



IN CAMERA

REPORT

Report Date: March 24, 2021
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RTS No.: 14413
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Meeting Date: March 30, 2021

TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Support for Unsheltered Residents – Memorandum of Understanding between City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and Provincial Government

IN CAMERA RATIONALE

This report is recommended for consideration by Council on the In Camera agenda as it relates to Section 165.2(1) of the *Vancouver Charter*.

(k) negotiations and related discussions respecting the proposed provision of an activity, work or facility that are at their preliminary stages and that, in the view of the Council, could reasonably be expected to harm the interests of the city if they were held in public.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council approve the Memorandum of Understanding (see Appendix A) between the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and the Ministry of Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing to support individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of an MOU which was developed by the Ministry of Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing with input from Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and City of Vancouver staff. The MOU seeks to formalize a collective shared commitment to a coordinated approach to connect unsheltered residents to housing that preserves dignity for these residents, respects the need for culturally appropriate services for Indigenous people, and considers the needs of the surrounding community.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

In June 2014, Council formally acknowledged that the City of Vancouver is situated on the unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh. As a City of Reconciliation, the City of Vancouver is committed to working with Indigenous leaders including MVAEC, its members, and other Indigenous organizations to prioritize the creation of a new Indigenous led, culturally appropriate housing that meets the needs of the diverse make up of urban Indigenous people.

In November 2017, Council approved the *Housing Vancouver Strategy and Housing Vancouver Action Plan*. The strategy seeks to shift the supply of new homes toward the right supply, with targets for new units along a continuum of housing types (RTS 12153).

In June 2018, Council approved the *Affordable Housing Delivery and Financial Strategy* to deliver on the revised targets contained in Housing Vancouver over the next 10 years (RTS 12562). The strategy includes social and supportive housing targets to meet the needs of low-income residents.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The Acting City Manager approved the foregoing.

REPORT

Background/Context

Homelessness

Vancouver has experienced a steady growth in homelessness since starting the official homeless count in 2005. The most recent Point in Time Count conducted in March 2020 found 2,095 residents who identified as experiencing homelessness. Of those surveyed, 547 were unsheltered and 1,548 were living in sheltered locations, including emergency shelters, detox centres, safe houses, and hospitals.

We also know that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted our most marginalized residents. Shelters have reduced capacity due to physical distancing requirements, many of our drop ins, community centres, libraries and other social service hubs have reduced hours or have closed and finally, many social and supportive housing operators have implemented 'no guest' policies which has resulted in people having no other options but to seek shelter elsewhere, or sleep outside.

People without adequate housing are forced to rely on friends or acquaintances for a place to sleep or the availability of a bed in an emergency shelter. Ultimately, if these alternatives are not available, they are forced to sleep outside in tents or other structures, usually in public spaces such as sidewalks and parks.

Vancouver's current homeless crisis is a direct result of a historic lack of sufficient investment in supportive and affordable housing infrastructure, sufficient and appropriate health supports for people with mental health and addictions, and sufficient income supports for people living in deep poverty.

While the City has made significant investment (land and direct funding) to develop or incentivise the development of affordable and supportive housing, as well as the creation of interim crisis shelter spaces, the continuing housing crisis is disproportionately impacting Vancouver's most marginalized residents and is contributing to growing homeless encampments. This issue is not new or unique to Vancouver and is being witnessed in communities across the region, province and country.

Encampments

There have been a number of larger encampments in Vancouver over the years. Typically, encampments are established to protest the lack of affordable housing and needed supports for people experiencing homelessness. Over time however, they grow and become established encampments for people with few to no other housing or shelter options. Increasing concerns for the safety of those living in encampments, and the impact on surrounding neighbourhoods has resulted in action being taken, in partnership with senior government and shelter and housing providers, to end encampments. Appendix B provides an overview of the history of encampments in Vancouver and how they were ended.

Responding to People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness

The City's Homelessness Services Outreach team conducts early morning/late evening rounds to areas where people are sleeping outside to offer income, housing, health supports. The Outreach team works in coordination with Engineering, Parks, VPD, VFRS to identify people sleeping outdoors who may be willing to be connected with necessary services. Outreach staff use a trauma-informed approach and work collaboratively with other agencies and service providers to support people that need and are willing to engage to address their housing and other support needs.

In 2020, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation amended the Park Control By-law to align with BC jurisprudence which permits people to shelter overnight in parks if there are no other shelter options. In other parks across the City, Engineering and Park Rangers engage with people sleeping in parks in the mornings asking that tents/structures be taken down during the day. VPD assists to keep the peace and protect staff safety as required. Finally, crews clean up abandoned items, as well as articles people voluntarily leave behind when asked by staff to take down their tent.

In closing encampments, City and Park Board staff work collaboratively with the Province, through BC Housing to secure units to support the transition of people to indoor spaces. The City's Homelessness Services Outreach team works with BC Housing on assessing the housing needs and options for each individual and support that person to move. The City's Engineering with Park Board staff secure the site and remove debris once people have transitioned into indoor spaces. A successful decampment process is dependent on securing adequate housing, and an injunction to enforce the VBPR GM order to comply with the Park Control By-law and remove structures from the park.

Strategic Analysis

Strathcona Encampment

Strathcona was established as a protest encampment in June 2020 and has grown significantly since then. City and Park Board staff have been working with BC Housing and Vancouver Coastal Health to address the health and safety needs of those residing in the encampment, manage the environmental conditions of and within the park, mitigate impacts to surrounding community and businesses, and secure housing and shelter spaces to transition people and return the park to broader community use. Initiatives and actions include:

- VFRS issued two (2) Fire Chief's Orders (June 2020, February 2021).
- ACCS provided project management and support to BC Housing and partner organizations for the installation of washroom and shower trailers, staff trailers and warming tents (staffed 24/7 by Atira) – December 2020.
- BC Housing is funding PHS to provide support (meals, tents) to people in the park.
- Park Board issued a GM Order to remove tents and structures on the west side of the park and transition people indoors or to other areas of the park (February 2020). A second GM Order will be issued on March 30 prohibiting tents and structures in areas on the east side of the park to continue gradual decampment process and enable the remediation needed to return the park to public use.
- Engineering and VBPR staff manage ongoing sanitation services and removal of debris from the park.
- BC Housing and City are securing and renovating spaces to provide 120 shelter spaces and additional housing options for people in the park and surrounding neighbourhood which will be announced in the coming week.

The Ministry of the Attorney General and Housing has committed to securing adequate indoor spaces to support the decampment of Strathcona by end of April 2021. As part of process, the MOU was drafted to define our collective actions to address encampments and support individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

MOU

An MOU for dealing with Strathcona and to outline roles and responsibilities in the event of future encampments was recently requested by the Ministry of Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing. The objectives of the proposed MOU are to:

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved regarding unsheltered residents and confirm our shared commitment to transition an estimated 350 people sheltering in and around Strathcona Park by April 30, 2021 into shelters, temporary or permanent housing with health, cultural and social support services;
- Confirm the shared commitment of partners working together to reduce the total number of unsheltered residents in parks and public spaces in Vancouver to zero by addressing medium- and long-term affordable housing, health, mental health and social support needs; and
- Recognize the combined obligation to act immediately in a positive and compassionate way with viable alternatives, along with access to social and health services to support unsheltered residents and those living in temporary structures in parks and public spaces.

The proposed MOU also outlines commitments to public communication throughout the decampment process.

Critical to ending the Strathcona decampment, as well as future encampments is the need for safe, secure, and affordable housing with necessary supports so individuals can maintain their housing.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk (if applicable)

Financial *

Staff set separate order numbers to track incremental costs related to encampments, including outreach, sanitation, public safety and enforcement related to an injunction, park remediation and ongoing monitoring.

Legal

The Memorandum of Understanding creates no legal obligations on the City and it accurately sets out the respective jurisdictions of the parties.

CONCLUSION *

This report recommends Council approve an MOU between the City of Vancouver, the Ministry of Attorney General and Housing and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. The MOU outlines the roles and responsibilities in the decampment process for Strathcona Park, as well as future encampments.

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Please see attached: RTS 14413 - Appendix A

Summary of Encampments in Vancouver

Oppenheimer Park – 2014

- Encampment established as a protest
- Injunction granted
- Occupants who were homeless were supported to transition to shelter. Most subsequently moved to the Quality Inn which was leased on a short term by CoV.

58 West Hastings – 2016

- Encampment established as a protest in July
- Injunction granted in November
- Occupants who were homeless were supported to transition to shelter

950 Main Street – 2017

- Encampment established as a protest in April; City property leased to Lu'Ma Native Housing for affordable housing development
- Injunction granted to Lu'Ma in June
- Occupants who were homeless were offered option to transition to shelter

1100 Franklin Street - 2017

- Encampment established in June as a protest following order to vacate 950 Main
- Occupants voluntarily relocated to shelter in December; no injunction sought
- Site subsequently deployed for temporary modular housing

Oppenheimer Park – 2019

- Encampment grew from a few tents in the February 2019 to 200 tents by the summer.
- Occupants who were homeless were supported to transition to shelter and housing in August 2019. No injunction was sought and a few people remained, including new leadership that had arrived at the park.
- The encampment was re-established as a protest. The encampment grew and in spring 2020, the Province issued a public safety order to transition people from the park.

Port Lands Parking Lot - 2020

- Encampment established as a protest by leadership from Oppenheimer Park.
- Port granted injunction for trespassing – no housing or shelter offers made.

Strathcona Park - 2020

- Encampment leadership from the Port Lands parking lot were supported to move to Strathcona Park.
- Working with