



**Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of July 4, 2024**

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** June 27, 2024
From: Councillor Hammond
Subject: Financial relief for residents affected by crime and social disorder

BACKGROUND

With Victoria property taxes due by July 2nd, some councillors have been hearing from taxpayers who are negatively affected by crime and social disorder, and are suffering social, experiential and financial consequences. In the last couple weeks, a number of taxpayers, whether they are businesses, or residents have reached out to some or all councillors. Without revealing their actual names and addresses, here are just three examples:

Example 1

I have spoken to and received numerous correspondence from residents living close to the 900 block of Pandora (even prior to the October 2022 election). Less than a month ago, I received an email from one of these residents: "People on my block (1000 Pandora) feel left with no support since the 900 Block Sweep. No one was surprised when tenters relocated to our Block and started accumulating junk almost immediately. Shelters and piles of garbage have sat without removal since the morning after the sweep. The crows, other curious nomads and the fierce winds have been distributing junk all over the neighbourhood. We pick up what we dare but we are not responsible for the location of these entitled, belligerent, messy, disruptive people. We are concerned that Bylaw has been chastised for doing their job and trying to respect those of us who feel trapped living on Pandora Ave and yet still continue to contribute to City coffers. Is this current inertia coming from City Hall? Is there a plan? Hope so because our frustration and resentment is really starting to boil."

Example 2

I received one of several emails from a business located on a street where many people hang out, causing numerous problems. This is part of one email: "This block is, and has been, a constant hangout for street people. It has been going on for years and is getting worse. Check with bylaw to see the amount of emails we send them, asking for their assistance. This morning, there was a large structure, garbage, and a couch, right outside our shop door, blocking customer parking. While I was on the phone to the police, one of our customers phoned, saying that he had an appointment today, and was here before the shop opened. Of course, he couldn't park in front of the shop, so he went across the street, where one of the street people threw a glass jar at his vehicle, which exploded on impact with his truck, damaging his vehicle. We have been saying for a long time how the amount of street people constantly on this street is affecting our business. We shouldn't have to deal with this. Our customers should not be scared to come to our shop...We

were told of extra bylaw enforcement, and more street cleaning. That happened for two weeks, then back to the same mess. New garbage cans were installed, which resulted in more garbage being available for the homeless to scatter all over the street and sidewalk. Why are the street people coddled by the city? Why are they allowed to break the bylaws about no camping and no loitering?"

Responding to my email to this business, they wrote: "Yes, it is getting frustrating. We have heard that bylaw won't attend to this street without police escort, because it is a dangerous area. How does the city think we feel? Or our customers? Will our customers also be able to get a police escort, to come to our shop? Taxes keep going up, but we are getting less service. We feel that the local businesses should receive a tax break, since we are getting reduced services. If I give an estimate for work...but don't do all the work quoted, I can't charge as much...The street is still a mess, with street people on both sides, taking up parking spots with their debris, fighting while we are trying to deal with customers, and the local prostitute screaming obscenities. If we park a car too long on the street, we get a ticket, but a street person can camp, with all their garbage, on the sidewalk and street, for a week, without consequences. This is absurd."

Example 3

Just this week, I received an email from a property manager, representing owners of a condominium building near Vancouver and Johnson. She wrote, "We have had issues with the homeless since Covid. But for some reason in the last 3 or 4 months, the activity has ramped up to every night, lighting fires on the porch and sidewalk, large groups of people hanging out on the porch, sleeping, doing drugs and behaving in ways that make the residents feel very unsafe. This behaviour has been reported to the police but as we all know the police are stretched to capacity and have a hard time responding. We have had to now engage a security company full time at night, 7 days a week at a significant cost \$40 an hour for 8 hours which is \$2,240.00 a week. As you can imagine, this is a cost that this small group of owners are having a hard time paying for, so suggestions from the City of Victoria on how to pay for a necessary service that is a direct result of the City's inability to deal with the downtown homeless situation would be appreciated. Also, looking for guidance from the City of Victoria on how this group of owners are to continue living and working in a situation that is frankly dangerous and terrifying."

Victoria residents and businesses expect a safe and secure environment. With approximately 24% of the City's budget going towards police services, with millions more spent on bylaw and public works responses, and other social service contributions, people also expect appropriate services in exchange for their tax dollars.

As noted in the examples above, residents who, by virtue of their business or home location are repeatedly exposed to the impacts of crime, nuisance and/or social disorder, question why they are paying the same taxes as other residents and businesses who do not have to endure the same negative activities. One perspective is that the city should pay for some of the costs for responding to these activities for those who pay taxes but are not living the same city experiences as most others. Another perspective is that the city should pay for loss of the standard of peace and order that accompanies most of the residents and businesses in Victoria.

Acknowledging that the City must be cautious and prudent when embarking on new programs that may set precedents that are unsustainable (and hopefully unnecessary over time), there is an argument for temporary programs that acknowledge and compensate for circumstances that are currently suffered by some residents, while those circumstances gradually improve as actions undertaken by the City, other orders of government and agencies yield results.

As a first step, city staff could be asked to investigate options for such programs, in particular reviewing

- criteria to determine eligibility for financial assistance
- length of time for eligibility and duration of the program
- source of funding
- timeline for implementation
- similar programs currently available in other municipalities in British Columbia and/or Canada, if any.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to investigate options for methods in which residents affected by crime, nuisance and/or social disorder might be compensated and return to Council with recommendations for such methods, including implications for their implementation.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Hammond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Hammond