



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

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December 14th

Honorable David Eby
Attorney General
Minister responsible for Housing
Room 232 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Honorable David Eby:

I am writing you to share with you some of the concerns of my neighbours and constituents.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced capacity in shelters in Victoria, as elsewhere in the province, has led many unhoused residents to shelter in local parks.

Following the closure of the Pandora Avenue and Topaz Park encampments, North Park's Central Park became one of the main locations for tents. At one point, more than 120 structures were erected in the park, with most clustered around the neighbourhood's main playgrounds. City of Victoria bylaw has been working towards a decentralized and distributed model of in-park sheltering, but the number of tents remain high (55). The park lacks proper sanitation and hygiene, including bathrooms, handwashing, and showers.

North Park is an amazing neighbourhood – my constituents are engaged, compassionate, informed, and committed. They are concerned about the health, safety, comfort, and rights of their unsheltered neighbours', and added pressures from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, mental health crisis, and toxic drug supply. They are also worried about the neighbourhood's loss of green space and a playground at a moment when spending time outside and access free recreation is more important than ever. A majority of residents live in 5+ story apartments and so do not have access to their own backyards or private green spaces. North Park is also an underserved and vulnerable community. Ranked the most financially vulnerable of the 78 neighborhoods in the Capital Regional District where 36% of seniors and 28% of other residents including children are low income.

Last week, on December 7th, I attended the North Park Neighbourhood Association AGM. I am writing to you to share their questions and concerns.

As you'll see, they are informed and engaged and are seeking information and action.

1. Residents are concerned about decisions made by the Capital Regional Hospital District with regards to the temporary use of Oak Bay Lodge (OBL) as an emergency shelter for seniors. They want to make their concerns about demolishing the building instead of using it to shelter seniors during this time of crisis known. Given that demolition of OBL is under way, is there another, similar building that could be used for urgent indoor sheltering?
2. Relatedly, neighbours would like to know whether the Province can and will use the powers of the BC State of Emergency to requisition the use of the Save On Foods Memorial Arena, which was providing temporary shelter for 45 individuals. They highlight Dr. Henry's Dec. 2 update requiring anyone playing sports to stay in their own community and believe that WHL hockey should not be prioritized over indoor shelter.
3. Neighbours are concerned about individuals experiencing homelessness who do not want to access supportive housing or sheltering options. Is there a plan to bypass this type of housing in the “positive flow” plan? According to BC Housing, the rent subsidy program is working well in our community – if they are able to secure private rentals for those currently unhoused using this rent subsidy program, would the Ministry consider increasing the rental subsidies available in Victoria?

Thank you for considering these questions, I look forward to your response so that I can then provide this information to my neighbours and constituents.

Building relationships and engaging with the unsheltered community has been core to the work undertaken by the NPNA. As such, the community would like to advocate for the inclusion of those with lived and living experience in our government's decision-making process. They are also committed to the end of homelessness, and the neighbours of North Park and others in my constituency would support ongoing efforts to target the systemic causes of homelessness across the province and greater allocation of resources in prioritizing homelessness prevention.

Sincerely,

Grace Lore
Member of the Legislative Assembly
Victoria-Beacon Hill

