

Supports Item No. 5
P&E Committee Agenda
December 3, 2009

5. Assistance to Shelter Act

MOVER: Councillor Ellen Woodsworth

SECONDER: Councillor

WHEREAS:

1. The Provincial government has introduced the Assistance to Shelter Act for debate and discussion and has invited commentary on its impact from stakeholders;
2. The City of Vancouver is a stakeholder along with local service providers, police and other levels of government in ensuring the health and safety of all of our residents, including our homeless population;
3. The police already have the legal right to apprehend citizens in mental distress under Section 28(1) of the Mental Health Act of Canada and to take them to a health care provider, or to call an ambulance if the health and safety of the individual is truly in jeopardy;
4. The existing shelters are already full so the police would have nowhere to take these people;
5. People do not want to go to shelters for fear of losing their belongings; low-barrier shelters (which allow pets) are nearly always full;
6. Many homeless people have said they choose the street because they "can't handle" lots of people. They know their own stress threshold limitations and don't want to end up causing a scene. There are concerns about the safety of both shelter-users and trained staff, if people, who could react violently, are brought to them. This potential disaster increases exponentially if those people are brought to over-crowded, substandard conditions run by volunteers;
7. Many women feel unsafe in shelters; and
8. Homeless people need homes not shelters.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT Vancouver City Council send a letter to the Minister of Housing and to the Vancouver Police Board expressing the following concerns over this proposed legislation:

1. Recognizing that all Canadians have the right to make fundamental decisions about their health, we are concerned that this legislation may violate the constitutional rights of homeless citizens who may not wish to comply with police efforts to bring them to shelters against their will;

2. Recognizing that emergency shelters don't have the staff or expertise to address homeless individuals who may not wish to be in shelter, we have concerns that the staff and volunteers working in shelters might be endangered by this legislation;
3. Recognizing that homeless individuals who don't want to be brought to shelter against their will may seek to avoid being forced to do so we have concerns that this legislation might result in our homeless population hiding from police and thus further endangering themselves in an extreme weather event;
4. Be it further resolved that the letter re-iterate our commitment to working cooperatively with the provincial and federal governments to address the high rate of homelessness in Greater Vancouver and throughout Canada, with a focus on providing homes to those in need.

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