

Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of November 12, 2020

То:	Committee of the Whole	Date:	October 30, 2020
From:	Kerri Moore, Head of Business & Community Relations Thomas Soulliere, Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities		
Subject:	Sheltering Impacts within the Downtown Victoria Business Association Boundary		

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding the impacts of sheltering within the boundaries of the Business Improvement Area called the Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA).

At the September 10, 2020 Council meeting, Council passed the following motion after giving third reading to an Amendment to the Parks Regulation Bylaw attached as Appendix A:

That staff be requested to report back within 4 weeks on the impacts (including the impacts on shelter spaces displaced to other locations) of a blanket prohibition of sheltering within the boundaries of the Business Improvement Area, or within an alternative boundary encompassing areas essential to the economic vitality of the City.

The amendment Bylaw was adopted September 17,2020.

The primary focus of the amendments made to the Parks Regulation Bylaw was to mitigate health and safety risks for individuals seeking shelter in parks as well as individuals working in and visiting parks. One outcome of the new regulations is a decentralization of sheltering activity into parks across the city to avoid high-risk scenarios associated with congested encampments. Council also added several parks to the list of parks where sheltering is prohibited, based on factors that included environmental sensitivity and proximity to schools.

In the month since Council adopted the amendments of the Parks Regulations Bylaw, temporary sheltering in the boundary of the DVBA has been very limited. As of October 22, one month after the adoption of the new bylaw amendments, two temporary shelters have been recorded within this boundary, both of which were in Centennial Square for a limited time. Centennial Square is the only park in this area that includes a public washroom open 24/7.

Parks within the DVBA boundary map include Centennial Square, Ship Point Park, Centennial Park, Peter Pollen Waterfront Park, Reeson Park (sheltering prohibited), Cridge Park (sheltering prohibited), and Quadra Park (sheltering prohibited).

Staff received feedback from the DVBA regarding sheltering within the boundaries of their business improvement area and the impacts to businesses.

Based on business feedback the DVBA collected over the last several months in relation to the encampments and the increase in unhoused individuals congregating downtown, businesses downtown have been impacted in the following ways:

- Beginning from the early weeks of the pandemic, downtown saw a significant increase in criminal activity affecting businesses, including break and enters, smash and grabs and shoplifting. Much of this is reflected in the crime statistics for downtown
- Staff at many downtown businesses have complained about the impacts of street disorder and open drug use on their sense of safety and well-being
- Many businesses had to resort to adding private security to assist staff and protect both their inventory and property, all at a time when revenue was at an all-time low
- The DVBA received the greatest number of phone calls and emails from the general public commenting on their negative views of downtown, and that they no longer felt safe to come down and shop, and
- There are 17 hotels within he DVBA boundaries, some of them reported directly to the DVBA that they had guests arrive, see the encampments and cancel their rooms, or heard about the encampments via the media or online reviews and cancelled their reservations.

Businesses have also reported directly to City staff and Council with the same concerns outlined above from the DVBA.

Businesses are heading into what is traditionally called the 'shoulder' or 'off' season when tourism slows down, afternoons become darker, and weather is more inclement. The DVBA is concerned that the combination of this year's shoulder season during the ongoing pandemic, coupled with the DVBA reported sheltering impacts to business could have a further negative effect on our downtown.

Impacts to Financial Plan

The financial impacts associated with the City's efforts to mitigate the risks relating to outdoor sheltering are significant. Over the past four years, the City has invested between \$250,000 and \$370,000 annually on dedicated cleaning, security, and waste removal for parks and open spaces, in response to the growing number of homeless individuals. Due largely to the pandemic, these City costs are projected to reach at least \$1 million in 2020.

CONCLUSION

Based on the business feedback received by the DVBA and to City staff and Council, it's evident that businesses have been impacted by sheltering within the DVBA boundary.

Respectfully submitted,



Kerri Moore Head of Business & Community Relations

Thomas Soulliere Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Map

Date: November 4, 2020

List of Attachments

Appendix A: Parks Regulation Amendment Bylaw No. 20-102