Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of March 14, 2024

To:	Committee of the Whole	**Date:**	March 4, 2024
From:	Councillor Dave Thompson and Councillor Krista Loughton		
Subject:	Our Place – operating hours and storage grant for 2024		

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 February 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

Prior to the Provincial Government adopting Belonging in BC and the MOU being signed, the City of Victoria undertook a number of stop-gap measures to address 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 was 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 proposed ($50,000) for a total grant of $100,000.

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 MOU only being signed last

month, the Provincial Government has not yet announced how it will support these 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 with funding from Contingency or prior year's surpluses. This year, Councillor Thompson was approached as Council's Downtown Liaison to bring the request forward. As part of the budget process this year, Council has already allocated the full prior year surplus, but the Contingency would be available, and reallocation of funding is also a possibility. (The Social Policy, Equity and Accessibility Pilot Grant program will not be operational for several months, and Council direction was that it be for pilot projects.)

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. report back with a summary list of funding that the City provides to organizations to serve the unhoused population so that Council can consider whether to allocate such funds differently for this year; and,
3. 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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Councillor Thompson

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Councillor Loughton