



Council Member Motion

For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of February 22, 2018

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** February 19, 2018
From: Mayor Helps and Councillor Lucas
Subject: Sheltering Prohibition in Reeson Park and Quadra Park

RECOMMENDATION

That subject to the BC Housing agreeing to keep:

- The Out of the Rain (St Andrew's Presbyterian - 680 Courtney) 30 Mats youth 15-25 only, slated to close April 15th
- And the Cool Aid Seasonal Shelter - 755 Pandora – Mats, Co-Ed, slated to close March 31st – open beyond a seasonal basis

or the equivalent number of spaces at other locations, Council direct staff to amend the Parks Regulation Bylaw to prohibit overnight sheltering (camping) in Reeson Park and Quadra Park.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this motion is to provide Council with a recommendation based on feedback received from the community and the reality of a decrease in park usage because of the availability of new housing options and shelter beds.

Since December 2017 the police have noticed a significant reduction in the number of people sheltering overnight in parks. At this time they have found persons from time to time sleeping in Beacon Hill Park including Holland Point. Otherwise they are not finding large groups of folks sleeping in any other City Parks. They do however continue to find several folks sleeping rough on the streets, doorways, under the bridges and the Galloping Goose Corridor. The reduction in City Parks can be attributed to several likely causes:

Additional Shelter/Housing options:

- The seasonal mats being opened at the Cool Aid Rec Centre on Pandora
- The increase in capacity and hours of operation of the First Metropolitan Church Shelter
- The Emergency Weather Program that was activated for most of December and into January to present time.
- The Douglas Street (now called Arbutus) shelter opening in late December.
- In December the decision to re-open the My Place transitional housing on Yates St.
- The decision to extend the lease of the Choices Transitional housing in View Royal and to keep it open until people are housed at the Tally Ho.

Focus on Housing:

Since the early summer of 2017 there was a fundamental shift on the part of both BC Housing, Island Health, Police and Service Providers to get people living rough in the community into housing or shelter and to keep them housed. Much greater communication, collaboration and partnerships working collectively to address some of the most challenging and vulnerable people in our communities.

Piloting of the Coordinated Housing Outreach Team – comprised of BC Housing, Pacifica, Island Health, Ministry of Social development Poverty Reduction, Bylaw Services and the VicPD. This is the first such “Outreach” team to focus on housing where the team actually goes to the streets and parks to connect people with health and housing. This concentrates efforts in areas of town such as the parks where homeless people shelter overnight. They facilitate referrals, applications for housing and social assistance, health care and specialized services like mental health and addiction services. The team has also brought on additional supports when needed through the, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness and Youth Services. One criteria of the team is to focus on highest impacts to the community which is the first time that this was ever considered.

- The team works very closely with all service providers to build consistency, fair and equitable access to shelter space and housing modeled closely on the “Housing first concept”.
- The team has built considerable momentum and has been successful in finding shelter or housing for close to 20 persons – many of whom have not been housed for over a decade.
- The team is close to becoming formalized which will include a new name.
- BC Housing has taken a lead role in building consistency and communication between all shelter and housing providers. Working closely with VicPD and the big three shelter providers those involved are currently building processes and communication strategies to never evict someone to the street. This can assist in creating times and space for respite when one shelter is forced to move someone from their facility due to extreme behaviours. The difference before was that these folks would simply find themselves back on our streets or into the parks.

In addition to this, Councillor Lucas has met with nearby residents, businesses, Community Associations and the Victoria City Police with regards to the two parks. Common concerns have been heard from all with respect to challenges with these two parks last summer and fall:

- direct noise disturbance (yelling, swearing and fighting)
- health concerns from feces, urine and syringes left in parks
- intrusion of activities onto private property
- displacement of other park users
- unwelcoming appearance of the park.

Council has discussed that the restriction of additional parks should be made based on the following criteria. The guiding principles for restricting camping in the two parks are identical to

those of the four parks Council has already added to the parks bylaw. They are as follows:

- proximity to pathways
- directly adjacent to residences/hotels
- environmental sensitivities
- park size
- without access to appropriate washroom facilities

Based on these criteria and considering the current success we are having with safe spaces for people to sleep inside and resources in place to help people get housed, we recommend adding two further small neighbourhood parks to the Parks Bylaw, subject to the conditions outlined in the recommendation.

MOTION

That subject to BC Housing agreeing to keep:

- The Out of the Rain (St Andrew's Presbyterian - 680 Courtney) 30 Mats youth 15-25 only, slated to close April 15th
- And the Cool Aid Seasonal Shelter - 755 Pandora – Mats, Co-Ed, slated to close March 31st – open beyond a seasonal basis

or the equivalent number of spaces at other locations, Council direct staff to amend the Parks Regulation Bylaw to prohibit overnight sheltering (camping) in Reeson Park and Quadra Park.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Helps



Councillor Lucas