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Article rank 30 Sep 2015 Times Colonist

A new look at housing puzzle

The homeless in Victoria are a frequent topic of conversation these days, but they are just a fraction of the people in our region who are being crushed by the cost of housing. Less visible are those who struggle to find a home that doesn't strain their limited incomes. As a new analysis shows, almost 49,000 households in the area are spending 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter.

Solving that problem has been a priority for the Capital Regional District, because sipping another latté and ignoring the situation is not an option.

The study by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria looked at what is called the "housing gap," the difference between what people can afford for rent and what is being charged.

The gap is dramatic. Graphs comparing household incomes and housing costs show that Greater Victoria has lots of expensive housing and far less affordable housing than is needed for the number of lower-income families.

According to the report, renter households in the region had a median income of \$38,583 in 2010. At that income, an affordable rent is defined as \$965 a month. But the average market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$130 more than that. For a two-bedroom condo, the difference is \$324.

The problem has been growing, as the average vacancy rate in 2014 was at 1.5 per cent. Between 2005 and 2014, average rents rose by 30.4 per cent, according to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, much higher than the 17.3 per cent inflation rate.

For some renters, the 10,341 units of social housing are the place to find affordable homes. But the demand exceeds the supply, and many social-housing units are in danger of losing the funding they get from the federal or provincial governments.

In the capital region, 1,239 households were on the B.C. Housing wait-list for social housing, more than half of them in Victoria. About 40 per cent of those on the waitlist are seniors.

About 25 per cent of the subsidy agreements for social housing will expire in the next five years. Half will run out over the next 10 years.

The CRD has called on the federal government to renew the agreements, and Ottawa should heed that request. Letting the subsidies lapse would just exacerbate the affordability problem. As the numbers show, however, subsidies are just part of the answer.

Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps says it's more than a social problem; it's an economic problem, which is why she has released a draft economic action plan.

"Part of the answer is creating an economy that has room for everyone, and that's what the economic action plan is about," she said.

The plan aims to generate jobs and increase incomes through economic development, focusing on six "engines," including technology, advanced education and the marine sector.

While everything should be up for discussion, changing the economic reality is a tall order for a municipal government. And even if the plan is successful, it will take time to affect the incomes of those who are most in need of help.

The gap analysis is another tool in the quest for solutions, and it is a measure of how big a problem we face.

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CRD report highlights high housing costs

Posted By: Keith Vass on: September 29, 2015 In: News

Nearly a third of households in Greater Victoria are struggling to afford the cost of housing.



Nearly a third of households in Greater Victoria are struggling to afford the cost of housing. That's the key finding in a new report going in front of the Capital Regional District Wednesday.

It's the first time the region has completed a housing "gap analysis," with detailed data drawn from dozens of sources compiled for the CRD by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria.

It shows a staggering 48,000 households are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on shelter, and almost a quarter of renters pay more than half of what they earn each month on housing.

"They're spending income that they really can't afford on housing and it means of course that they have to give up other things," said North Saanich mayor Alice Finall, who chairs the CRD's planning committee.

The report notes average rents have shot up more 30 per cent in the last decade while supply remains low, with vacancy rates hovering around 1.5 per cent.

But renters aren't alone in facing challenges. Nearly a quarter of owners also paying more than a third of their income on housing costs.

"Sometimes they're maybe not eating as well as they should. Sometimes their transportation is difficult. And if you're a family with young children these things are very difficult," said Finall.

The report doesn't provide solutions. Its data is intended to form the basis for discussion leading to an update to the region's housing strategy from 2007.

But Finall says one thing is already clear; the region can't solve the problem alone.

"I think it certainly shows that we all need to work together to lobby the higher levels of government for much more," she said.

Finall says the first step needs to be convincing the province to commit to renewing more than 900 rental supplements set to expire before 2020.



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Article rank 27 Sep 2015 Times Colonist BILL CLEVERLEY Times Colonist bcleverley@timescolonist.com

Housing gap too wide, study says 1

Thousands of renters continue to struggle in the capital region. Nearly one third of households spend at least 30 per cent of their income on housing costs, a new study says.

A housing affordability analysis was prepared for the CRD by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria.

It says there were 1,239 households on the B.C. Housing waitlist for social housing in the capital region, where the median before-tax household income for a renter household was \$38,583 in 2010. An affordable rent for that income level is \$965 a month.

But for a two-bedroom rental unit, there's an affordability gap of \$130 a month beyond what the median household can afford, the study says. Thousands of individuals, families and seniors continue to struggle with housing affordability in the Greater Victoria area, according to a new housing-gap analysis.

Almost 49,000 households in the capital region, an estimated 31 per cent, are considered to be in housing need — spending 30 per cent or more of the total household income on shelter costs, says the analysis, prepared for the Capital Regional District.

The fact that costs are high and incomes is low are not surprising, says Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps, vice-chairwoman of the CRD's planning, transportation and protective services committee, which will receive the report in the coming week.

"This is so not a surprise," said Helps, who hopes to attack some of the affordability issues through her recently released draft economic action plan.

"We often attack these problems as social problems or housing problems, and they certainly are that," she said.

"But also part of the answer is creating an economy that has room for everyone, and that's what the economic action plan is about."

The report, prepared by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, says 1,239 households were on the B.C. Housing wait-list for social housing in the capital region in 2015.

Fifty-one per cent — 636 applicants — were in Victoria, followed by 271 in Saanich and 149 in Esquimalt. Seniors accounted for 40 per cent of the wait-list.

And many social housing units are at risk of losing senior government-funding. In the CRD, about four per cent (467 units) have rent supplements (cash assistance). Twenty-four per cent, or 2,524, units have subsidy agreements with the federal or provincial governments.

Almost 25 per cent of those agreements are due to expire over the next five years, and half will expire over the next 10 years, the report says.

Helps says the CRD has already endorsed a resolution calling on the federal government to renew the subsidy agreements.

The 2014 vacancy rate for the 23,866 purpose-built rental apartment units in the capital region was 1.5 per cent, but the vacancy rates for more affordable units is at levels not seen since 2007-08.

The median before-tax household income for a renter household in the capital region was \$38,583 in 2010. An affordable rent for that income is \$965 a month.

There is an affordability gap of \$130 a month between what the median household income can afford and the average rent for a two-bedroom market rental unit. The gap increases to \$324 a month for two-bedroom condominium units.

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, average rents have increased by 30.4 per cent between 2005 to 2014 — an average annual increase of 3.2 per cent. The inflation rate over the same period was 17.3 per cent, an average increase of 1.2 per cent a year.

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B.C. NDP leader John Horgan to meet with Lisa Helps on homelessness

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September 25, 2015 10:30 from Art Aronson


British Columbia's NDP leader John Horgan says he is going to meet with Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps on the homelessness housing issue.

"The Mayor and I have committed to meet early not next week but the week after to go after the financials and the proposals that she is putting together with her council," said Horgan. "And how can I as an opposition leader try and urge the provincial government to get into the operating cost side of this."

Speaking on C-Fax1070 with Frank Stanford this morning, Horgan reiterated this stance on making crown land available for Municipalities.

Horgan praised Victoria City Council at the UBCM meetings in Vancouver for its plan to borrow \$50 million from various levels of government to tackle homelessness.

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Article rank 25 Sep 2015 Times Colonist DREW SNIDER

Homeless are a reflection of ourselves 1

You're probably familiar with the phrase: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." It might be a cliché, but as we consider the discussion around the homeless in Victoria, that cliché is an inescapable truth.

I spent more than a decade ministering to "street people" on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. I can't remember what, if any, preconceived notion I had when I first walked into Rainbow Mission near Oppenheimer Park that warm night in 2004, but this much quickly became apparent: Any one of us is one misstep away from the cascade of events that leads to a similar situation.

One fellow I met made some bad business choices, which cost him his wife, his home, his income. Well into his 70s, a good 40 years since that muckrain fell on him, he was still wading through a mire of self-loathing and self-pity.

Some were injured on the job, like Kris, who beat a drug habit only to slip and fall while working on the Bear Mountain development, and painkillers gave way to crack cocaine. There was Herbie, who blew out his knees and couldn't continue in the plumbing trade.

Len was a professional engineer, but somewhere along the line, his mind threw a piston and now he rarely speaks in coherent sentences — not coherent to us, anyway.

Marty was a teacher who fell into a drug habit and has been struggling for the past several years to regain his life. Bill, one of the gentlest souls I've ever met, is too old to work and, without a retirement plan, spends his days pushing a cart around the streets, collecting bottles and cans and anything else saleable.

The level of intelligence is incredible. They ask profound questions, often about the Bible; some write brilliantly, others are amazing artists. They have a sense of humour that has obviously seen them through some tough times. For me, and for many others ministering to them, they became family.

I'm not trying to sugar-coat the scene, but we need to break through the coating of spiritual barbed wire that covers our picture of "street people."

Yes, there are some angry, dangerous dudes there, with criminal records and pasts that some would deem undesirable.

Yes, there are freeloaders — the ones some letter-writers to this paper claim will flood into Victoria if they hear there's free housing to be had — but you'll find those sorts of people in any walk of life.

Yes, any Skid Row and its people can be scary, but perhaps the scariest part of all is not how different they are to us, but how similar.

If something is scary, the antidote is not to run and hide or to vilify and ignore, but to remember the words of the Apostle John: "Perfect love casts out fear." Jesus Christ calls us to love the unlovely, to give grace even when we don't think someone deserves it, and to give a "cup of cold water" to someone in need.

He also calls His followers to be His witnesses "in Samaria" — the Downtown Eastside, Pioneer Square in Seattle, New York's Bowery or any place where street people congregate are today's equivalents of Samaria.

What Jesus does not call us to do, is to "triage" people according to our perception of how they got into that situation.

What's the solution? It's a complicated issue, and a top-down approach, dictating what people need, hasn't worked in other cities. I believe Mayor Lisa Helps is to be commended for reaching out to the affected people to include them in the conversation. (And 20 bucks a head is money well spent, if it ensures that we hear as many voices as possible and the discussion isn't dominated by a relative few self-appointed advocates..It might not be neat or pretty, but that's democracy.)

This much I do know: No solution will succeed if it's not founded in love and the recognition of the inconvenient truth that we are not dealing with a "subset" of society, but with reflections of ourselves.

Drew Snider is a former Victoria broadcaster who spent seven years as an associate pastor at Carrall Street Church/Gospel Mission in Vancouver.

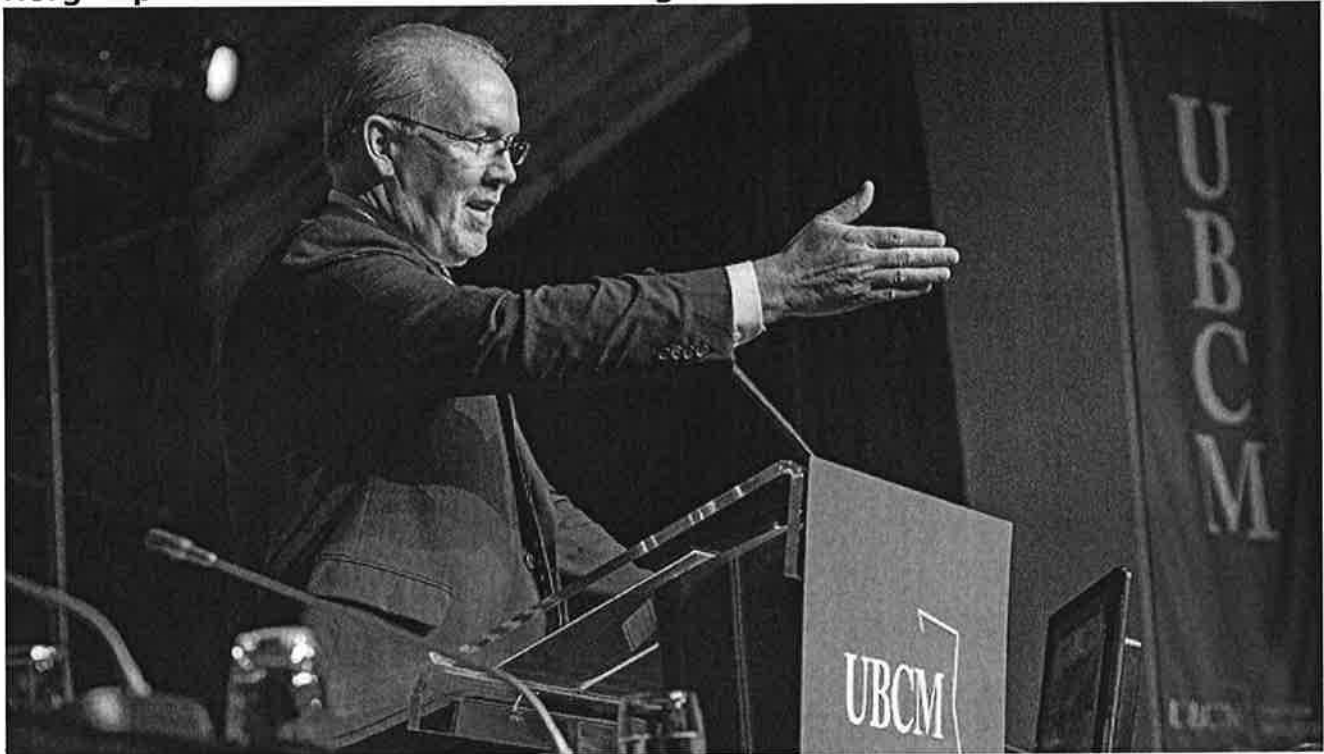
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VICTORIAN NEWS PRINT

Horgan promises Crown land for housing



By Victoria News

Published: **September 24, 2015 11:00 AM**

Updated: **September 24, 2015 11:2311 AM**

A B.C. NDP government would provide provincial Crown land to communities to lower the cost of new housing, NDP leader John Horgan says.

Horgan used his address to the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention Thursday to highlight local government struggles with high urban housing prices, homelessness and treatment for mental illness.

He said the NDP would use Crown land to help communities with housing instead of selling it off to "wealthy developers" as the current government did recently with a tract of land on Burke Mountain in Port Coquitlam.

Horgan praised the work of Maple Ridge and Victoria to address growing homelessness, and the B.C. Liberal government's support for shelters. The province announced \$550,000 Thursday to help run a 40-bed shelter in Maple Ridge through the winter, after the closure of a Salvation Army-run facility was announced by the local council.

Victoria council wants to raise \$50 million through a levy on Capital Regional District property taxes to build social housing for the city's chronic homeless population, many of whom camp in city parks.

Horgan also promised mayors and councillors that as premier he would scrap the B.C. Liberals' new Auditor General for Local Government and redirect the money to communities. Communities Minister Peter Fassbender told the convention Wednesday he has appointed a new auditor, former Metro Vancouver chief financial officer Gordon Ruth.

Responding to Horgan's speech for the B.C. Liberal government, Energy and Mines Minister Bill Bennett acknowledged the new local government auditor got off to a poor start, with the firing of the original auditor after an overly ambitious start and poor relations with municipalities.

Bennett rejected Horgan's claim that the B.C. government ignores recommendations from its own Auditor General, and said all elected officials should learn to accept independent scrutiny of their spending and management.

Bennett said Horgan mocks Premier Christy Clark for pushing to establish a liquefied natural gas export industry, and insists the government is focused on nothing else. The \$9 billion Site C dam project got underway this summer, and Horgan still has no clear position on it due to factions within the NDP, Bennett said.

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Article rank 24 Sep 2015 Times Colonist MARK WILLSON and SARAH WILSON

Stipends for housing workshop about accessibility 4

We applaud the City of Victoria's commitment to accessibility at their sheltering-solutions workshop last week, which included providing \$20 stipends to participants currently experiencing homelessness.

We are alerted to the need to explain why stipends are a best practice for including people who live in extreme poverty by a Times Colonist editorial ("Paying for input a disturbing trend," Sept. 19).

The editorial misunderstands barriers to participation by arguing that interest in the issue should be sufficient to bring people living in extreme poverty to public meetings. Accessibility measures for persons with disabilities (such as wheelchair ramps) are now accepted as common sense, but it's helpful to remember that these measures did not come easily or quickly.

Much like stipends now, basic things such as wheelchair-accessible buses and buildings slowly came to be accepted because of concerted public education and policy advocacy. We're hoping our current conversation can be part of this important process of continuing to expand accessibility measures here in Victoria.

Much like the disability-rights movement, struggling during the 1970s and 1980s for wheelchair accessibility on transit and in public buildings, stipends address the issue that people do not all share the same capacities to use public services. In either case, taking accessibility seriously means recognizing that barriers are created by structural factors.

In cases of disability, exclusion is built into the architecture of buildings and vehicles; in cases of poverty, exclusion is built into the economic framework that shapes how much freedom people have in allocating time in their days.

There's a powerful myth that people living in extreme poverty (without regular work or housing) spend all day sitting around and doing as they please. In our experience, we see that people experiencing poverty have a rigid daily schedule to provide basic subsistence for themselves.

This includes considerations such as being at services at the right times for food servings and to get nightly shelter. It also includes basic subsistence-oriented economic activities such as binning (collecting recyclable bottles).

Because income-generation such as binning are all-day activities with a very modest return, taking several hours off can mean a significant setback on an income that is already rarely enough to provide for a person's most basic daily needs. These personal costs and risks associated with taking time to attend a meeting are increased by the fact that many individuals are on foot, and may also have various physical barriers, adding to the transportation costs (in time or in money) needed to attend a meeting that is not within their immediate vicinity.

For these reasons, stipends are a broadly accepted method for, at the very least, ensuring people experiencing extreme poverty do not have to put themselves at heightened risk of not meeting basic subsistence needs through the day in order to be socially and politically engaged (by attending public meetings, etc.).

The amount of a stipend will vary depending on available financial resources, but \$10 per hour away from essential economic activities is standard practice in Victoria.

No doubt it's possible to provide smaller stipends than this, but we believe a commitment to accessibility means more than simply providing people with the barest possible supports. The City of Victoria showed a great deal of respect for all residents of our city by being faithful to, and thoughtful about, this commitment.

It's heartening to see the mayor and council continuing to move the city forward in terms of our respect for all residents, in the spirit of non-discrimination and inclusion that pushed the disability-rights movement forward so many years ago.

Mark Willson is health education co-ordinator for the Society of Living Illicit Drug Users. Sarah Wilson is a support and advocacy worker for the Victoria Persons With HIV/AIDS Society.

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Article rank | 23 Sep 2015 | Times Colonist

Helps' housing plan raises many questions 2

Re: "Homelessness workshop turned into a fiasco," letter, Sept. 18.

I am so appalled at this situation I don't know where to begin. Paying people to show up at an open forum? Is this a normal practice?

Which group of homeless is the housing for? The people that have been forced onto the streets because they can't afford their own housing? The people who want to live on the streets? In which case they will remain on the streets and so the plan will not end homelessness. The people who are mentally ill, addicted to drugs and/or alcohol? These people are the true tragedy of homelessness and will more than likely not be included in the plan. Where is the plan to properly look after these people with medication, counselling and rehabilitation?

How can you say you are going to end homelessness in Victoria without including all the homeless? What jobs are available for them? Will they even opt to work rather than beg? Who is monitoring the building where they live? Homelessness is just not about being homeless, and if city council doesn't understand that they should not be running this city.

Mayor Lisa Helps and her posse are simply putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound that requires surgery. I think what they are doing is trying to hide the homeless. Out of sight, out of mind. If not, then I ask them to answer these questions. Barb Singer Victoria

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Article rank 23 Sep 2015 Times Colonist

Pay ensured homeless attended workshop 2

Re: "Paying for input disturbing trend," editorial, Sept. 19.

It's pointless to have a workshop on short-term sheltering unless the "interest group" most affected participates. So Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps took the necessary steps to ensure their attendance and paid homeless people \$20 each to attend.

The editorial maintains that this was wrong: "Their zeal for their cause should be enough motivation" to attend. "Surely, they should care enough to participate in discussions about their own future."

Maybe, after sleeping rough for months and not eating for a day or so, they really, really cared, but were all out of zeal.

Imagine a workshop on public access where those in wheelchairs got an elevator ride to the second floor. Able-bodied members of other interest groups had to take the stairs. Should the wheelchair-bound have been forced to rely on their zeal to get to the second-floor workshop? John Farquharson Victoria

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Article rank 23 Sep 2015 | Times Colonist

Who is guarding city's bank account? 1

Re: "\$20 'consulting fee' for homeless stirs debate," Sept. 19.

I am so disappointed in Mayor Lisa Helps.

First, how did she get 365 \$20 bills to pay the street people without someone authorizing it? If it is that easy, who is watching over the city's bank account?

I guess \$7,000 is just chicken feed for the council. We had mayor Dean Fortin and his \$100-million bridge, and now we are getting a \$50-million bill for the homeless and spending \$7 million for more bike lanes.

It can only be paid by raising our property taxes. Jerry Justesen Sr. Victoria

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Article rank 22 Sep 2015 Times Colonist BILL CLEVERLEY Times Colonist bcleverley@timescolonist.com

'Business as usual' for homeless wake-ups: police 1

Social-media posts erroneously claimed 'major policy shift'

Homeless people taking shelter in downtown doorways are still being woken by police and moved along in the mornings, contrary to posts on social media, officials say.



TC FILE

Victoria police will continue their policy of rousing homeless people downtown in the morning.

The Facebook page "I 'heart' Downtown Victoria" posted photos of people sleeping in doorways said to have been taken at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, accompanied by comments saying that as a result of "a major policy shift" at Victoria City Hall, police would no longer be conducting their daily morning routine of rousing the homeless — leaving storekeepers to do the job.

"It's absolutely untrue," said Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps, adding that it's concerning when people believe everything they read on social media, then re-post items without checking the facts.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Homeless people given \$20 to attend meeting on housing in Victoria

Andrea Woo

VANCOUVER — The Globe and Mail

Published Sunday, Sep. 20, 2015 9:54PM EDT

Last updated Sunday, Sep. 20, 2015 9:56PM EDT

A public meeting on temporary housing options that saw hundreds of homeless people receive \$20 each for their thoughts has raised some eyebrows, but Victoria's mayor says the unconventional approach has helped build bridges and generate new ideas.

More than 500 people attended last week's meeting, including 366 homeless people who were each paid \$20. The \$7,320 total was deducted from a \$350,000 council budget set aside to explore the issue of homelessness.

At tables of 10 that filled Victoria's Crystal Garden conference centre, members of the public discussed their ideas and recorded them on worksheets with basic questions: What is your solution, and why? What are the next five steps in implementing it? Who should the city partner with?

The two most-discussed ideas involved converting vacant buildings and providing additional funding to existing shelters to create more beds, Mayor Lisa Helps said.

But there were unexpected solutions.

"One thing that came up that I think needs to be pressed into is that the homeless people who were there started to list all the skills that they had," Ms. Helps said in an interview on Sunday. She recalled one man saying he had worked as a carpenter and could help fix up a church basement.

"That night, I met carpenters, stonemasons," Ms. Helps said. "One of our staff met an engineer who had drawn up some drawings for temporary shelters that were easy to construct."

From that, the idea to create an inventory of skills among the homeless population was born.

The mayor said the meeting's format also helped build trust and understanding between the city and its homeless population. She called the \$20 payments – an idea raised by the inner-city community centre Our Place – a modest expenditure.

"Those folks that came out, they're the least expensive consultants we've ever hired and they had

already done the research in advance,” she said.

Councillor Ben Isitt noted that providing small payments is considered a best practice when working with marginalized populations. “I support the payment of honoraria to facilitate the participation of people who lack financial resources and who would otherwise be excluded from civic engagement processes,” he said in an e-mail.

But Councillor Geoff Young, who reviewed some of the completed worksheets, said he doesn’t think it was a good use of city funds. “I don’t think we needed 360-odd people to represent the views of the homeless community,” he said, adding that many people repeated ideas that staff have heard many times before, such as easing restrictions on camping.

Mr. Young also questioned the merit of housing solutions proposed by the homeless in general. “I agree that you want to hear from the clients of our services – when we’re providing homeless shelters, or whatever it is – because we don’t want to be providing services that are unused,” he said.


“At the same time, clearly if the people we’re targeting had the ability to organize housing, organize shelter, they presumably would do so for themselves. There’s a limit on what you can expect to learn from them.”

However, Mr. Young acknowledged the need to provide temporary housing options if the city wants to curb camping in public parks. The B.C. Supreme Court ruled in 2008 that it is unconstitutional to deny overnight sleeping in parks if homeless shelter beds are not available.

An estimated 130 people sleep in Victoria parks every night. In July, hundreds of people attended a public meeting at the city’s Topaz Park to oppose the idea of designating it a temporary “tent city” for the homeless.

City staff have collected material from last week’s public meeting and are expected to report back to council on Oct. 22.

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October 13, 2015

Victoria Homeless Paid \$20 'Consulting Fee' To Attend City Meeting

The Huffington Post B.C. | By [Andree Lau](#)

Posted: 09/20/2015 3:53 am EDT | Updated: 09/20/2015 4:59 pm EDT

The mayor of Victoria, B.C. is defending a decision to pay \$20 each to nearly 400 homeless people to participate in a meeting on housing options.

Mayor Lisa Helps [compared the payout to consulting fees](#), telling the Times-Colonist: "We pay consultants all the time and usually we pay consultants \$150 to \$200 an hour. These are the least-expensive consultants we've ever hired and when they showed up they had already done their research."

The city held the public event at Crystal Garden on Wednesday to gauge ideas and opinions on temporary housing. Roughly 365 people showed up, which cost about \$7,300. The money was drawn from \$350,000 the city [has already set aside to study the issue](#), said Global News.

Helps told the outlet that staff had to make multiple trips to the bank for cash.

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Article rank 20 Sep 2015 Times Colonist

Housing plan will attract more homeless

Re: "\$50M homeless plan clears hurdle despite doubts," Sept. 18.

Once again, as Victoria taxpayers are still wondering about the costs to come on our new bridge and sewage-treatment plants, our mayor — and now the council — want not only to borrow \$50 million to "virtually end homelessness in Victoria" but in turn invite future homeless persons to Victoria for free housing.

No one can actually believe that if and when this "loan" is approved that the costs will end. As has been previously seen in Victoria, wherever this type of project occurs, neighbourhoods deteriorate, policing increases and the vacuum expands to surrounding business and residential.

Now, with the council stating this housing will end our homelessness woes, how long before the influx begins? And, guess what, the original scope of this project is no longer viable — it will have to be larger, cost more and end nothing. Where is the money going to come from now?

Most agree that homelessness in Victoria is a sad and increasing problem, but once again, simply building housing isn't the answer. We just believe if this avenue is followed, we all look good and the issue disappears — until tomorrow.

Ric Smith Victoria

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Housing alone will not be enough

Re: "Actual costs of housing plan are ridiculous," letter, Sept. 18.

Providing 367 housing units would be a drop in the bucket. How do you decide who gets a home and who remains on the street?

The letter-writer says "a significant portion of the homeless choose to be so." I have never met a person who has chosen to be homeless. Everyone wants and needs a home.

On the other hand, giving a home to someone who is facing challenges such as addiction and mental issues would be a disaster. Many of our citizens who are on the street need mental and health care, detox, rehab, counseling and, eventually, some form of training or education.

Perhaps our mayor should be taking a closer look at the program Woodwynn Farms Therapeutic Community is working hard to establish. Richard LeBlanc's vision of how to create "homefulness" is a wellthought-out program and is based on giving our homeless the opportunity to learn life skills and become independent.

It is time for us to get on board and give our disadvantaged citizens a real fighting chance.

Maren Kallstrom Victoria

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Hundreds of Victoria's homeless get paid \$20 to attend meeting



By Justin McElroy Web Producer Global News

Sept 19/2015



A recent public meeting in Victoria is raising eyebrows. It was focused on trying to solve the homeless crisis -- and those living on the streets were encouraged to attend. But as Julia Foy found, it was the city staff decision to pay them for their input that has some people outrage.

The latest footnote in the ongoing story of Victoria's homeless population – and how the city is grappling with it – came at Crystal Garden on September 16.

Hundreds of homeless people gathered there to attend an open meeting on temporary housing options.

Approximately 365 people attended, and each were paid \$20. All told, it cost the city about \$7,300.

Mayor Lisa Helps said the money came out of a \$350,000 budget city council created explicitly to examine the issue. She says the money was well worth it.

“The city often hires consultants, to the tune of \$100, \$150 an hour. This is no different. These were consultants, with lived experience, and they had already done their field research by the time they got to the meeting,” she said.

Helps says the only thing she would do differently next time is have people sign up in advance, so they would know how many people were coming – and how much they would have to pay out. City staff had to go to banks multiple times in order to have enough cash on hand.

But otherwise, she has no regrets.

“The quality of input, and the kinds of ideas we got, simply would not have happened if we didn’t have so many people who were marginally housed show up. ...all in all, I think it was a very good, and very modest expenditure.

But not everyone agrees.

“The number of people to whom we’ve paid the honorarium was far beyond the number required to get opinions,” said councillor Geoff Young.

“I believe the numbers were a surprise not just to me but the people organizing it.”

READ MORE: Victoria says homeless problem an increasing drain on budget

The city has seen an increase in the homeless population in the years since a Supreme Court ruling allowed people to sleep overnight in public parks without penalty.

A proposed tent city in Topaz Park was put on hold after fierce opposition from the local community.

Don Evans is executive director of Our Place, which runs drop-in centre downtown. He says it was his suggestion to offer a \$20 honorarium.

“If there wouldn’t have been anything to attract people to go, then you may have got some of the regular people that are advocates – people that advocate hard for the homeless – but you wouldn’t have gotten the people that are actually living the experience every day and having to live with all the challenges,” he says.

“They were engaged, there was optimism, there was hope in the room, and these are people that don’t often feel very hopeful. To give them that voice was important. I’m glad that we were able to do that.”

Victoria pays hundreds of homeless people \$20 each to attend meeting on housing

BY BILL CLEVERLEY, TIMES COLONIST SEPTEMBER 19, 2015

Rogers Chocolates



People line up outside Crystal Garden, waiting for start of a meeting about homelessness. The City of Victoria paid homeless people to attend. Sept. 16, 2015

Photograph by: BRUCE STOTESBURY, Times Colonist

There was no need to get Victoria council approval for a plan to pay homeless people \$20 apiece to attend a public meeting on temporary housing options, Mayor Lisa Helps said Friday.

Coun. Chris Coleman said he had no idea the city planned to pay members of the homeless community a stipend to attend the meeting and Coun. Geoff Young said while he saw emails about the idea between the mayor and some councillors, he certainly doesn't support it.

About 365 people were each paid \$20 to attend the meeting Wednesday at Crystal Garden for a total of about \$7,300. The suggestion to pay came from Don Evans, executive director of the Our Place downtown drop-in centre, and was agreed to by city staff.

"I do not feel it was a good use of funds," Young said. "My thinking is we did not need that number of homeless people to represent that viewpoint and, in fact, the opinions that we needed were from people who had experience in attempting to provide housing in various ways. And there were some of those people there," Young said.

He said most of the proposals he saw were ones that the city is already aware of and, in many cases, has rejected, including permitting campers longer hours in parks and supporting a permanent tent city.

Helps said city staff made the decision to pay, and the money came out of \$350,000 council set aside for addressing homelessness. "If council was in the business of approving \$7,000 decisions, we'd never get anything done."

She equated the \$20 payments to consulting fees. "We pay consultants all the time and usually we pay consultants \$150 to \$200 an hour. These are the least- expensive consultants we've ever hired and when they showed up they had already done their research."

But Jordan Bateman, B.C. director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said paying one group of people a fee to attend a public meeting to advance their own self-interest doesn't sit well with him.

"Public consultation is something that is very important and you want to get a mix of people in the room and a mix of people talking about these issues. But paying folks for their public consultation, but only paying one subset of folks, really seems unfair and it really flies in the face of treating everyone equally," Bateman said. "It's not as if they are invisible."

It's the fact that they are so visible that Victoria is talking about spending \$50 million to build 367 housing units for homeless people, he said.

Evans said the idea was to hear from as many people as possible. "Whether it's the person that's living under the bridge or the person in the park or the doorway. If we wouldn't have done something, we would have just got the usual people that would come and you wouldn't hear from all the varieties of people that came that night."

It was important for the housed and the homeless to work together, Helps said. "They sat around the table together, looked each other in the eye and said: How are we going to solve this problem together?"

Coleman said he understands the reasoning. "I think it's open to abuse and that's the concern that goes with it. The rationale that goes with it [is] our staff were all there on Wednesday night and they were paid to be there. Elected officials are there and, theoretically, we're paid to be everywhere. There were people who are facing the trauma of homelessness who weren't being paid, so there's perceived inequity there. By the same token, there were a number of people out of the community who were there on their own time and weren't being paid."

The meeting was organized after Helps and Coun. Ben Isitt faced down an angry crowd in Topaz Park this summer. They were opposed to a council initiative that might have located a temporary tent city there.

Coun. Pam Madoff said the stipend was reasonable and prior council approval wasn't necessary. "You're asking folks who are very marginalized to come and participate and offer their insights," she said.

"It's a modest amount. It doesn't require council's approval when you add it all up."

bcleverley@timescolonist.com

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Article rank 19 Sep 2015 Times Colonist BILL CLEVERLEY bcleverley@timescolonist.com Times Colonist

\$20 'consulting fee' for homeless stirs debate 6

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Article rank 19 Sep 2015 Times Colonist LINDSAY KINES lkines@timescolonist.com Times Colonist

Project would house 80 homeless 2

Cool Aid mulling makeover at a cost of up to \$8 million

The Victoria Cool Aid Society has an accepted offer on a building that could provide apartments for at least 80 people who are homeless.

Kathy Stinson, executive director, declined to identify the building or its location, but said she hopes to release details in the coming weeks.

"That is going to be a repurposing of an existing building, so that can happen quite quickly," she said. "We're doing our due diligence on that right now, and we hope to be able to make a decision by the end of October."

Stinson estimated the cost of redeveloping the building at \$6.5 million to \$8 million, depending on the number of apartments created. Additional money will be required to provide services for the tenants.

"We're really designing that to have a number of health supports in place," she said. "Our expectation would be that our partner, Island Health, would come to the table on that for support dollars."

The society plans to name the building after Dr. Joe Haegert, who retired in 2014 after 44 years providing health care to the needy.

If the deal goes through, the project will represent a significant advance toward the society's goal of nearly doubling its housing stock by adding 360 apartments, Stinson said.

Cool Aid has previously announced plans to build apartments for 45 homeless seniors in its Cottage Grove project in Saanich.

"That project went out to tender this week, and we expect to break ground on that before the year is out," Stinson said.

In addition, the society's 21-unit Cedar Grove property on Gorge Road is "ripe" for redevelopment, she said. "We believe we could house 60 people there."

If all three projects go ahead, they could create homes for 164 people by the end of 2018, Stinson said.

"We will need money for that, and that's why we have a capital campaign underway."

The organization has already raised \$1.5 million of its \$5-million goal, she said. "Then the idea is that will leverage additional funds from local, regional and provincial governments."

Stinson said the society's plans dovetail with the City of Victoria's push to have the Capital Regional District borrow \$50 million to build 367 supportive housing units in an effort to end chronic homelessness.

Victoria council on Thursday voted 8-1 to move ahead with the plan, which would require a 15-year, region-wide annual levy of about \$11.18 per household.

"I think it's a bold move on the City of Victoria's part," Stinson said. "Certainly, we believe that the federal government should be stepping up its game considerably. But, in the interim, we have a crisis and the crisis needs to be managed. So kudos to the city for taking a bold move."

Former Victoria councillor Helen Hughes, part of Cool Aid's Help End Homelessness campaign, urged others to get involved.

"We need the federal government, obviously, to come and join us," she said. "But, I think the other thing I'd like to add is that we are a community and that means all 13 municipalities should be involved. There are homeless people all over — it isn't just in Victoria."

Hughes said the key to Cool Aid's success is that it provides support to the people it houses, so that its facilities blend into neighbourhoods.

The society opened nine buildings from 2002 to 2012 and now has 374 apartments, while providing health care to more than 4,000 patients and emergency shelter to 1,700 people a year.

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Article rank 19 Sep 2015 Times Colonist

Do the math on housing for the homeless 2

Re: "Helps wants CRD to borrow \$50M to house homeless," Sept. 15.

For a moment I thought it must be April 1. Has Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps done the math? She proposes to build 367 supportive housing units at a cost of \$50 million. That works out to \$136,240 per unit. It is then proposed that the provincial government kick in \$7.73 million to operate these units. This works out to \$21,064 per unit. Then the cost to service the debt will cost about \$2.08 million per year, or \$5,668 per unit.

Based on the figures provided, the annual operating cost per unit is \$26,732 or \$2,228 per month. With this money, one could rent a darn fine apartment. It would be cheaper to give each of the homeless \$2,000 a month and have them find their own accommodation. It would seem that for \$500 to \$700 per month, studio and other small apartments could be rented for the chronically homeless at an annual cost of about \$2.5 million per year, which is a figure close to the proposed cost to service the debt alone.

Politicians always seem to come up with grandiose ideas rather than looking at simple, practical solutions to a problem.

John Olson Galiano Island

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Article rank 19 Sep 2015 Times Colonist

Paying for input disturbing trend 3

If we want your opinion, we'll ask you for it — and pay you \$20 besides. A City of Victoria workshop on short-term sheltering options attracted a capacity crowd to the conference centre, and no wonder — homeless people were given \$20 each to attend the event. It sets a troubling precedent.

Mayor Lisa Helps called the event historic, saying it was important in a discussion on homelessness to hear from those most affected.

That's true. Who better to talk about the problems of homelessness than the homeless themselves? But members of interest groups are usually not paid to come to public meetings to defend their interests. Their zeal for their cause should be enough motivation.

Helps defended the payments as being like consulting fees, saying the homeless people at the meeting were paid to share their expertise. It's an interesting metaphor, but it falls apart on closer examination. The city would generally not hire a consultant with a personal stake in the issue. That's called a conflict of interest.

The mayor said it's customary for Our Place and other entities that deal with the homeless to give an honorarium to people attending. In fact, the payment was suggested by Don Evans, executive director of the Our Place Society, who said he knew what it would take to get useful input. While that might be something a nonprofit organization does occasionally, it is not something a municipality should do.

The workshop sought ideas for temporary solutions. As a more permanent solution, Helps has proposed the Capital Regional District borrow \$50 million to build 367 housing units for the city's homeless. Servicing the debt would cost each CRD household about \$11 a year, she says, and maintaining the housing and appropriate support programs would cost another \$7.7 million a year, which would be sought from the province.

Victoria city council voted 8-1 Thursday to take that proposal to the CRD board of directors.

It's a bold plan, and bold plans are needed. Homelessness is costly to society and to those who don't have shelter. Economics and compassion dictate concrete solutions.

But math is also involved. Savvy taxpayers will quickly calculate that the proposal involves spending about \$136,000 per homeless person in initial capital costs, then about \$20,000 per person a year for support. That's a simplistic analysis of a complex problem, but those are hard numbers, and hard questions will be asked. Those questions are not made any easier by the knowledge that homeless people were each paid \$20 to come to a workshop to talk about their problems and issues.

What do these payments suggest? Are they made on the assumption that homeless people are not like other people, that they need to be bribed to speak on their own behalf? Many suffer from mental illness and addictions, but that does not mean they are not autonomous, reasoning people.

The issue is about providing the homeless with shelter and support. Surely, they should care enough to participate in discussions about their own futures. It would have been appropriate to provide coffee and sandwiches at the meeting, but not cash payments.

Public input is vital, but that input should be freely given, not purchased.

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Article rank 19 Sep 2015 Times Colonist

Mayor seems intent on spending our money

The taxpayers of Victoria are getting more than a little concerned about our property tax bill.

Mayor Lisa Helps wants to shell out \$100,000 or more per year for "parking ambassadors" to replace the commissionaires who currently do an admirable job of looking after parking. The "ambassadors" will also make maps of the thousands of cracks, holes and any other flaws that make our sidewalks a challenge to walk on. Perhaps they may also give you a kiss and a hug while handing you your ticket. Doing that won't give them much time to write tickets, though.

This money would be much better spent on the homeless situation.

More than \$14,000 was wasted painting the coloured stripes on the crosswalks near city hall. Thousands more are being considered for portable shacks for the homeless.

And, finally, there's the price of three lattes per household per year to cover the cost of borrowing multimillions by the Capital Regional District to build permanent housing for the homeless. Not to say that such housing is not needed.

D.D. Thompson Victoria

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TIMES COLONIST

Homeless will flock here for free housing

Times Colonist

September 18, 2015 12:31 AM

Re: "Reaction mixed to plan for tax levy to house homeless," Sept. 17.

The mayor's idea of borrowing to provide 367 units of housing for the homeless is a path to disaster.

If this idea should happen, has anyone given thought to the Canada-wide invitation this provides to the homeless from Manitoba west to Victoria? Come to Victoria, where housing is free!

While providing shelter for the current local homeless might seem sensible on the surface to some, how is the city going to control the hundreds, maybe thousands, who will migrate here to get in on this flawed idea? You can't stop migration within our borders.

The projected cost of this can only be the tip of the iceberg.

There might be an answer to this homeless problem, but I don't think this one is it. Go back to the drawing board, please.

Jim Laing

Victoria

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\$50M homeless plan clears hurdle despite doubts

Sept 18/2015

Victoria councillors vote 8-1 to seek regional funding

KATHERINE DEDYNA
Times Colonist

Victoria councillors voted 8-1 to push ahead with a request for \$50 million to "substantially reduce" homelessness in the capital region.

An amended proposal, which adds the Greater Victoria Coalition Against Homelessness as a partner, will be discussed by council again in early October.

"I'm thrilled to see the leadership that council took today by moving this proposal forward," said Mayor Lisa Helps.

"It got much better through amendments and our discussion."

Amendments to bring on the coalition and stakeholders such as housing and social-services providers and homeless people will make the motion much stronger, said Coun. Jeremy Loveday.

He said he's getting "overwhelmingly positive" feedback for the idea of a 15-year, region-wide annual levy of \$11.18 per household that would pay for construction of 367 units of housing for homeless people. Helps earlier referred to that number as effectively ending homelessness in Greater Victoria by 2018.

The Victoria council motion is expected to go to the Capital Regional Hospital District Board on Oct. 14 in light of the large health-care costs incurred by homeless people.

Coun. Ben Isitt said the amendments keep "the emphasis on the obligation of senior levels of governments to act" along with ongoing input from social-service agencies. "We will now be working hard to reach out to colleagues and residents in all 13 municipalities and three electoral areas, with a view toward consolidating regional support for action at the hospital board

Voting against the motion was Coun. Geoff Young, who said he worried the proposal is "over-selling" and "over-simplifying" what is at stake. "Even if the units were created instantly, it would not end homelessness in Victoria, never mind the region," he said.

He suggested that rental subsidies would keep people housed without needing to build new units, calling it "a tragedy" that some people lose their homes due to a few hundred dollars a month in rent they cannot pay. In any event, a huge lump sum for housing units isn't always the problem, he said. It can be resistance to rezoning, as for Woodwynn Farms in Central Saanich or lack of an "enormous" amount of operating funds for supported housing.

Young said he is not convinced the pitch will make it past the CRD directors.

Coun. Charlayne Thornton-Joe raised concerns with the way the idea was put forward. Even though she is chairwoman of the CRD's Housing Trust Fund, she was unaware that the motion had been in works for weeks and got a little heated in the debate. "I had no idea until people started to phone me and stop me," she said.

"Did we do the proper engagement before the motion came forward?" she asked, given she has even been asked if the Housing Trust Fund is going to close as a result of the \$50-million request.

"I think all of us want the money to provide housing. No one is so stuck on that it has to be done a certain way."

But she said it was necessary for the Coalition to End Homelessness to be a partner, which was not in the original motion. "On the positive, any time we get money to go to housing is something to celebrate." kdedyna@timescolonist.com

The Drive with Ter



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Cool Aid Society welcomes actions taken by the city on homelessness

Share Print

September 18, 2015 10:35 from Art Aronson

The Cool Aid Society in Victoria is calling it a "bold move" on the part of the city.

The Society is enthusiastically welcoming the motion to take a plan to CRD to finance 367 homes for people who are homeless.

"We believe that the federal government should be investing in housing," says Executive Director Kathy Stinson. "They invest less than one percent of their budget right now in housing. One point six percent of the Federal budget could end homelessness across the country."

Stinson adds that they currently have three projects on-the-go in the region that could potentially house at least 164 for people who don't have homes.

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Homelessness workshop turned into fiasco

Re: "Reaction mixed to plan for tax levy to house homeless," Sept. 17.

I am one of the Topaz Park neighbours who made a stand against tent cities in our parks. I went to the "workshop" on homelessness Wednesday night with a fear that the minds of Mayor Lisa Helps and Councillor Ben Isitt are already made up.

The huge number of folks attending who obviously had personal issues with homelessness surprised me and I was ready to listen with an open mind. I dismissed as paranoid a suggestion that the meeting had been stacked.

However, when Helps's opening remarks were interrupted by people shouting for their money, she acknowledged that low or no-income attendees were being paid an "honorarium" to attend. This was followed by open mikes taken over by very loud and angry men using violent and abusive language. This is a focus group? This is democracy?

Despite the number of police, ambulance, security and city staff present, I didn't feel safe, and left early.

All this fomenting and dishonesty will not convince me that our chronic yet urgent issues with homelessness are either a crisis or an emergency, no matter how many times this big lie is repeated.

I will continue to observe, attend and contribute, but I have absolutely no confidence in the leadership on city council. I can only hope that the damage being done to our city can be fixed by the next mayor.

My poor city.

*Barbara Wiggins
Victoria*

Offer tax deduction to cover rent

Re: "Reaction mixed to plan for tax levy to house homeless," Sept. 17.

Instead of building affordable housing, I propose the federal government offer a tax deduction for renters to cover a substantial amount of their rent. This would make it affordable to stay in one's current rental unit or move to more appropriate shelter, thus freeing up lower-cost housing for those on lower incomes.

Shelter should be a right for all, especially for those who work. Offering a tax

One on One with Ian Jessop



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Victoria council votes to take homelessness to the Regional District

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September 17, 2015 01:35 from Frank Stanford

A committee of Victoria Council has decided to approach the Capital Regional Hospital District about taking on the role of identifying funding to build housing for the region's homeless.

Councillor Ben Isitt says it's time to crystallize the work of the "Coalition to End Homelessness"...and he says it's reasonable to look at homelessness as a health care issue...

"The Coalition has never been defined as a developer or as a funder and that's what this proposal is all about. It's to identify the Hospital District as the lead agency so the developer and the co-ordinator of the funding strategy (are) working in partnership with the various operators to move forward"

The city's motion makes reference to a figure of 50 million dollars, but also talks about urging senior governments to provide a share of that.

The proposal is expected to land on a regional board agenda just days before the federal election.

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Hear Victoria native Jesse Roper rocking-out on CFOX 1070 Tuesday morning with Al Ferraby.

Roper is giving back to the community with the release of "Food For a Day Acoustic Sessions," a 9-track acoustic album in support of local charity Our Place Society.



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VICTORIANEWS PRINT THIS

Victoria mayor calls on feds for more social housing dollars

By Victoria News

Published: **September 17, 2015 01:00 PM**

Updated: **September 17, 2015 01:321 PM**

The memories from Bernice Kamano's painful past are still fresh in her memory.

Kamano was just nine months old when she was taken from her mother and father and placed in the foster care system in Vancouver.

"I was a sick child. My mother took me to the hospital. Because my mother was aboriginal, I was apprehended," said Kamano, who was a keynote speaker at the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness' annual general meeting at the First Metropolitan United Church Tuesday.

For years, she jumped from home to home, never having a stable roof over her head.

As a child, she has very vivid memories of her experience living in an orphanage. Kamano's picture was published in a local newspaper asking for people to adopt her — though she never was. On another occasion, children in the orphanage lined up and adults would choose which child to take out on a day trip.

"It was a painful life. I pretty much had no family and lived alone, isolated and abandoned," said Kamano, adding she battled addiction when she was older. "That pain never leaves you. People think you should get over it, but you don't. It's part of who you are. But what the pain doesn't do anymore is take you out."

Now, the 67-year-old Victoria resident is standing tall and living in a home she can call her own.

"It's really nice to be secure. Living in foster care all the time, the concept of living in a home wasn't really a part of my reality," Kamano said. "But now that I am in a home. It's my place and I can do what I want."

Kamano, a member of the Kwakwaka'waka Nation, is currently using her own experience to help the aboriginal homeless community and help end homelessness in Victoria.

At the AGM, Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps also kicked off a new homelessness awareness campaign, calling on the federal government to increase its investment in social housing by 0.6 per cent.

"We can see this stepping back — ongoing homelessness, people who are housing in increasing housing need, unstable housing, increased health and social service costs, death due to lack of shelter," she said. "All we need is to increase the investment in social housing to 1.6 per of the federal budget and we can solve the problem."

There needs to be 367 affordable housing units to end homelessness in the region, according to the coalition.

Find this article at:

<http://www.vicnews.com/news/328094771.html>

Lottery could raise money for housing

Re: "Helps wants CRD to borrow \$50M to house homeless," Sept. 15.

How about a lottery as a fundraiser to raise funds to build homes for the homeless? It should have a very attractive prize that would attract ticket-buyers from across the country. Perhaps the winning number will only be drawn when the \$50 million has been reached.

If the town of Inverness in Nova Scotia can do it, why not Victoria?

Jennifer Shore
Victoria

deduction would free up some money for renters to save for a house or spend, which would help the economy.

I wrote to Mayor Lisa Helps with this proposal and she said: "Good idea," but added it's a federal issue. I'd like to see some discussion on this idea by all parties during the election.

Bennett Guinn
Victoria

Lottery could raise money for housing

Re: "Helps wants CRD to borrow \$50M to house homeless," Sept. 15.

How about a lottery as a fundraiser to raise funds to build homes for the homeless? It should have a very attractive prize that would attract ticket-buyers from across the country. Perhaps the winning number will only be drawn when the \$50 million has been reached.

If the town of Inverness in Nova Scotia can do it, why not Victoria?

Jennifer Shore
Victoria

Actual costs of housing plan are ridiculous

Re: "Helps wants CRD to borrow \$50M to house homeless," Sept. 15, and "Give housing plan a chance," editorial, Sept. 16.

I was appalled to read about Mayor Lisa Helps's plan to end homelessness.

Despite having good intentions, the plan is seriously flawed and is a financial nightmare. It ignores the fact that a significant portion of the homeless choose to be so. It doesn't address the problem of what to do with the near-majority of homeless who are addicted — some estimates put this number as high as 40 per cent. Nor does it consider how to feed the people when housed.

Worse yet, it doesn't address the moral dilemma of providing people who don't work for a living with better accommodation than many of those working full time or more at minimum wage can afford.

Worst is the program's ridiculous cost and the disgusting misinformation: Eleven dollars per household is just the cost to service the debt. It doesn't include a penny to pay it down, which would cost every man, woman and child in the Capital Regional District nearly \$150 to pay in full.

The actual cost of the project is \$275 per household, or 24 times more than Helps would have you believe. Even if we were to ignore the issues about cost, why is the mayor attempting to house the homeless in single-resident units at a cost of \$136,200 each? Military personnel get by for months at a time living in small rooms with bunk beds stacked three high. If it is adequate for those who serve our country, surely it is enough for those getting a free ride in subsidized housing.

Lucas Pallard
North Saanich

Housing plan a Band-Aid solution

Re: "Give housing plan a chance," editorial, Sept. 16.

Helping others is something Canadians do well and with good intentions. However, the methods should be studied carefully. Fifty million dollars is no small amount. The figure of \$11 per Capital Regional District household to service the debt sounds low to us. The answer would be: "Of

But, what about repayment of the \$50 million itself? At some point, the debt has to be repaid. I am no accountant, but as a humble taxpayer, I would like to know the actual bottom line, not the \$11 service charge.

Unfortunately, building for the homeless is a Band-Aid solution and given our climate and other factors, Victoria is a prime destination. As the line in *Field of Dreams* said, "If you build it, they will come."

I know it's nigh on impossible to tackle the many roots of the problem, but a free one would be to value your children and instil self-esteem and respect for self and others.

Before we go forward, some numbers please. We already feel sucker-punched on the bridge situation.

Nana Spence
Victoria

All politicians should read Hancock column

Re: "Taxation should maximize human well-being," Sept. 16.

This column by Dr. Trevor Hancock should be mandatory reading for every one of our politicians. If, as I suspect, they can't read, then their caregivers should be made to read it to them.

A wonderful read, Dr. Hancock. Thank you.

Lyall Eriksen
Colwood

Comment-pages list political 'despicable's

The *Times Colonist* Comment page might be better titled "Despicable's." The editorial on the Health Ministry firings shows no one in government takes responsibility, while Dermot Travis's article on Partnerships B.C. shows that they sure will take the money.

On the back of the Comment page is the list of Election Hall of Shamers.

The desire to run for public office was once a higher calling. Now it is simply a rush to the public trough by many undeserving of our trust.

Despicable indeed!

Phil Leith
Victoria

What is happening to our democracy?

Re: "Surprise surplus provides Harper edge in campaign," Sept. 15.

What sort of Third World dictatorship do we live in when candidates are not permitted to present themselves and their policies to the public at all-candidates meetings, when the only voice permitted is that of "the leader"?

When did we stop questioning the misuse of power, where dissenting opinions are forbidden, where destruction of libraries eliminates valuable research materials?

We are being told today that the current government ran a surplus last year and therefore the Conservatives are the only ones who can manage the economy. What is the source of that surplus? Is it a true surplus or did it come from the return of money left over from the shutdown and diminishing of programs, veterans' offices, First Nations education and other programs? Don't equate managing the economy with slashing government programs.

Featured



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Body found in creek on Salt Spring Island

Victoria slammed for paying homeless attendees of public meeting

CTV Vancouver Island
Published Thursday, September 17, 2015 6:24PM PDT
Last Updated Thursday, September 17, 2015 6:54PM PDT

The old saying goes “a penny for your thoughts,” but when it comes to engaging the homeless population in Victoria – it’s more like \$20 for an opinion.

A public meeting Wednesday on homelessness in Victoria is being heralded as a success, but some critics are taking issue with the city’s decision to pay each homeless person who attended.

Nearly 500 people, many of them homeless, crammed the city’s conference centre to discuss possible solutions to the longstanding issue for a total cost of more than \$7,000, the city said.

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But one tax watchdog accused the city of wasting money on the pricey payout.

“This is a really bizarre story, and something I think taxpayers should be very uncomfortable with,” said Jordan Bateman, spokesman for the Canadian Federation of Taxpayers.

“This whole situation’s arisen because there are people camping in parks,” he added. “We know where they are. We could go and get this expert advice from them for free. We don’t need to incent them to come to a meeting to do that.”

But Helps stood by the decision to pay attendees, saying the city regularly pays for consultants – sometimes much more.

“We pay consultants all the time, and usually the consultants charge us way more than \$20 for their time,” she said. “So just think of it as these folks came out, they gave us their expert experience. They’re consultants, and it’s the cheapest consulting the city has ever engaged.”

The attendance incentive was the idea of Don Evans, the executive director of Our Place Society, who said he knew what it would take to get meaningful input.

“A lot of the people who were there came for the incentive, but they stayed and gave their thoughts. They offered ideas to help and the problem,” he said.

Helps said the meeting itself was productive, sparking dozens of new ideas to help house an estimated 366 people living in the city without a home.

The meeting came about as the result of a controversial proposal to construct a tent city in Topaz Park earlier this year.

Hundreds of residents were fierce in their opposition to the plan and complained that they weren’t consulted enough, prompting Helps and council to go back to the drawing board.

City council will review the ideas from Thursday at a meeting in October.

With a report from CTV Vancouver Island's Scott Cunningham

MOST WATCHED



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CTV News at Six Vancouver Island for Monday, October 12, 2015



Disgusting case of animal abuse results in ban

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8 Comments

[Sort](#) [Subscribe](#)**Daniel Wallace**

26 days ago

I feel badly for Jordan Bateman of the Canadian Federation of Taxpayers. If the Federation was getting THEIR money's worth, then the government would be using the taxes to house their fellow citizens. So either Jordan is doing a bad job, or the Federation is doing a bad job, or the homelessness issue is not on their agenda. I'd say that's a waste of way more than \$20.

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2

**Percival Kalinsky**

26 days ago

Kudos to Don Evans for having such a sensible plan. What a great way to bring those affected the most into the debate. That 20 is a very nice incentive to take part in the event and to tell their side of it. Jordan Batemen should bare in mind that even the homeless pay taxes for goods and services and the people that pay HIS salary could find themselves in the same situation.

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2

**Derek Book**

26 days ago

It's common practice to make accommodations for those experiencing challenges when it comes to political involvement. The average Victoria resident can simply drive down and walk in. For a homeless person to attend, it often takes a good deal of walking, and for those with mobility issues, \$20 is the least we can do. Frankly, I'd rather not hear this outdated complaint again, it's distracting.

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2

**mrmrky**

24 days ago

Should have payed them \$100 each.

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1

**Russ**

25 days ago

The city has no problem paying (by calculating \$7,000 cost at \$20 per participant) 350 homeless consultants for their 'expert' input, but don't get in touch with anywhere near that number of home owners/residents who live in the area of the proposed tent city. Sounds more like a conclusion on the results of the meeting was reached prior to the actual meeting and then 'supported' by paid 'experts'

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1

**Tyler**

25 days ago

Legally the homeless can not be confined to Topaz Park. If I were homeless I'd pitch my tent on the lawn of Victoria's Parliament building and challenge Christy Clark to move me. These people are pretending to be advocating for the homeless but in reality they are pushing them away from where the services are.

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1

**Marilyn Crosbie**

26 days ago

How cheap can people be? So, it cost the city \$7,000. So, each homeless person got paid \$20. Are we so cheap that we can't reward these people for their input? Their input is probably the most valuable of all and if some of their ideas are considered unsuitable, they can be weeded out, just as the unsuitable suggestions from the general public and the "experts" are weeded out.

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1

**Anomnomymous**

25 days ago

As long as there wasn't any "Say this specific opinion only and get \$20" shenanigans I don't really see the problem though I think it would have been better to offer them \$20 worth of food instead of money in case some of them have drug/alcohol problems.

OAKBAYNEWS PRINT THIS

Housing plan seeks to re-engage province, feds

By Oak Bay News

Published: **September 17, 2015 03:00 PM**

Updated: **September 17, 2015 03:123 PM**

A City of Victoria proposal of a regional funding plan to end homelessness calls for a levy of \$11 per household per year through the Capital Regional Hospital District.

"Housing is not something that municipalities should take on," said Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps, also the co-chair of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. "But in the absence of leadership from the federal government, residents of the region can no longer sit by as people – particularly those with mental health and addictions issues – suffer on our streets."

The plan to re-engage other levels of government who used to concern themselves with housing is a good one, says Oak Bay Mayor Nils Jensen.

"What (the City of Victoria initiative is) trying to do is reconstitute a partnership between local governments, the CRD, the province and the federal government," Jensen said. "Housing the homeless is a priority for the CRD and this initiative I think has a lot of potential. It still requires the buy-in from the federal and provincial government."

The proposal is that the Capital Regional Hospital District serve as the lead agency, in partnership with social service providers and local, provincial and federal authorities, to build 367 units of new housing with supports, which the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness estimates to be the number of chronic shelter users requiring housing. They would request the federal government contribute toward the capital costs of the 367 units to reduce or eliminate the need for local contribution, consistent with the Government of Canada's traditional role supporting the housing needs of Canadians.

The proposal requests that the provincial government contribute \$7.73-million annually in operating costs toward the support services required to assist the "hardest to house" in maintaining stable housing, a model that currently exists in several buildings funded by the province around the Capital Region operated by the Victoria Cool Aid Society and the Pacifica Housing Society.

Oak Bay, and many communities in the region, already contribute funding to a Regional Housing Trust in similar small-scale partnerships.

"The majority of the CRD municipalities are involved in the Regional Housing Trust where we pay into the trust fund and that money is levered into partnerships with other agencies including the province, the federal government and non-profit organizations," Jensen said.

"Our dollar can turn into \$5 or as much as \$12 and that's done by creating these partnerships.

"A collaborative approach to dealing with an issue that is so important is the only way forward," Jensen said. "That is the best, and arguably the only way, forward to make these projects a success."

Victoria's proposal for a regional housing strategy arose from public outcry over micro-housing and temporary tenting areas suggested to ease the homeless populations. "What we need in Canada at the federal level is a housing strategy. Most Western European countries have a housing strategy which aims to ensure there's housing for the homeless, affordable housing, rent geared to income housing ... That has to come from the top," Jensen said. "There has been great reluctance to wrestle that. It is a priority for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and it really is an important aspect of our society that we have plans in place to ensure that everyone has access to proper housing. It really is central to who we are as Canadians to have that as a value."

Find this article at:

<http://www.oakbaynews.com/news/328111751.html>

ELECTION DAY: OCT. 19

timescolonist.com/election

Housing should be federal issue: Victoria mayor

Helps urges next government to improve funding

KATHERINE DEDYNA
Times Colonist

Capital region taxpayers can pay to end homelessness by borrowing up to \$50 million over the next 15 years, but it's really up to Ottawa to reinstate the social-housing budget slashed in the past quarter-century, Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps said Tuesday.

Helps told about 100 people attending the annual meeting of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness that low-income housing should be an election issue that translates into improved funding — no matter which party forms government after the Oct. 19 federal election.

Victoria councillors will debate Thursday a proposal to ask the Capital Regional District to borrow \$50 million to build 367 supportive housing units for the chronically homeless — the number of units some believe would effectively end homelessness in Greater Victoria by 2018.

It would cost about \$2.08 million a year to service the debt, which could be paid through an annual levy of about \$11.18 per household in the capital region.



WARNING!

Less than 1% for social housing in the 2015 federal budget.
Causes increased health and social service costs.



The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness has launched a social media campaign calling for increased funding for affordable housing. GREATER VICTORIA COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS

the resolution says.

"We are prepared to do this in the event that we have to, but we state very firmly, if you read through the motion, that we want the federal government to step up," Helps said. The coalition has kicked off a social-media campaign that includes videos and yellow stickers warning that affordable housing gets less than one per cent of the federal budget. This year's Treasury Board budget estimate was roughly \$241 billion.

Helps said feedback on the \$50-million proposal has been "almost entirely positive" and

noted it would save taxpayers sums spent on health care and social services for homeless people. It costs \$21,000 annually to house a homeless person but \$55,000 in health, social and other costs for a person living on the street, she said.

Ottawa spends barely half of what it spent on social housing 25 years ago, even though the Canadian population has increased by 30 per cent over that same time, she said.

"Federal spending on low-income housing per capita has dropped from \$114 in 1989 to \$58 in 2014," she said, adding the

WHAT THE PARTIES SAY

Liberal Party

The Liberals have pledged to invest \$20 billion over 10 years in "social infrastructure," including affordable housing and seniors facilities. The party calls for renewed federal leadership in housing, and says it would help build more housing units and renew support for Housing First initiatives that help homeless Canadians find stable housing.

NDP

Randall Garrison, NDP candidate for Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke, attended the meeting and said his party would increase the amount spent on social housing by \$200 million in the next year, specifically to bolster the expiring operating agreements for co-op housing to allow them to maintain their subsidies. It's not 1.6 per cent, he said, but "it's a change in direction to get the federal government back involved in social housing."

result of the diminishing housing options is obvious on streets across Canada.

"There is a federal election well underway, and the Coalition to End Homelessness is working in Victoria and with organizations across the country to encourage people to vote for housing," Helps said. "If we all do our job well here on the ground in Victoria and our colleagues across the country, hopefully the CRD will not have to borrow one dollar. Hopefully, the

Conservative Party

The Conservative platform concentrates on home buyers, particularly first-time home buyers. Measures include tax credits for home purchasing, renovation and accessibility upgrades, and a home buyers' plan.

Green Party

The Green Party platform says it would enshrine affordable housing in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and calls for increased spending on social housing. The Green Party also urges the appointment of a minister for housing to oversee a national affordable-housing plan and a change in the mandate of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. to resume its former responsibility for affordable, non-market, and co-operative housing.

— Katherine Dedyne

federal government will listen to cries across the country from Canadians and will invest in housing in this region and across the country.

"All we need is to increase the investment in social housing to 1.6 per cent of the federal budget and we can solve the problem."

The coalition received \$782 last year from the federal government but nothing in 2015, its audited financial statement shows.

kdedyna@timescolonist.com



City of Victoria
@CityOfVictoria

Follow

Full house at community workshop to discuss sheltering solutions for our community

6:55 PM - 16 Sep 2015

4 6

Victoria Coun. Geoff Young told the Times-Colonist that he felt it was not a good use of money, pointing out the proposals he saw at the meeting had already been passed over by the city.

The homeless population in Victoria — with its mild climate and laid-back lifestyle — has climbed to an estimated 1,000. A Supreme Court decision in 2008 paved the way for allowing homeless people to sleep overnight in city parks if shelters are full.

Jordan Bateman of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation called the \$20 stipend a "bizarre story." He told CTV News that since the city already knows where homeless people are located, officials could "go get this expert advice from them for free."

In an editorial published on Saturday, the Times-Colonist said:

The issue is about providing the homeless with shelter and support. Surely, they should care enough to participate in discussions about their own futures. It would have been appropriate to provide coffee and sandwiches at the meeting, but not cash payments.

Public input is vital, but that input should be freely given, not purchased.

But Don Evans, the executive director of downtown drop-in centre Our Place, said he proposed the \$20 payment as a way to attract the people who are actually struggling without shelter. He and the mayor both said it was money well spent for the productive turnout.

City council voted 8-1 this week to move forward on a \$50-million request to tackle homelessness in the region. The proposal includes building 367 units for homeless people — by charging each household \$11 for 15 years.



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VICTORIA

13°C

\$50-million fund pitched to tackle Victoria homelessness

Posted By: Keith Vass on: September 15, 2015 In: CHEK Point Question, News

Victoria mayor says plan would cost \$11 per household per year



0:00 / 3:46

Homelessness has long been one of Victoria's pressing issues, now the city's mayor and two councillors are presenting a new possible solution.

On Thursday Victoria city council will debate a motion, put forward by Helps with councillors Jeremy Loveday and Ben Isitt, calling on their colleagues at the Capital Regional District Board to seek approval to borrow up to \$50 million to fund the construction of 367 supported housing units.

Helps says it could be enough housing to effectively end homelessness, at a cost of \$11 per household per year for 15 years.

"Eleven dollars and 18 cents. Three lattes," she said.

The numbers were drawn from research done by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. Executive director Andrew-Wynn-Williams says that number of units could all but eliminate visible homelessness in the region.

"That would pretty much kill the challenge as far as we're concerned," he said.

Helps says housing shouldn't be a local responsibility, and the timing the proposal during a federal election campaign is in large part aimed at bringing Ottawa back to the table.

"The most important part of the motion is after the election writing to the federal government letting them know what we're doing and asking them to fund this so we don't have to borrow a cent."

Oak Bay mayor and CRD chair Nils Jensen said he would be prepared to move the idea forward.

"It's a very interesting proposal its certainly very worthy of consideration," he said. "Homelessness is a priority in the Capital Region and we need some action on it, there's no question about it."

But Langford mayor Stew Young said adding another CRD levy to his taxpayers is a non-starter

"What I'm saying is lets be fiscally responsible and find a way support the homeless within the budget we've already got, maybe cut something we put on the CRD 15 or 20 years ago that's not that important to us anymore," he said.

Victoria councillors will debate the proposal Thursday and decide whether or not they want to press forward with the plan.

Meanwhile, the city's public consultation process on temporary shelter options, including tent camps and micro-housing potentially in to be located in city parks, will begin with a workshop Wednesday evening at the Crystal Garden starting at 6:30pm.



TIMES COLONIST

Housing proposal the best bargain yet

Times Colonist

September 15, 2015 04:49 PM

Re: "Helps wants CRD to borrow \$50M to house homeless," Sept. 15.

Three lattes a year per household for housing 367 homeless people? That's the best bargain yet!

I and my colleagues at the Committee to End Homelessness Victoria fully support Mayor Lisa Helps and councillors Ben Isitt and Jeremy Loveday in asking for this Capital Regional District levy.

It is the first serious local move toward solving a nasty problem. And maybe a new government in Ottawa would recognize that a city willing to kick-start such a solution is a city worthy of serious funding.

Never having bought a single latte in my life (I'm too cheap), I'd sacrifice three cups of tea and a chocolate doughnut every day.

Alison Acker

Victoria

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Helps wants CRD to borrow \$ 50M to house homeless 7

Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps and at least two of her councillors want the Capital Regional District to borrow \$50 million to build 367 supportive housing units for the chronically homeless — a move they believe would effectively end homelessness in Greater Victoria by 2018.

It would cost about \$2.08 million a year to service the debt, which could be paid through an annual levy of about \$11.18 per household in the CRD, the three say in a resolution to be debated by Victoria councillors on Thursday.

The initiative being put forward by Helps, along with councillors Ben Isitt and Jeremy Loveday, is a response to the message Helps received this summer when council proposed putting a temporary tent city in Topaz Park to address the issue of people tenting in city parks.

"People stood there and yelled at us at Topaz Park and said: 'We need housing,'" Helps said.

"We've heard very clearly that people want the problem solved, and in the absence of the federal government putting forward the \$50 million which we anticipate is needed to build those 367 units, we think it's time for residents of the region [to solve it], and residents of the region have told us loud and clear they think it's time."

The Coalition to End Homelessness estimates 367 units are needed to end chronic homelessness in the region.

The resolution: • Calls on Victoria council to go on record in support of a regional housing-first strategy and to ask for CRD board approval for the Capital Regional Hospital District to be the lead agency in getting the housing financed and built. (Housing-first programs aim to get people into housing as an essential first step in helping them overcome other problems.) • Seeks council's approval to approach the province for a \$7.73-million annual commitment (\$21,064 per unit) to go toward operating costs. • Seeks council's support for the mayor to write to the prime minister after the federal election asking for a federal commitment toward costs of building the new units.

Helps said having the hospital board as the lead agency to co-ordinate financing makes sense. The hospital district has housing within its purview and is entitled to borrow money for housing and hospitals. The Capital Region Housing Corp. is more focused on managing social-housing units, she said.

The province has to come on board with money to pay for the necessary support for the housing to work, Helps said. "As everybody knows, you can't just stick people in houses and expect them to get better. That's where the supports come in."

Helps said the estimated cost of \$11.18 per household should be within most people's budgets — equating it to the cost of three lattes. Homelessness, she said, affects all 13 municipalities in the CRD. "There are people sleeping in parks in Langford. It's not just a Victoria problem."

CRD chairman Nils Jensen said the idea is "worthy of consideration."

"What is important is to make sure the efforts are co-ordinated. It's pretty critical that we don't all run in different directions and thereby dilute the effectiveness," said Jensen, who is also Oak Bay mayor.

"Leveraging through a regional fund has proven to be very successful — something that we couldn't do here in Oak Bay or other small communities couldn't do by themselves. So I think a co-ordinated regional approach is certainly something that's preferred, in partnership with other groups."

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TIMES COLONIST

Victoria looks to residents on homelessness

Times Colonist

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Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps takes questions from a crowd at Topaz Park. July 30, 2015 Photograph By BRUCE STOTESBURY, Times Colonist

Victoria will host a workshop Sept. 16 to hear from residents and develop options for short-term sheltering solutions.

"I want to be really clear ... we're not talking at this workshop about long-term solutions to housing," Mayor Lisa Helps said.

"We're not talking about building more affordable housing. We're not talking about subsidies. We're not talking about the federal government.

"We're talking about what can we do so we don't end up with this crisis in our parks next summer that we saw this summer and last summer."

City staff estimate that about 130 people sleep in parks, costing the city an estimated \$600,000 a year in associated costs.

The B.C. Supreme Court ruled in 2008 that it was unconstitutional to deny a person the right to erect shelter in a city park if there were no shelter beds available.

The city's recently developed temporary housing action plan suggested two temporary options: designated tenting areas in some city parks and a micro-housing village that could include semi-permanent homes about the size of garden sheds on private or public land.

Part of the thinking was that a designated tenting area could alleviate pressure on smaller neighbourhood parks, such as Kings Park on Caledonia Avenue, where people are camping.

But when Topaz Park, on Blanshard Street, was identified as the possible site, the neighbourhood rose up in

opposition.

Council passed a motion Aug. 5 directing staff to consult the public on options before councillors consider any proposal for a temporary designated tenting area in any park.

The city has received hundreds of suggestions, Helps said: asking people to take in a homeless person; insulated, bicycle-pulled trailers; and using closed schools or parking garages as shelter.

An estimated 367 units are needed in the capital region to house all the people who are chronically homeless, she said.

"We're asking the public to help us co-develop work plans," she said.

The workshop will be held Sept. 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m., at the Crystal Garden.

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TIMES COLONIST

Homeless of Kings Park hold barbecue for neighbours

Bill Cleverley / Times Colonist

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Kings Park

Homeless campers who have been calling Victoria's tiny Kings Park home for months — much to the chagrin of many neighbours — hosted "a private neighbourhood barbecue" Saturday in an effort to put a friendlier face on the fact they are living there.

The barbecue was the brainchild of Ken Prowse, a formerly homeless man who used to live in Kings Park and still regularly returns on weekends to pitch a tent.

"It's for the neighbours to see that we're all not that bad and to give back a little," Prowse said of the barbecue as he sat on a lawnchair in the Caledonia Avenue park, nursing a bad back.

Devin Landis and other volunteers from the Table Church covered the cost of the burgers and pop, and helped Prowse organize the event.

Landis said about 40 people stopped by. "It's been a happy time. Everyone is smiling and a lot of people have met each other. So that was the goal."

Harold Stanley, who lives in a townhouse complex at the corner of Cook Street and Caledonia Avenue, said he appreciated members of the homeless community reaching out. "The more we see each other as part of the same community, the more understanding and accommodation we'll have for each other," said Stanley, adding that he's had no problems with the campers.

In 2008, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to deny a person the right to erect shelter in a city park if there were no shelter beds available.

City staff estimate that about 130 people sleep in parks, costing the city about \$600,000 a year in associated expenses.

At Kings Park, upward of a dozen tents are pitched each night.

Neighbours of the pocket park, which has no washroom facilities, have long complained about the homeless campers. They don't want their children or dogs to run free for fear of discarded needles and human excrement.

Mike Aucoin, who has lived across from the park for five years, said he felt "conflicted" about whether to attend the barbecue.

"I want to be sensitive to the homeless population and their plight, but, at the same time, I have to be conscious of how it affects my life and my living situation," Aucoin said.

"When I purchased the property, I purchased it partly because of the greenspace, which is not there any more because they are there all the time."

His water has been tapped into, a neighbour has had electricity stolen and needles are regularly found in the street, he said.

Aucoin said the wording on the handbill, which says the barbecue is hosted by Kings Park residents, rubbed him the wrong way.

"They've pitched it like they're members of this neighbourhood which, to me, they are not. They are not paying taxes. They are not using the land responsibly. They are not being good neighbours," he said.

"So, they've sort of seconded my park, and for me that's a bit of a problem. Like I said, I want to be sensitive to their needs and I want to make sure they are looked after and that there's a solution for them, but I don't know what it is.

"It's a complex problem that I don't think you can solve easily."

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