

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. **Declaring a Homelessness Emergency: Making an Emergency Plan to Drastically Reduce Homelessness**

Submitted by: Councillor Swanson and Councillor Fry

WHEREAS

1. At least 2,223 people were counted as homeless across Vancouver in 2019;
2. At least 7,655 were counted as homeless across British Columbia;
3. At least 30,000 are homeless in Canada in any one day with 235,000 experiencing homelessness in a year;
4. Homelessness robs people of their security, dignity, rights and lives -- homeless people have about half the life expectancy as housed people;
5. Canadians are upset by the fact that we have homelessness in a rich country, and that people have to live on the streets. On June 21, 2019, the Governor General of Canada signed into law Bill C-97, which contained the National Housing Strategy Act, and the federal right to housing legislation -- which enshrines "adequate housing as a fundamental human right";
6. Numerous academic studies have established that providing secure housing is a more cost-effective solution to homelessness than maintaining temporary shelters and incurring additional policing, mental health service, and health care costs;
7. The full continuum of housing needs far outweigh local government's available resources and funding required to effectively address this issue, and desperately needs the support of both the Provincial and Federal governments;
8. BC Housing and other social housing providers have long wait lists and a lack of available housing, while:
 - a) Low rent housing is being lost to rent increases when tenants move out;
 - b) Not enough social housing at welfare rate is coming on-stream to make up for the loss of low rent housing; and
 - c) Modular housing works well to house people who have been homeless, but the province isn't funding enough of them to meet the demand;
9. Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels are often the last resort before homelessness. SROs are being bought by investors who are evicting current low income tenants by renovating and increasing the rents. Vancouver could lose hundreds of SRO rooms to this practice;
10. Welfare and disability shelter rates as determined by the province are too low at \$375 per month to even cover operating costs for an SRO room;
11. Skyrocketing prices for housing and land over the past 10 years, spurred by low-interest rates and financial speculation, have turned Vancouver into one of the most

expensive housing markets in the world, far out of reach of most local incomes;

12. On January 29, 2020, following a unanimous council vote, Ottawa became the first city in Canada to declare a housing and homelessness emergency; and
13. The circumstances and extent of homelessness in Vancouver constitute a crisis and emergency situation.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Vancouver City Council declares a Homelessness Emergency.
- B. THAT Council urge the federal and provincial governments as well as regional and local governments along with other partners, to make a Homelessness Emergency plan to build or find dignified, affordable housing for at least 80 percent of counted homeless people within three years.
- C. THAT Council direct staff to incorporate this target into the existing Housing and Homelessness Strategy and be a key focus of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy ongoing.
- D. THAT this Homelessness Emergency plan includes raising social assistance shelter rates so people can afford to pay rent.
- E. THAT this Homelessness Emergency plan include recommendations for implementing vacancy control as a tool to preserve existing lower rent accommodation.
- F. THAT Council direct staff to prepare and submit the following Homelessness Emergency declaration and request for a plan, along with whereas clauses 2, 4 and 5, as a resolution to the Lower Mainland Local Government Association (LMLGA) and the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM):
 - i. THAT the UBCM declare a province-wide Homelessness Emergency and call upon the Province to work with local governments, BC Housing and other partners on a Homelessness Emergency Plan to build or find dignified, affordable housing for at least 80 percent of counted homeless people within three years; and
 - ii. THAT the UBCM recommends the province implement vacancy control as a tool to preserve existing lower rent accommodation.
- G. THAT Council direct staff to prepare and submit this Homelessness Emergency declaration and request for a plan, along with whereas clauses 3, 4 and 5, as a resolution to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM):
 - i. THAT the FCM declare a nation-wide Homelessness Emergency and call upon the Federal Government to work with local and provincial governments, and other partners on a Homelessness Emergency Plan to build or find dignified, affordable housing for at least 80 percent of counted homeless people within three years.

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