



Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of September 5, 2024.

To: Committee of the Whole Date: August 30, 2024
From: Mayor Alto
Subject: Incentives for Temporary Sheltering on Some Surface Parking Lots

BACKGROUND

In May 2021, Council added ethnocultural facilities as a new type of property eligible for a permissive tax exemption. As part of the decision, Council directed that beginning in 2023, any ethnocultural facilities that became eligible for an exemption in 2022, would be 100% exempt in that year, but that beginning in 2023 – for properties where a surface parking lot covers more than 50% of the lot – the property tax exemption for the parking lot portion of the lot would be phased out by 20% per year over a five-year period.

Concerns were raised that this policy would unfairly disadvantage a new category of exempt property, and it was suggested that all currently exempt properties where a surface parking lot covers more than 50% of the property should be subject to the same policy. That policy adjustment was made.

Permissive tax exemptions should be used to incentivize and support the kinds of activities that provide public benefit. Currently parking lots serve as an important adjunct to the function of some community halls, churches and other exempt properties. With transportation mode shifts and accessibility improvements continuing in the coming decades, and in a fully built out city with limited land for important community amenities like childcare, community services and affordable housing, there are opportunities to explore between the owners of exempt properties, the City and other potential partners to make better and higher use of these surface parking lots. Reducing the tax exemption for parking lots (where the lot covers more than 50% of the property and therefore may be a viable alternative use site), was seen as one way to initiate discussions about better public good uses for these open spaces.

In June 2021, Council adopted the Motion *That the exemption for the parking lot portion of all properties subject to a permissive tax exemption be reduced by 20% each year over a five-year period, beginning in 2023, where surface parking lots are 50% or more of the total property area.*

Staff communicated directly with impacted property owners, and on April 14, 2022, permissive tax exemption applicants were notified of the change in policy impacting parking lots starting in 2023, and then on September 9, 2022, staff notified approved applicants of the change to their exemption on the parking lot portion of the property.

The properties thus affected were:

1. Anglican Church of St. Barnabas
2. Bayanihan Cultural and Housing Society

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3. BC Muslim Association
4. Bialy Orzel Polish Association White Eagle
5. Eidsvold No. 53 Sons of Norway
6. Glad Tidings Church
7. Gurdwara Singh Sabha Society of Victoria
8. Khalsa Diwan Society
9. Maplewood Gospel hall
10. Victoria Edelweiss Club German Canadian Cultural Society
11. Victoria Italian Assistance Centre
12. Victoria Shambhala Centre
13. Victoria Truth centre

The City continues to explore a multitude of ways to respond to the housing crisis, in particular filling gaps left by the pace of permanent housing construction and expansion of social and health services. In recent months, the City has ventured into new realms of action, enabling additional direct social services provision, dedicated sheltering locations, reduction in allowable sheltering in public spaces, and expansion of broad enforcement tools, as part of a comprehensive strategy to do everything it can – and arguably more than its share – to mitigate homelessness and its impacts on both unhoused and housed Victorians.

One more avenue in this strategy could be to explore a better and higher use of some surface parking lots by encouraging and rewarding ethnocultural facilities, and/or any organizations that benefit from a tax-exempt status and has parking spaces, to provide a portion of those parking spaces for overnight sheltering, whether in vehicles or other protected temporary structures.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to craft a policy for Council consideration that offers incentives and rewards for community organizations to offer temporary overnight shelter spaces in parking lots, including but not limited to an interruption and/or reversal of ongoing tax exemption reductions, identifying timelines for each option.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Alto