

Attention: Mayor, Council, Shannon Perkins (Bylaw), Thomas Soulliere, Nav Sidhu, Janelle Wyman (Parks), Bill Eisenhauer, Sheldon Johnson (Engagement)  
CC: NPNA Board, NPNA Land Use Advisor  
Date: August 31, 2020

Good morning Mayor, Council, and all,

Like many Victoria residents, this [CTV article](#) was how I learned that there are immediate changes being made to sheltering currently taking place in Centennial Square, that will have immediate and detrimental effects to surrounding neighbourhoods. When communication and responsiveness from Council and City staff is already an issue, this is a mis-step that will lead - and is leading - to further frustration, and increased escalation in tensions.

The response to immediately close Centennial Square is also very frustrating to see. This is a reactive response to outdoor sheltering that is not taking into account the effect it will have on residential parks. Central Park, for example, which by Sunday now has 42 shelters (up from 35 last week). I have asked Engagement and Bylaw for an update on the most recent outdoor sheltering count and breakdown by park.

Where are the people sheltering in Centennial Square supposed to go other than the parks located in residential neighbourhoods? What options are they being given by Bylaw officers who are enforcing this City request? (Or are they still proposing Central Park and Beacon Hill Park as the only two options.) There is no question that the situation in Centennial Square was unmanageable. But so is the situation in Central Park. Nearby residents are becoming even more frustrated - escalating tensions that were already at a fever pitch. The supports provided to those sheltering in Central Park are inadequate, and there appears to be no action to improve them. There is still no coordinated approach to provide outreach or services, increase access to hygiene, or provide oversight at parks.

Based on the media coverage in recent weeks, it is widely accepted that the folks sheltering in Centennial Square are engaged in dangerous and violent behaviours, and for this reason the square must be vacated - presumably these folks will disperse themselves to other City parks. This sends the message that the concerns and safety of downtown businesses and residents are more important than the residents in North Park, James Bay, and Burnside Gorge - where the concentration of outdoor sheltering is taking place.

Furthermore, as encampments grow in size (looking at you, Central Park), what's to stop this "criminal element" from choosing a new location and the process beginning again? It alarms me that the safety of the unhoused residents does not appear to be taken into account. One woman sheltering alone in a tent in Central Park, told me that she feels safer in Central Park than she did at Sandy Merriman. This was when there were \*just\* 35 shelters though.

This is not a reaction that centres equity and will continue to have really detrimental effects on families, children, seniors, immigrants, and low income folks who live in North Park. [Please read this week's summary of feedback about Central Park](#). The feedback we are getting is increasingly concerning, with some residents now sounding downright afraid.

**Sarah Murray**

Executive Director

North Park Neighbourhood Association

613-888-2106 | <http://npna.ca>