



## Governance and Priorities Committee Report

For the meeting of June 4, 2015

---

**To:** Governance and Priorities Committee      **Date:** May 27, 2015  
**From:** Robert Woodland, Director of Legislative & Regulatory Services  
**Subject:** Action Plan for Housing Supports & City Services for Sheltering in City Parks

---

### Executive Summary

The lack of adequate housing opportunities for homeless people in Victoria has resulted in many taking shelter in City parks. These sheltering activities are having a number of impacts on City parks and resources, and the community. Council directed staff to develop strategies that would address the housing needs of homeless people as the primary means to reduce the need for and impacts arising from sheltering activities in City parks.

On April 16, 2015 Council reaffirmed its commitment to a *Housing First Strategy*, which seeks to provide permanent housing for those in need. Council also recognized that it will take time to achieve solutions through this strategy, and instructed staff to develop short-term initiatives for alternative, temporary housing options. City staff and Victoria Police (VicPD) also recommend that a number of operational initiatives be taken to better manage the current situation in parks.

The proposed *Action Plan for Housing Supports & City Services for Sheltering in City Parks* (Appendix A) outlines a number of initiatives that respond to Council's direction. It is recommended that Council endorse the *Action Plan* and make a commitment to fund capital grants and operating expenses necessary to achieve the *Action Plan* objectives. Further development and implementation of alternative, temporary housing initiatives would flow from Council's decisions.

### Recommendation

That Council approve:

1. The *Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Homeless People Sheltering in City Parks* outlined in Appendix A of this report; and
2. Additional operating funding of up to \$350,000 from 2015 contingencies to support specific *Action Plan* initiatives, subject to final approval by the City Manager.

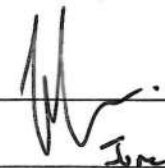
Respectfully submitted,

  
Robert Woodland  
Director of Legislative & Regulatory Services

  
Julie MacDougall  
Assistant Director, Parks & Recreation

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date:

  
June 1, 2015

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Provide Council with information on actions being taken in response to Council's direction given April 16, 2015
2. Seek further Council direction on alternative, temporary housing options for homeless people currently taking shelter in City parks and other operational initiatives.

## **Background**

The focus of this report is to propose an *Action Plan* for Council's consideration that responds to Council's resolution passed on April 16, 2015:

### **Use of Parks & Green Spaces for Overnight Shelter**

1. *Re-affirm the City's commitment to a Housing First strategy, partnering with the federal and provincial governments and housing providers to increase the supply of new housing with supports to reduce and eliminate homelessness,*
2. *That the City continues to take on an active advocacy role in pushing the provincial and federal governments to fulfil their duty to adequately fund housing, mental health and addiction services, in the region;*
3. *Direct staff to report on a priority basis on options for increasing the supply of temporary shelter and housing in the city, including micro-housing options, based on best practices in other communities, to provide alternatives in the near-term to unregulated, overnight shelter, including working with the province to increase the number of shelters beds to 260 year round.*

This report describes actions being taken in response to parts 1 and 2 of Council's resolution; however, the focus for Council's decision-making is part 3 of the resolution.

The creation of affordable housing units for a variety of residents, and especially housing and supports for those in need are key objectives of the City's Strategic Plan. Relevant parts of the Strategic Plan include:

### **2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan**

#### ***Objective 6: Make Victoria More Affordable***

#### **Actions**

1. Form an Affordable Housing Task Force to research, analyse and implement innovative housing policy solutions. (2015)
2. Increase City contribution to Affordable Housing Trust Fund. (2015)
3. Initiate Municipal Housing Strategy. (2015)
4. Review Affordable Housing Trust Fund to consider increasing the amount per door and building family housing. (2015)



## **Outcomes**

1. Substantial increase in construction of new low-cost housing units with implementation of income-mixed zoning. (2016)
2. Increased range of affordable housing not only for those in need of supports, but also for working people, families and youth. (2017/2018)
3. More affordable and supportive rental units are available. (2018)

Note: The Housing Affordability Task Force (Action 1) was convened in May 2015 and will report out on its work by July 2015. Council increased its annual funding to the Victoria Housing Reserve (Action 2) by \$750,000. Both of these actions are expected to enable Actions 3 and 4.

## ***Objective 7: Facilitate Social Inclusion and Community Wellness***

### **Actions**

1. Increase the number of subsidized housing units, lobby upper levels of government and increase investment in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. (2015).
2. Work with partner agencies and street-involved people to establish increased options for safe and secure storage of the belongings of street-involved people in an area that will not have negative impacts on surrounding neighbours or land uses. (2015)
3. Facilitate creation of supervised consumption services embedded in a continuum of health services, including harm reduction. (2015/2016)

### **Outcomes**

1. Created accessible health services for Victoria's most marginalized people. (2017)
2. Victoria is closer to ending chronic homelessness. (2017)
3. Coalition to End Homelessness completes its mandate to end homelessness. (2018)

Note: The City remains actively engaged in its efforts to advocate for more permanent supportive and affordable housing units (Action 1), primarily through the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (the Coalition). Council allocated \$45,000 in 2015 to help implement Action 2.

To support some of the Strategic Plan objectives Council recently approved the following expenditures in the 2015 – 2019 Financial Plan as outlined below:

### **2015 – 2019 Financial Plan**

1. \$750,000 (additional) into the Victoria Housing Reserve.
2. \$45,000 (new) for storage of homeless persons' belongings.

### **Consistency with Official Community Plan**

The Official Community Plan (OCP) recognizes that parks and open spaces are critical components of a complete community and serve many different uses in an urban environment. They help to improve the liveability of densely developed areas, enable active lifestyles and

personal health, provide spaces for respite and contemplation, highlight historic and cultural landscapes, and provide indoor and outdoor gathering places.

Many parks and open spaces also play an important role in providing animal and plant habitat and maintaining ecosystem services. "Park" is defined in the OCP as "land managed by the City of Victoria that provides outdoor space for unstructured or structured leisure activities, recreation, ecological habitat, cultural events, or aesthetic enjoyment, not including planted areas within street rights of way." Considering the purpose of parks outlined in the OCP, their use for sheltering activities does not support OCP objectives for parks and open spaces, and is not a valid, long-term housing option for homeless people in our community.

### ***Issues and Analysis***

The *Action Plan* outlined in this report is meant to address the immediate issues arising from people taking shelter in City parks. These issues include the need for adequate housing options, supports for people in need, and improved City services to respond to the current situation.

The *Action Plan* outlines a range of housing initiatives that respond to Council's direction given April 16, 2015. The *Action Plan* also proposes a number of operational initiatives that are either necessary to support the housing objectives or to improve the City's response to the impacts that arise from people taking shelter overnight in parks.

Housing options are reviewed ranging from temporary housing options (e.g. additional emergency shelter mats) to permanent housing options (E.g. supportive housing). The report recommends that separate and concurrent strategies be pursued for both permanent and temporary housing options, since it is expected that people will continue to take shelter in City parks until there are adequate housing options available.

City staff and VicPD believe it is important to provide an adequate service response to the impacts that sheltering activities are having in City parks. The City needs to maintain adequate service levels to monitor bylaw compliance, respond to complaints from the public, and maintain and restore City parks. A series of actions are proposed that are intended to ensure an adequate service level to respond to public complaints and impacts flowing from people taking shelter in City parks.

The City does not have a role in the direct provision of housing and social services to people in need at this time. The City relies upon the Provincial government, Provincial agencies such as BC Housing and Island Health, and a local network of community service providers to perform these important functions. In light of this, the City would rely on partnerships with local service providers or community groups to undertake any of the temporary housing options outlined in this report.

Research, policy development, service coordination and advocacy for local housing and social service supports is primarily focused through the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (the Coalition). City staff and elected officials participate on the Coalition, and the City provides an annual grant of \$100,000 to support the Coalition's operations.



## 2015 – 2016 Housing Initiatives

### 1. Temporary Housing Initiatives

A Housing First strategy seeks to establish adequate, permanent housing for people in need. However, the time required to build an adequate supply to meet the demand for permanent housing will take several years. In the meantime, temporary housing such as formalized outdoor shelter locations and micro-housing villages may be a more suitable alternative to unregulated overnight sheltering in City parks. The following initiatives are recommended for Council's consideration.

#### a. Increasing the Supply of Emergency Shelter Beds in the Region

A study published by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network indicates that the average monthly cost to operate an emergency shelter unit is \$1,932 per person while the same monthly costs were \$701 for a rent supplement unit and about \$200 monthly for a social housing unit. Most emergency shelter units created in the past decade have come through partnerships within the Federal Government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). In 2014, the HPS program was renewed for a three year term, but with a drastically reduced funding pool and policies restricting the use of funds to Housing First initiatives.

Housing First approaches support placing a homeless person or family directly into a housing unit and bypassing the shelter programs. Hence, the Coalition is currently working with BC Housing and other partners to explore the possibility for additional rent supplement funding and financing to support the development of more affordable housing units in the region. It is reasonable to expect that the current complement of emergency shelter spaces will continue to be needed to address the needs of those who require these services on a temporary basis; however, success in securing more resources for rent supplements and affordable rental housing development should eventually reduce demand on the existing services to the point where they are not operating at full capacity.

Until that time, it may be necessary to secure funding to open additional emergency housing mats through service providers. Emergency mats provide a temporary housing option suitable for people who do not wish to shelter outdoors. Recently, BC Housing advised that they are committed to funding additional rent supplements for 20 people, which is expected to free up 20 spaces in the emergency housing supply. It should also be noted that this strategy addresses the primary issue in the Adams' decision; namely, that the right to take overnight shelter in a park only applies if no shelter mats are available.

The Victoria Cool Aid Society has indicated that they believe some individuals currently sheltering outdoors would take advantage of emergency shelter beds if they were made available during the summer period.

Staff recommend that the City and the Victoria Cool Aid Society work jointly with local service providers to secure funding (~\$112,000) to enable the 40 emergency "winter season" mats for adults to remain open during the summer period (May

through October) to provide an alternative to sheltering in City parks.

Staff also recommend that the City work with the Out of the Rain youth shelter program to identify and secure funding (~\$40,000) to support the 35 youth emergency mats during the additional months of September 2015 and April/May 2016.

b. Creating New Forms of Micro-Housing

Alternatives to traditional temporary shelters are operating in some jurisdictions. Staff have reviewed the following five alternative models:

- Eugene, OR – Opportunity Village
- Eugene, OR – Rest stop pilot program
- Portland, OR - Dignity Village
- Portland, OR - Right 2 Dream Too
- Seattle, WA – Tent Cities 3 and 4

The sites listed above provide a variety of sleeping facilities, including semi-permanent wooden structures, Conestoga huts and/or tents. Some provide communal gathering, eating and/or washroom facilities. All have “site rules,” including prohibitions against alcohol or illegal drug use on site. Findings from this preliminary research have raised some questions that reinforce the expectation that several temporary housing options may be needed to address the City’s situation:

1. Which homeless people sheltering in City parks would this model be appropriate for?  
The Coalition’s *Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities* report provides a useful analysis of the needs levels of the estimated 367 individuals currently experiencing chronic homelessness in the region. Further discussions with partners and stakeholders is required to determine which of the identified four “need level” groups could be suitably sheltered and supported on a temporary basis using this alternative housing model.
2. What is the right role for the City in this type of alternative housing model?  
In all of the alternative models listed above, either the residents, a non-profit organization or a faith community is responsible for day to day supervision and management of the site. In some cases, the host City has contributed land and assistance with ensuring that structures meet any applicable life safety requirements. City staff are exploring the potential interest of local groups who might wish to lead the operation of a micro-housing village.

Discussions with potential micro-housing proponents suggest that this model will be suitable for some of the people who take shelter in City parks. It will be important to move forward with a model that has the greatest chance for success in order to build further community support and interest in this approach. For that reason, City staff do not believe that a micro-housing approach should be the sole focus of the City’s temporary housing strategy.

The City foresees its role in this model as a facilitator that enables an interested and viable community group to operate the village. The City’s role should be focused toward



- Assisting in locating and acquiring a potential site
- Facilitating regulatory approvals, such as zoning and permits
- Facilitating any grant applications for funding
- Developing operating and “neighbourliness” rules with the site manager
- Identifying life safety considerations in the design and construction of the site
- Providing City services to the site (E.g. water, garbage collection, safety inspections, community policing)

Based on the experiences in Oregon, an ideal site would be about an acre in size, located near to transit services and close to other services that residents might need, such as health care and social service supports. Compatibility with neighbours is also a key consideration. A multi-year lease of a paved or level site of this size may be available in a number locations near the central part of Victoria. Securing a lease with a private landowner on an underutilized site may provide suitable land tenure. The map in Appendix B shows the general geographic area that might have a suitable site for a micro-housing village.

Staff recommend that Council consider identifying and supporting a “grass roots” organization to develop a “made in Victoria” micro-housing approach, subject to:

- Identifying an appropriate site of sufficient size to serve about 35 to 50 residents
- Developing an agreement with the organization on objectives and operations
- The City’s commitment to provide funding and City services to the project

#### c. Regulating Overnight Sheltering in Specific Park Locations

Permitting the temporary use of specific City park areas for overnight sheltering and providing services to support these sites is another alternative form of temporary housing. This is different from the micro-housing option in that people would reside in their own tents, and built structures would not be permitted. This model could be structured in one of two ways:

1. A site where continuous occupation of the tenting area by residents is permitted; or
2. A site where residents are only permitted to shelter overnight, and must move-on the next day.

In light of the primary purpose of parks outlined in the OCP the permanent designation of a park area for use as temporary housing is not recommended.

Past experience and information from other communities suggests that the number of residents should be limited to less than 50 persons in one site to maintain safety and community order within the shelter area. The following facilities and services are recommended to support either model:

- Portable toilets or washrooms
- Potable water
- A designated area to prepare and cook meals
- A site manager supported by security staff
- A fenced area to support residents’ safety
- Garbage receptacles and collection service
- Storage for belongings

In addition, routine contact with the following services are recommended:

- social service and housing outreach
- health services outreach
- community policing
- fire department and ambulance service

The choice of suitable location(s) for this model should consider the following factors:

- proximity to services that homeless people typically need and use
- a location not immediately adjacent to neighbours who would be adversely affected

Immediately available locations would include City parks; however, many parks will be unsuitable if they are not close to services, or are too close to adjacent, sensitive land uses (e.g. elementary schools, residences). Other City sites might also be suitable, such as a surface parking lot; however, there are fewer potential sites. Acquiring a lease over private land or the purchase of land for such a purpose is also possible, but would take more time and have higher financial risk, especially if the site proves unsuitable. If the intention is for this type of housing option to operate in the long-term then land other than park land should be acquired for this purpose.

Larger parks might provide opportunity for a temporary, designated sheltering area. Four of these parks are shown in the Map included as Appendix B. Within these parks there may be areas that could support sheltering activities on a temporary basis:

- the southwest corner of Topaz Park
- the parking lot at Royal Athletic Park
- Banfield Park
- Stadacona Park

Due to the unique legal status of Beacon Hill Park, its consideration as a designated, continuous sheltering location is not recommended for consideration. Based upon City staff assessment of available parks sites, an area in the southwest corner of Topaz Park may provide a suitable location due to the presence of washrooms, hard surface fenced areas for shelters, the distance from neighbours and the proximity to downtown services.

The model where continuous occupancy in the sheltering area is maintained day and night provides stability for the residents. It is important that management and security over the site is maintained to ensure resident safety and to prevent others from victimizing residents. The need for fencing and the on-going presence of shelters will exclude the general public from using the designated area of the park. It is expected that special events and playing field bookings will be affected by the designation of a park area for temporary sheltering use.

The model that permits overnight camping only is more disruptive to the lives of the nightly residents. However, it does not create a sense of permanency of the use in the park, and allows for clean-up of the site each day. This approach could also be more flexible as designated site(s) could be moved from time to time to reduce the impact on one specific location or park.



In either approach, the VicPD note that establishing a designated temporary sheltering area without proper management and security could not be supported. Of primary concern to the VicPD is that creating a designated temporary sheltering area where persons are permitted to reside will place an already vulnerable segment of the population at serious risk for further victimization.

The current situation, where homeless people may shelter in any park overnight, disperses people to many park areas. This reduces the burden on any one park, but spreads the impacts to many areas of the City.

Staff recommend that Council consider a single site designated for continuous overnight sheltering. The next steps would include:

- City staff would seek partners to provide management and support to the site
- City staff would prepare an operating budget for the site that includes the recommended services.

Staff also recommend that Council endorse the operational initiative (noted below) to add portable toilets or extend washroom hours in locations where people continue to take shelter.

## 2. Advocacy for Permanent Housing and Supports

The City of Victoria is an active member of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. The Mayor is Co-chair of the Coalition Leadership Committee, which also includes the CEO of BC Housing and senior administrators with Island Health and the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation. The Coalition uses best practice research to inform its positions on how to effectively address homeless issues in Victoria and engages in annual counts of shelter use and a regular one-night count of homeless individuals in the region. The next one-night count is scheduled for the early part of 2016.

The Coalition's most recent publication, "Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities" outlines the outstanding needs of chronic emergency shelter users and outlines the specific needs of four key intervention groups. It also provides a summary of the estimated cost associated with creating the housing and support services to help these individuals. This report represents the most current and comprehensive analysis of needs in this area. With respect to the three areas of interest to Council, the report and advocacy work of the Coalition suggests the following with respect to addressing the needs of homeless populations in Victoria.

### a. Proposals for New Transitional and Supportive Housing

The partners that make up the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness have collaborated to create the "Priority Housing Project List" process. Through this process, supportive and affordable housing projects are assessed and approved by a sub-committee of the Coalition's Management Committee on the basis of how well the project will address the needs of homeless populations in the region. The process is supported by the non-profit organizations currently building and operating supportive and affordable housing projects and the list provides a planned approach

to building the resources needed to achieve the Coalition objective of eliminating homelessness.

The current list includes 7 projects, 6 of which are proposals to add an additional 130 units of supportive housing and 108 units of affordable rental housing through new builds or additions to existing programs. The list also includes a project to add 90 additional rent supplements to the Streets to Homes program operated by one of the local non-profit providers. This will allow the program to access 90 more units in the private rental market that can be used as supportive housing. Some of the projects on the list have already received grant approval from the Victoria Housing Reserve fund, and others are likely to apply once there is evidence of commitment from other potential funding partners.

City staff recommend that Council consider supporting projects on the Priority Housing Project List for City funding from the Victoria Housing Reserve.

b. Social and Health Services Supports

The “Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities” report, recently completed and released by the Coalition, estimates that there are approximately 367 chronically homeless individuals in Victoria. These are individuals who are either repeat users of the shelter systems, or who are engaged with community based intervention teams and are abjectly homeless due to their circumstances (E.g. mental health issues or chronic addictions) rendering them unable to maintain themselves in a shelter or housing unit. The report estimates the cost of developing and operating housing as well as the resources needed to provide adequate support services to these populations. In addition, there are also efforts underway to explore the establishment of a safe consumption site for those people suffering chronic addiction issues. The City’s interest in contributing to the development of this service is outlined in Council’s newly adopted Strategic Plan.

Staff recommend that the City work with Island Health and health services providers to facilitate the establishment of a safe consumption site and associated health services.

## **2015 Operational Initiatives**

It is expected that people who are homeless will continue to take shelter in City parks until there are other housing options available to suit individual needs. The operational initiatives outlined below are recommended to address the City’s immediate need to improve its service response to the impacts arising from people taking overnight shelter in City parks. Many of these initiatives are also required if the City is to discourage unregulated overnight sheltering in any park in favour of other temporary housing options such as designated sheltering locations, emergency shelter beds, micro-housing or permanent supportive housing.

1. Storage Project for Homeless Persons Belongings

The objectives of the storage facility project are to:

- provide a place where homeless individuals can safely store their personal belongings; and



- reduce the amount of unattended chattels on public and private property

Council approved \$45,000 toward this initiative, conditional on a service provider identifying and operating at a location(s) that does not have negative impacts on surrounding neighbours or land uses. A city staff team is currently working with a community group coordinated by Our Place Society to implement this initiative by September 2015.

City staff will review the proposed location(s) to determine whether the storage facility use is consistent with the zoning for the site, and will be seeking to fund a service provider in a location(s) that meets Council's criteria. It is expected that provision of the service at a single new location will likely create increased pedestrian traffic, which may have an impact on immediate neighbours. Having more than one storage facility location may prove more convenient for people and reduce the number of people at any given location. Staff will explore opportunities for decentralizing the service in other locations within the approved budget.

Further Council decision-making may be required in the event that:

- regulatory approvals by Council are required to enable this use at a specific site
- additional funding is required to enable more storage sites.

## 2. Additional Social Service Outreach

VicPD currently has one officer integrated with the Island Health Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams. This Officer's area of responsibility is spread across all 4 ACT Teams operating within the City of Victoria and in addition, is a resource to the 713 Outreach Team and the newly proposed and operating Severe Addiction and Mental Illness (SAMI) Team. Each ACT Team currently has a client base of 65 persons per team and 713 Outreach is at that same level. Many of the ACT Team Clients are homeless persons and a significant majority of the 713 Outreach Team Clients are homeless. VicPD is currently working very closely with their Island Health Partners to evaluate resources and identify gaps in services.

Currently, Island Health, BC Housing and Cool Aid Society are working on a plan to free up emergency shelter beds and extend outreach services to people sleeping rough in the City. BC Housing is adding 20 rent supplements to the existing program to allow individuals in transitional housing units to move to more independent housing in the community, which should help free up shelter beds as clients move from emergency to transitional housing. During this process it will be important to engage with those individuals sleeping rough in parks and on the streets in order to estimate the number of people without housing and the level of services needed to adequately engage them and assist them in moving through the housing continuum.

Recent discussions with BC Housing, Island Health and Cool Aid Society have identified the opportunity for the City to work in partnership within this initiative by providing, on a six-month pilot basis, the funding to hire an outreach worker to work alongside Victoria Police and Bylaw Officers to engage with the street community, refer them to immediate assistance where needed and assess their short and long-term needs. Staff members of the 713 Outreach and the Downtown ACT Team have indicated that the work of this person would fill a gap in current outreach efforts and expressed a commitment to working with this additional resource in order to assist individuals in accessing needed resources. VicPD advise that the proposed new street outreach services would be of assistance in their interactions with the homeless in the City.



Staff recommend that Council authorize an expenditure of up to \$35,000 to support a six month pilot project to employ a social services outreach worker to engage with people sheltering in parks to assess their needs and provide assistance.

### 3. Monitoring & Clean-up

City staff and VicPD believe it is important to provide a consistent level of information, monitoring and service response to mitigate the impacts of sheltering activities. The City will continue monitoring sheltering activities with a compassionate approach that is respectful of a person's situation. It is recommended that Council consider increasing the service level response to the impacts arising from overnight sheltering in City parks, as outlined below:

#### a. *Special Clean-up and Garbage Collection Team*

A designated seven day per week clean-up and garbage collection team is needed to improve the City's service response in parks. The team would work directly with Bylaw Officers and VicPD and focus their service to specific areas identified during daily parks monitoring. This crew would also be tasked to service any designated temporary housing sites as part of their routine operations. Without this service, parks crews will be diverted from their regular parks maintenance duties, which will impact the level of cleanliness of the City's parks system.

Staff recommend that Council authorize an expenditure of up to \$100,000 to support the operation of the special clean-up service for the remainder of 2015.

#### b. *Improve Washroom Access & Garbage/Sharps' Bins*

Improving access to washrooms in parks that are known to have frequent sheltering activities may reduce public health issues in those parks. This initiative would also be required to support any designated temporary sheltering area within a park. Options include extending washroom hours or installing portable toilets in areas of need. It is hoped that this initiative would improve the sanitary conditions in parks that experience a high frequency of sheltering.

Preliminary cost estimates for the two approaches are:

Extend City washroom hours until 2:00am (per washroom facility)

• Washroom monitoring and security	\$4200 per month
• Additional cleaning & maintenance	<u>\$1800 per month</u>
• Total monthly cost per washroom	= <u>\$7,000 per month</u>

Portable toilets (per unit)

• Portable toilet rental	\$565 per month
• Additional cleaning & maintenance	\$95 per call

Proposed locations for extended washroom hours include Topaz Park, Stadacona Park and Beacon Hill Park. Portable toilets could also be deployed adjacent to frequent sheltering areas or in support of a designated sheltering location. It is expected that



there will be a need for close monitoring of the washroom and portable toilets to ensure that these facilities remain clean and safe. In the event of misuse or vandalism, staff may need to change service arrangements.

Adding waste receptacles in specific park areas and installing more sharps' bins would help alleviate the amount of discarded waste, including hazardous waste such as hypodermic needles. These additional bins would be focused in high frequency sheltering areas or in support of designated sheltering locations. Costs to collect from and maintain these additional receptacles is included in the Special Clean-up and Garbage collection program (noted in (a)). Staff will also explore opportunities with other service providers to collect hazardous waste from sheltering locations in parks.

Staff recommend that Council authorize an expenditure of up to \$150,000 to fund extended washroom hours and/or the provision of portable toilets in specific City parks.

c. *Improved Public Information*

Having people comply with the City's bylaws is dependent upon their awareness of the regulations. A number of actions will be implemented to improve the information available about the rules that apply to taking shelter in City parks.

A staff team is preparing an information pamphlet that can be distributed to inform people about the City's regulations on sheltering activities. This can be handed out in person by VicPD and Bylaw Officers, and made available in other locations such as shelters and hostels. Staff will continue to monitor and respond to postings on social media that communicate misinformation about the City's bylaws.

The use of signs in parks is also being considered in certain areas. Parks staff will review locations where the installation of signs may be appropriate, such as signs to identify sensitive ecosystem areas where sheltering is prohibited. The expected cost to sign existing sensitive park areas is about \$5,000.

Staff recommend that Council authorize the expenditure of up to \$5,000 for the installation of signs in City parks.

d. *Continue with Bylaw Officer & VicPD Parks Monitoring*

To support this action Bylaw Officer positions and schedules have been modified for 2015. However, to sustain a seven day monitoring routine with VicPD additional salary funding of about \$47,000 is required for 2015. At this time, funding will be sourced from 2015 contingencies provided sufficient funding remains in that account through the year.

The focus of monitoring activities will be to encourage people who shelter in parks to abide the City's regulations about the permitted times, and to encourage those people to clean-up their site each morning. There will be on-going communication with people regarding appropriate and inappropriate locations for sheltering and the impacts that sheltering activities have on the community. Partnering with another social service outreach program is also recommended, as noted above.

Staff recommend that Council authorize the expenditure of up to \$47,000 to sustain the Bylaw Officer compliance monitoring service level for 2015.

e. *Incentives for Compliance*

Acknowledging peoples' cooperation in abiding the overnight sheltering regulations and cleaning up after themselves may help improve the condition of parks and improve the relations with VicPD and City staff. Small incentives such as coffee or meal certificates offered by police or bylaw officers to homeless people may build cooperation and reduce the demand on City services over time. Staff will identify funding for this initiative from within the approved 2015 budget.

f. *Apply Sheltering Exemption Only to Homeless People*

To support this action Bylaw Officers and VicPD will actively communicate to people found sheltering in parks that this right is only available to homeless people. Travellers or visitors to the City who are not homeless will be warned and/or ticketed as the circumstances warrant. Correct information about the City's bylaw exemption for homeless people will continue to be communicated through various media.

4. *Improve City Management of Parks*

City staff and VicPD believe that new bylaw regulations are needed to support the temporary housing options and improve the City's management of City parks used for overnight shelter. These regulations would better balance the right to overnight shelter with the right to use and enjoy City parks. Proposed regulations include:

- Limiting continuous park occupation
- Limiting the areas within parks where overnight sheltering is permitted
- Identifying parks where overnight sheltering is not permitted
- Improving the authority to close a park for restoration or to abate a nuisance

People who continuously occupy a park area, by sheltering overnight and using the park throughout the day have a greater impact on the park environment and other park users. If people who shelter overnight are not required to move from their sheltering area they give the impression to others that continuous occupation of the park is an acceptable practice. Garbage accumulates over time and the wear and tear on the park area increases.

To reduce the physical impact on a specific park area it is recommended that a regulation be adopted that requires a person who took shelter overnight to pack up and move at least 100 metres from their sheltering site. It is also recommended that a person not be permitted to continuously occupy the same park area for more than six hours, unless they are engaged in overnight sheltering as permitted under the bylaw. For certainty, this proposed regulation would not apply to anyone who was taking shelter overnight in a park as authorized by the City's bylaw or who is a resident of a designated sheltering location.

Certain types of parks, or areas within parks are more susceptible to damage from sheltering activities. Park areas that have rare native plant species or shallow soils may be more adversely impacted by sheltering activities. Small parks set in residential areas can create immediate community impacts when sheltering activities occur.



Generally speaking, larger City parks have the capacity to accommodate more sheltering activities without causing immediate impacts to the park environment or neighbours. This may be a result of the park's size, the physical diversity of the park environment and/or the distance from adjacent neighbours.

Staff recommend that Council consider restrictions on the use of certain parks or park areas for sheltering activities. This would involve identifying specific parks where sheltering is not permitted based upon a set of criteria such as park size and adjacency to residential buildings. Proximity criteria could also be used to identify areas within larger parks unsuitable for sheltering; for example, the proximity to an adjacent residential use, a park border or a playground.

When a park becomes damaged or sheltering activities are causing a nuisance or public health issue, the City should use its authority to close the park for overnight sheltering to allow for restoration and recovery, or to abate a nuisance to neighbours. This authority would temporarily prohibit sheltering activities from that park or park area; where possible, other permitted uses of the park would continue.

It is recommended that staff bring forward *Parks Regulation Bylaw* amendments to enable these changes that will improve the City's management of its parks. Without these new regulations, City staff will not have the tools available to encourage people to shelter in appropriate locations. Staff are able to prepare these bylaw amendments for Council's consideration in July 2015.

## 5. Progressive Bylaw Compliance Strategy

Some individual's behaviours or repetitive sheltering activity are so problematic that they constitute a nuisance to adjacent properties, cause excessive damage to City parks and may constitute a safety hazard for the public. The VicPD estimate that the percentage of persons who are not compliant with the current regulations at between 2% to 5% of all people sheltering in parks overnight. The VicPD report a disproportionate amount of time and resources is being expended on the enforcement of the existing bylaw with a small number of persons who do not comply.

In these specific circumstances, VicPD and City staff recommend that Council authorize a progressive compliance strategy to deal with the situation. The strategy would include warnings, municipal tickets, bylaw prosecution and seeking of a Court order to stop the problematic activities. The primary purpose of such a strategy is to convey to people taking shelter in City parks that there are some reasonable expectations as to behaviour, and that disregarding such expectations has consequences.

Staff recommend that Council authorize a progressive bylaw compliance strategy, that includes warnings, municipal tickets, bylaw offence prosecutions and Court orders in situations where:

- An individual's behaviour or sheltering activities are so problematic that they are causing nuisance, damage to the park or present a safety hazard to other park users; and
- Efforts to seek voluntary compliance are ineffective.

## **Financial Implications**

This report includes a number of options that have financial implications totalling \$350,000. Costs for some of these options, primarily the temporary housing options, have yet to be determined.

The recommended funding source is the City's contingency budget, which has an allocation of \$1 million for 2015. This budget is intended to fund emergency or unforeseen costs such as wind and snow storms. The implication of allocating funding from this budget is that less would be available should an unforeseen event occur. If an event occurs where the cost exceeds the remaining amount in the contingency budget, Council can authorize a transfer from the Financial Stability Reserve.

It is recommended that an allocation of \$350,000 from the City's contingency budget be set aside to cover the cost of the options that Council wishes to implement.

Should Council wish to explore any of the options where the cost is yet to be determined, it is recommended that staff report back to Council with the cost implications once they have been determined, and that Council allocates funding at that time.

## **Conclusion**

Strategies and actions that yield more housing units and social service supports provide a path to the long-term resolution of people needing to shelter overnight in City parks. The City should be prepared to fund projects on the Priority Housing Project List from the Victoria Housing Reserve, as this will increase the number of permanent housing units available in the community.

The City currently contributes staff and Council time as well as \$100,000 per year in funding to the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. Considering the substantial amount of research and policy analysis completed through the Coalition, and the range and depth of stakeholder participation in the advocacy efforts of the Coalition, it is recommended that the City maintain its current level of investment in this partnership.

It is also necessary to broaden the types of temporary housing options available to homeless people in need of shelter. Since this group of people does not have uniform needs, a multi-faceted, temporary housing strategy is recommended:

- Seek funding for up to 75 additional emergency shelter beds year-round
- Seek out and support a local organization to spearhead a micro-housing initiative for up to 50 people
- Designate a location within a larger City park to permit continuous sheltering at that location or overnight sheltering only.

To complement these housing approaches, it is recommended that the City undertake a number of operational actions to improve the service delivery response to the impacts of overnight sheltering in City parks.



## Recommendation

That Council approve:

1. The *Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Homeless People Sheltering in City Parks* outlined in Appendix A of this report; and
2. Additional operating funding of up to \$350,000 from 2015 contingencies to support specific *Action Plan* initiatives, subject to final approval by the City Manager.

**Appendix A**  
***Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services  
for Homeless People Sheltering in City Parks***



*Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Homeless People Sheltering in City Parks*

**2015-2016 Housing Initiatives**

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
1. Temporary Housing Initiatives	a. Increase the supply of emergency shelter spaces in the region. (260 beds year round)	BC Housing funding approved for 20 new rent supplements. Will free up 20 beds in the emergency housing supply.	Support Coalition strategy to reduce demand for shelter beds by placing homeless people directly into housing.  Write to Provincial government to raise awareness of issue and request additional funding and supports.
		40 adult shelter mats and 35 youth shelter mats are closed during summer months.	Support Cool Aid Society in seeking \$112,000 in funding to open 40 adult emergency mats between May and October.
		Funding needed to these 75 emergency mats between April and November.	Support Out of the Rain program in seeking funding of \$40,000 to open 35 youth emergency mats for September 2015 and April/May 2016.
	b. Creating new forms of micro-housing	Workshop on micro-housing villages has stimulated interest and dialogue about this model.	Identify and support a local group that wishes to implement a micro-housing village by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helping to identify a site</li> <li>- Provide a project grant</li> <li>- Support site with City services</li> </ul>
	c. Regulating Overnight Sheltering in Specific Locations	Homeless persons may take shelter in any City park when there are no shelter beds available.	Establish a specific location within a park for a temporary sheltering location: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seek a partner to manage site</li> <li>- Develop and approve a budget</li> <li>- Support with services</li> </ul>

*Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Homeless People Sheltering in City Parks*

<p>2. Advocacy for Permanent Housing &amp; Supports</p>	<p>a. Proposals for New Transitional &amp; Supportive Housing</p>   <p>b. Social and Health Service Supports</p>	<p>GVCEH (Coalition) partners have developed a Priority Housing Project List (PHPL) to prioritize supportive and affordable housing projects.</p>  <p>Coalition report "Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities" published with analysis of homeless populations' needs.</p>  <p>City Strategic Plan supports establishing a safe consumption site and other health services</p>	<p>Support the Priority Housing Project List, and fund projects that apply for Victoria Housing Reserve capital funding.</p> <p>Facilitate timely processing of applications for funded PHPL projects.</p>  <p>Support Coalition recommendations in <i>Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities</i> report.</p> <p>Continue to support Coalition with City funding (\$100,000) and staff support.</p> <p>Support Island Health and their partners to establish a safe consumption site.</p>
<p>3. Continue to research alternative short-term housing options.</p>	<p>a. Review other temporary, alternative housing sites/models employed in PNW cities (E.g. Seattle, Portland).</p> <p>b. Assess needs of local homeless population and potential suitability for temporary, alternative housing models.</p> <p>c. Evaluate City micro-housing and temporary sheltering initiatives outlined in (2).</p>	<p><i>Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities</i> report published that provide useful insight into homeless populations' needs</p>	<p>Review experiences from these models and apply insights to Victoria models.</p> <p>Evaluate implementation of micro-housing and temporary sheltering options in Victoria.</p>



*Action Plan for Housing, Supports and City Services for Homeless People Sheltering in City Parks*

**2015 Operational Initiatives**

Initiative	Actions	Status	Recommendation
1. Storage Project for homeless' belongings	a. Explore potential service arrangements with downtown social service providers to create a storage facility for homeless persons' belongings.	Budget of \$45,000 approved. Staff initiating project discussion with potential partners.	Establish site(s) by July 2015. Evaluate 2015 project and make recommendations for 2016 budget.
2. Additional Social Service Outreach	a. Work in partnership with BC Housing, social services providers and Island Health to increase outreach resources for homeless people. - add a social support outreach position on a pilot basis to accompany BLS/VicPD to assess needs / direct homeless people to services	BC Housing, Island Health and Cool Aid Society are creating 20 new rent supplements to open up transitional housing and shelter spaces.	Fund a six month outreach position to provide immediate support to homeless individuals, assess need level and refer to required services. - \$35,000 for six month pilot
3. Monitoring & Clean-up	a. Designated special clean-up and garbage disposal team that works closely with Police and Bylaw Officers (additional resources)	Requires funding approval to initiate seasonal hiring - Ready for mid-June	Approve seasonal special clean-up crew - 2 person crew, May to October, 7 days - \$100,000 total additional cost
	b. Review improved access to washroom facilities  Review additional garbage and sharps' bins in key locations	Costs identified. Funding approval required. Locations TBD.	Fund additional washroom services from 2015 contingencies to November 30 <sup>th</sup> . - \$85,000 for washrooms - \$65,000 for portable toilets Evaluate and make recommendations for the 2016 budget.
	c. Install signs in Parks to increase awareness/support compliance.  Develop overnight sheltering information materials increase awareness, support compliance and direct people to shelter housing & services.	\$5,000 funding required  Underway.	Install signs in specific parks - \$5,000 cost. Distribute information materials to shelters and homeless people in parks.
	d. Continue Bylaw Officer & VicPD compliance monitoring (some additional salary funding required)	Bylaw Officers adopted new work schedule for 7 day service. Additional funding for BO salaries required to support 7 day service level (~\$47,000)	Fund Bylaw Officer salary expense to maintain 7 days per week monitoring. - \$47,000 for 2015 only.
	e. Consider incentives for bylaw compliance	Under development	Support small incentives to acknowledge cooperation with VicPD and City.
	f. Apply sheltering exemption only to homeless people	Ready to implement - No further approval needed	Improve messaging to itinerant campers respecting sheltering exemption.
4. Amend Parks Bylaw	a. Limit areas within parks where overnight sheltering is permitted b. Limit continuous park occupation c. Improve authority to close park for restoration d. Identify parks where sheltering is not permitted	Bylaw amendments drafted	Council consider adopting proposed bylaw amendments to improve City management of parks.
5. Compliance Strategy	a. Develop options for a progressive compliance strategy for the most problematic sheltering activities	Tools available that require support of Council.	Support compliance strategy for problematic sheltering activities.

## Appendix B Map of Potential Locations for Alternative Shelter Models

