



Council Member Motion

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

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: November 6 2020

From: Mayor Helps and Councillor Loveday

Subject: Immediate temporary and long term housing solutions for people sheltering in City Parks and Repealing Temporary Amendments to the Parks Regulation Bylaw

Recommendations

1. That Council direct staff to work with a private land owner or use city-owned land for the construction of temporary tiny home clusters of no more than 30 units beginning with one pilot project in Q1 of 2021 subject to the availability of one year of operating funding from BC Housing.
2. That Council allocate a portion of the City's federal-provincial restart money to help fund solutions that will move people indoors.
3. That the City request the Province immediately open Oak Bay Lodge to people 55 years and older who are currently living in City parks until the vacant building is demolished for redevelopment.
4. That the City indicate to the Province that it supports the use of the two sites recently purchased by the Province on Yates Street and Meares Street for affordable, supportive housing and encourages the Province to begin construction of modular housing on those sites as soon as possible, respecting the City's design guidelines.
5. That the City of Victoria works with the Province and other partners to offer housing or indoor shelter with a path to permanent housing for everyone currently sheltering in City parks by March 31st 2021 and directs staff to bring forward amendments to the Parks Regulation Bylaw so that the temporary measures including 24/7 camping expire on March 31st 2021. Final adoption of these amendments are to be scheduled once it is clear that adequate housing and shelter space will be made available by the March 31st deadline.
6. That the City supports partner agencies in engaging people currently sheltering in City parks to determine their housing and support needs, to inform the operation of shelter and housing facilities and ensure access to safe and adequate housing for all.

Background

The recommendations here are a suite of actions that the City and its partners can take to work towards providing housing or indoor shelter with a path to permanent housing to everyone currently sheltering outdoors in the city and to put an end to 24/7 camping in city parks. We understand that not all of the solutions outlined in the recommendations will be implemented by March 31st. But we are confident that working together with BC Housing and Island Health, enough indoor spaces can be provided by March 31st while medium term solutions – like the construction of affordable, supportive housing on Yates Street and Meares Street through modular (quick) construction methods – will follow. There is urgency to act now with winter upon us. We believe that setting a goal to work towards will help focus and mobilize action.

Additionally, doing this work together with the Province will result in savings for both parties. Earlier this year the Province spent a significant amount of money to run a tent encampment in Topaz Park. The Province has also supported the City through Emergency Management BC with roughly \$500,000 in funding to help manage sheltering related costs during the Provincial State of Emergency. This year it is estimated that the City's direct costs for managing sheltering in parks will be \$1.4 million. For the 2021 budget – if the status quo remains – staff are estimating a \$1.7 million expenditure for managing outdoor sheltering.

City of Victoria Support for Affordable Housing

The City of Victoria has been supporting the creation of affordable housing for at least a decade. The City of Victoria Affordable Housing Trust Fund supports the creation of affordable housing through direct funding of units on a per-bedroom basis including \$10,000 per bedroom for low-income units and \$5000 per bedroom for moderate income units. The per bedroom basis incentivizes the creation of larger units. Non-profit developers often express that although it is a small contribution compared to those from senior levels of government, the City's contribution helps to make projects viable.

The City created the 2016-2025 Victoria Housing Strategy which is currently in Phase Two (2019-2022). The Housing Strategy begins from the premise that housing is a human right and prioritizes actions that create affordable housing. The five key themes of Phase Two include prioritizing renters and renter households, increasing the supply of housing for low to moderate income households in Victoria, increasing housing choice for all Victorians, optimizing existing policies and processes, and trying new and bold approaches. As a result of COVID-19, Council has re-prioritized the Phase Two actions that will help to ensure housing security for renters.

The City has also used City-owned land for the purposes of supporting affordable housing. Together with SD 61, the City has contributed land to a project on Caledonia Street, which, if approved, will see the creation of 158 affordable units. In Burnside Gorge the City has also contributed city land and partnered with SD61 for the creation of 88 units of affordable housing. On top of the City's new fire hall on Johnson Street there are 130 units of

affordable housing under construction. And the City has recently purchased land that could be used for affordable housing and other community purposes.

The City does not have constitutional jurisdiction over housing or the resources to provide housing and shelter. Yet it is clear that we have – and will continue – to do our part using the tools and resources available to us, in partnership with BC Housing and Island Health, other public agencies and non-profits, and the private sector.

City of Victoria Advocacy Efforts

The City of Victoria has worked hard over the past six years to advocate for housing funding from the provincial and federal governments. It was a motion from Victoria City Council to the CRD that resulted in the beginnings of the CRD Regional Housing First Program. It was CRD staff that took the idea from Victoria Council and worked creatively to create a program that resulted in a \$40 million regional investment that was matched by \$40 million from both the provincial and federal governments. This \$120 million in funding has leveraged a total of \$600 million in construction and will result in 2000 units of affordable and rental housing, including 400 units that rent at \$375 per month. At this point, the majority of these units are being built outside of the City of Victoria.

In addition, Mayor Helps has been part of the Right to Home national municipal working group since the beginning of COVID-19. This national organizing and advocacy helped to shape the federal Rapid Housing Initiative and included the CRD securing \$13 million through this initiative – the only regional district in the country to receive direct funding.

While both of these programs are regional in nature and have been initiated and supported by regional staff and elected officials across the region, the City's efforts have been instrumental.

Community Wellness Alliance Work Plan

The City is also working hard as part of the Community Wellness Alliance. The Alliance was convened by the City and Island Health to help coordinate the decampment process and continue moving people indoors after the Province's initial work in April and May. The Alliance has responded to the needs of the majority of people sheltering in parks who have filled out BC Housing applications and want to move indoors and has set a goal of getting at least 200 people who are currently living in parks inside by December 31st of this year. With approximately 250 people currently living outside, this will make a big difference. But there will still be people left outside and this will require further interventions.

The 200 units include: 60 units opening in November in Langford and View Royal as part of the Regional Housing First Program (RHFP). These units rent at \$375 per month. People currently living in motels, shelters or supportive housing can move into these units and then 60 people can move from outside into the spaces vacated. Some people living outside may also move directly into the RHFP units. There are also 24 units for treatment available at Our Place's Therapeutic Recovery Community in View Royal.

In addition, BC Housing and Island Health are providing 100 “rent supplements”. This is a top-up provided to the income assistance rate which makes it possible for people to move from supportive housing into market rental units. And then people can move from parks into the supportive housing units that are vacated. There is one further opportunity for housing that will be available before the end of the year, bringing the total number of spaces to above 200. That opportunity can’t be announced at this time because there is no sitting government.

Rent supplements mean that people have \$825 per month to spend on rent in private market rental units. The people moving into units funded by rent supplements are ready to move out of shelters or supportive housing. They may need light supports that can be provided by Island Health or others. They don’t need or want to be in supportive housing or shelters any more. Because \$825 isn’t usually enough to rent a bachelor or a one-bedroom unit in the region, the mayor and other Alliance members are working on a creative solution to fill the funding gap.

This whole “positive flow” process – from supportive housing to Regional Housing First or market units and then from parks to supportive housing – is facilitated by the Coordinated Assessment and Access (CAA) process run by BC Housing, Island Health and the CRD. As vacancies become available, the CAA placement table meets and decides who is the best fit for which housing opportunity based on the needs people living outdoors or in shelters have identified in their housing applications.

Need for Shelter for all in Global Health Pandemic

People are sheltering in parks in the City and across the province and country because when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, shelters had to reduce their numbers because of physical distancing measures. These physical distancing measures are still in place.

We are now in the second wave of a pandemic that has hit seniors disproportionately. While it is unacceptable for anyone to be living outside in the middle of a global health pandemic, it is unconscionable that there are seniors living in tents when there is a recently vacated seniors home in our region.

We respect that Oak Bay Council and the CRD are in a planning process for the future of the Oak Bay Lodge lands. We also understand that the building will be demolished at some point to make way for the new development. What we don’t think we should accept as a community is that it is more acceptable for seniors to spend the winter in tents than it is for them to spend the winter in a building recently vacated by seniors.

Earlier in the pandemic there was a shortage of operators and not enough staff for temporary affordable housing sites. Recently a housing provider needed to hire 40 staff when they took over the running of a couple of housing sites; they were able to easily hire 40 staff who were trained to work in affordable housing sites.

We recommend that the Province move seniors currently living in parks into a small portion of the Oak Bay Lodge until the building is demolished and secure an operator to run a small portion of the building. We understand that the building is in poor condition. We are certain that the condition of the building is better than a tent for a 70 year old.

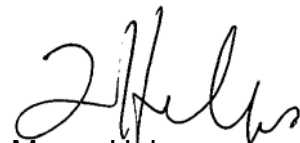
Need for Greenspace for all in Global Health Pandemic

While no one should be sheltering outside in global health pandemic, we also know that in a pandemic, access to parks and green spaces is so important. We have heard from residents over the past few months about the value they place on access to our parks system. Many residents have expressed compassion and worry about people who are living in parks; they've expressed a desire for people to get the housing and support they need. They've also expressed a desire to have the city's limited park space be available to everyone.

At this point, the temporary changes that Council made to the parks bylaws – including 24/7 sheltering – are set to expire 30 days after the Provincial State of Emergency ends. It is now clear, given that we are into a second wave with no vaccine, that the Provincial State of Emergency will likely not end soon. We can't have people living outside for the remainder of the State of Emergency. And we can't have our limited parks space restricted to limited uses. We need to set a date to have everyone *currently* living in the City's parks to be offered an indoor 24/7 housing or transitional housing opportunity and end 24/7 camping in parks.

We propose that Council set a date of March 31st to end 24/7 camping in parks and to continue to work with the Province to move people currently living in parks (as of the date of this report coming to Council) indoors by that date. Setting a date will give us all a goal to work towards, will continue Council's balanced approach and will signal that by next spring the parks will once again be available for everyone to use, including those who need to shelter overnight outside.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Helps



Councillor Loveday