

The concentration of individuals experiencing homelessness in Victoria is having significant negative and positive impacts in the community. At neighbourhood association meetings there are housed residents sharing experiences of increased crime and visible problematic behaviours, sharing their fears and anxiety about their day to day neighbourhood experiences. Some are also sharing their appetite to create and support solutions as they tell stories of positive engagement and interactions with their unhoused neighbours.

There are real and perceived threats to safety for individuals living in encampments and to housed individuals attending these sites and those living in surrounding neighbourhoods. There are also stories from people who are unhoused feeling safer and more stable as they are able to shelter in place, without having to pack up their belongings and move away each day.

While encampments are not a solution to homelessness (arguably they are a symptom of the causes of homelessness) right now they are a temporary, or transitional, solution while there is literally nowhere else for people to go.

Organized, Distributed Sheltering and Camping

During recent neighbourhood conversations and community meetings, some housed residents have expressed a willingness to consider more organized sheltering and camping in parks, with adequate supports and management. This is a marked change from opinions expressed in prior years. Whether this is a result of the stresses due to COVID-19, or a natural evolution of community acceptance and generosity, isn't clear.

What is clear is the consistent appetite for encampment guidelines that consider certain parameters: distribution (encampments must be in most if not all neighbourhoods in the city), proximity (distance to schools, playgrounds, community gardens), site size (a maximum number of tents), park size (large enough to allow for other uses), hygiene services (potable water, toilets, showers), health services (visiting or accessible urgent care, harm reduction, mental health services), site management (oversight by an agency), and safety and security (methodology to be determined). We understand that a city staff report is coming forward that may recommend some of these approaches.

Engaging People Currently Sheltering in Parks

People with lived and living experience of homelessness are subject matter experts in what the barriers and gaps in systems and services are, and are able to identify what effective solutions are in place. They know what they need. Before establishing any new camping or sheltering guidelines, views are needed from campers themselves.

This motion proposes an engagement process by which those currently experiencing homelessness, and who are camping and sheltering in city parks, are canvassed for their views on what factors affect and are needed to manage and support successful encampments. This will supplement and inform whatever work city staff propose to do.

Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, Peer Support Researchers would work with people/peers who are currently sheltering and living in camps in city parks to develop the project and recommendations.

Outcomes of this engagement process are to collaboratively create solutions for community safety and community harm reduction for all Victorians, create a shared understanding of

people's current lived experience, facilitate community-driven stabilization promoting health and wellness, and inform future encampment guidelines, designs and operations.

The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (GVCEH) has expressed interest in facilitating an engagement process to achieve these outcomes. GVCEH has extensive experience in working with unhoused Victorians, and has established its ability to provide facilitation, collaboration, coordination and communications support to community partners and agencies in the homelessness response sector within the Capital Region.

If this engagement process is approved by Council, the GVCEH would appropriately engage people currently sheltering in city parks, and in surrounding neighbourhood areas, in identifying solutions to current challenges (identified by the participants). The research would be led and delivered by Peer Support Researchers.

The solutions generated by the unhoused communities could help inform the development of encampment guidelines, and lead to better management of the sites as they are needed for temporary shelter, thus addressing some of the current challenges being experienced by housed and unhoused residents.

Engagement Process

General Structure

- Employ Peer Support Researcher(s) with lived experience of homelessness
 - Provide training in Peer Support and Peer Support Research methods
- Co-develop a Participatory Action Research Framework for individuals living in camps and surrounding neighbourhoods reduce community harms
- Promote equitable engagement
 - Pay stipends/honoraria
 - Provide healthy snacks
 - Support transportation (bus tickets) when needed
 - Ensure meeting times are not conflicting with services provision/meal access
 - Facilitate sessions, focus groups, and loop back with reports for validation

Timeline

Process to be complete within six (6) weeks of grant being allocated.

What are we trying to find out?

- What people living in camps and surrounding areas want/need to be asked?
- What 'in the meantime' solutions, before adequate housing and supports are available, would work for people?
 - i.e., before housing comes online, how could sheltering be better managed in city parks in the short term?
- How do we support community safety for people sheltering in parks and people living in surrounding areas?
 - What capacity building is needed to do this? i.e., Stipend-based safety work?

Outcomes

1. Citizen-led and community-driven Collaborative Social Development of solutions
 - a. Relationship & Community Building
 - b. Using a strengths-based approach expertise is harnessed
 - c. Doing 'with' not 'for'

2. Basic human needs are met
3. Person-centred and dignified engagement is modeled
4. Community is empowered and engaged through Social Enterprise
5. City hears unhoused residents' input to inform future policy
6. An updated voluntary census of individuals sheltering in parks is taken – those who wish to will be included in the Coordinated Access and Assessment process. Data will also inform service needs.
7. A summary of engagement findings is prepared for the city manager.

Budget

ITEM	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
3 Peer Research FTEs	\$ 12,730.50	540 hrs (3 x 30hrs x 6 weeks) @ \$20.50/hr + 15% MERCS
Training	\$ 2,000.00	Up to 4 Peer Support Researchers at \$500 per person
Project Management	\$ 3,942.00	Management & Coordination, Team Training, Data Analysis
Supplies	\$ 2,000.00	Paper, printing, clip boards, pens, food service materials
Stipends/Honorariums	\$ 7,500.00	Surveys/Validation, FOCUS Groups, research meetings etc.
Bus Tickets	\$ 1,687.50	1500 Bus Tickets
Food	\$ 4,800.00	Healthy food, snacks, drinks, coffee (for engagement activities)
Phones	\$ 150.00	2 months phone plan or reimbursements
Laptop	\$ 500.00	Laptop for Peer Research Team
PPE	\$ 1,200.00	Hand sanitizer, masks, gloves etc.
SUBTOTAL	\$ 36,510.00	
Administration (10%)	\$ 3,651.00	
TOTAL	\$ 40,161.00	

Recommendations

1. That Council approve \$40,161.00 from the Financial Stability Reserve to facilitate an engagement with people currently sheltering and camping in the city's parks, and
2. That Council provide a grant to the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness to facilitate that engagement.

Respectfully Submitted,



Councillor Alto



Councillor Potts