

Sheltering at Central Park: collected feedback from residents

The NPNA is posting weekly updates on the status of sheltering in Central Park here:

<http://npna.ca/sheltering-in-parks/>

Frequent feedback from nearby residents by theme:

- Many residents are no longer using the playground, sports fields, or outdoor gym at Central Park
 - Families with younger children feel especially unsafe
- There are tents way too close to the playground.
 - But there are no regulations on how far away from playgrounds, pathways, sports fields the tents are required to be (just that they cannot be IN the playground, etc)
- Many residents feel that Central Park is NOT a suitable location for continuous outdoor sheltering
 - Low income neighbours with little access to alternative green space / recreation are being displaced
 - North Park is a low income neighbourhood with little access to alternative playground space, and affordable covid friendly recreation.
 - It is also felt that permanent camping is inconsistent with the covenant that the park be used exclusively for the recreation purposes
- There have been many reports of violent incidents, fights, verbal and physical altercations, and generally very disruptive behaviour in Central Park.
 - These incidents are taking place at all hours of the day and night, disrupting sleep of adults and children, and leaving many residents feeling as though they need to be constantly aware of the situation at the park, assessing risk, and calling 911 regularly
- Several residents are considering selling their homes or moving. Two residents have already done so (that we know of)
- Trespassing on private property, theft, inadequate hygiene, hoarding, and open drug use within Central Park are contributing to residents feeling unsafe and unwelcome in Central Park
- Parents of George Jay students are concerned about students walking to school through Central Park.
 - The bus stop in front of Crystal Pool is a popular bus stop for many GJ students, which results in walking directly through or around Central to get to school
- The situation in Central Park is unmanageable
 - It is taking a toll on the mental, physical, and emotional health of nearby residents.
- The current situation is not safe from a COVID-19 perspective.
 - Physical distancing between campers or tents is not being enforced.
 - Trespass on private property and continual rifling of vehicles often without the owner's knowledge is a risk for spread of contagion that is all but impossible to guard against.

Feedback from individuals sheltering within the park by theme

- There are too many shelters in Central Park
 - A few individuals have taken it upon themselves to maintain order, work with

- police to get disruptive/violent individuals out of the park.
- There are too many people sheltering in Central Park with not enough resources or support
- Bylaw is offering individuals the choice of either Beacon Hill Park or Central Park
 - Bylaw is then leaving individuals' belongings on the Pembroke side of Central Park closest to the playground.
- Secure storage is required in order to reduce hoarding and mess around tents
 - One resident has offered to be responsible for the storage. Could the City work with this individual?
- Adequate access to hygiene - whether sheltering continues in Central Park or elsewhere, those sheltering outdoors need adequate access to hygiene. Across Victoria, there are only 80 available shower spots per day.
 - 20 at Rock Bay landing - which primarily serve those on Ellice, and
 - 60 at Our Place
 - Both locations are only open during the day
 - Could RAP's shower facilities be made available
- A schedule of outreach services and supports are needed at any location where outdoor sheltering is taking place
 - Meals, harm reduction, connections to indoor housing, counselling