacities and capabilities of local authorities in light of the current pandemic event. I would also like to note that the same principles would apply should the need to identify facilities for medical testing, isolation of patients, or similar purposes. EMBC senior regional managers in all parts of the province are available to assist local governments in navigating these extraordinary measures at this extraordinarily challenging time.

If you have questions about this process, please work through your PREOC.

Sincerely,



Stan Bates  
Executive Director, Response  
Emergency Management BC