



North Park Neighbourhood Association
PO Box 661 #185-911 Yates Street
Victoria, BC, Canada
V8V 4Y9

Re: North Park Neighbourhood Association Call For Housing

Attention: Grace Lore: MLA Victoria Beacon Hill, Laurel Collins: MP, Murray Langdon: BC
Housing

CC: NPNA Board, NPNA Land Use Advisor

Date: December 2, 2020

Dear Grace Lore, Laurel Collins, and Murray Langdon.

I am writing on behalf of the North Park Neighbourhood Association (NPNA). We appreciate the time you are taking on Monday, December 7, 2020 to attend the NPNA's monthly meeting and answer questions from the community. The high concentration of sheltering that continues to take place in North Park is stressful for everyone, and we hope that we have demonstrated that North Park is eager to be a part of the solution. Victoria's North Park neighbourhood, bordering the downtown, boasts a diversity of residents, businesses, services, industries, and places of worship.

According to 2016 Census statistics for North Park:

- 57% of residents live in 5+ storey apartment buildings,
- 28% are considered low income,
- 21% are racialized,
- 4% are recent immigrants,
- 28% of children (0-17) live in poverty, and
- 36% of seniors (65+) live in poverty.
- Lastly, North Park is ranked the most financially vulnerable of 78 neighbourhoods in the Capital region of Victoria according to Prosper Canada's National Financial Health Index, a composite index of household financial health at the neighbourhood level.

Since May, when the City of Victoria relaxed bylaws to allow continuous sheltering in light of public health recommendations, Central Park, located in the heart of North Park, has experienced the highest concentration of outdoor sheltering in the city. North Park has been working collaboratively and compassionately for months to [advocate for the needs of those sheltering while also balancing the needs of housed community members](#): primarily, access to Central Park - a well loved, and much needed community amenity.

New bylaws were passed in September 2020 limiting the number of individuals who can shelter in Central Park. The bylaws would suggest about 20 structures would fit in Central Park. To date there are still 55+ shelters in Central Park, most of them clustered around the children's

North Park Neighbourhood Association Call For Housing

North Park Neighbourhood Association

playground. Central Park also lacks proper hygiene facilities such as washrooms and showers, and puts a further strain on access to green space in North Park.

Furthermore, North Park is considered a “park deficient” neighbourhood with only 1.23 hectares/1000 residents compared to the City average of 3.16 hectares/1000 residents. However, the actual amount of green space is much, much lower when taking into account sheltering taking place in Central Park, as well as the fact that Royal Athletic Park - which makes up about half of North Park’s greenspace - is a fenced, regional facility.

With the second wave of COVID-19 now here, it is irresponsible to allow high-density sheltering without access to basic hygiene facilities in Central Park. Furthermore, as winter sets in there is a dire need for permanent housing options, and for temporary accommodations that will lead to permanent housing. Unfortunately, there is simply not enough housing now, temporary or permanent, to accommodate the roughly 250 people currently living outdoors in Victoria.

I support the following recommendations to fill this critical need. These recommendations are a part of a suite of recommendations put forward by [City of Victoria’s Mayor Helps and Councillor Loveday on November 6, 2020](#), with the intent of delivering a combination of immediate and long-term housing options.

In particular, I urge you to act on these recommendations:

1. That Council direct staff to work with a private landowner or use city-owned land for the construction of temporary tiny home clusters of no more than 30 units beginning with one pilot project in Q1 of 2021 **subject to the availability of one year of operating funding from BC Housing.**
2. That the City request the **Province immediately open Oak Bay Lodge to people 55 years and older who are currently living in City parks** until the vacant building is demolished for redevelopment.
3. That the City indicate to the Province that it supports the use of the two sites recently purchased by the Province on Yates Street and Meares Street for affordable, supportive housing and **encourages the Province to begin construction of modular housing on those sites as soon as possible**, respecting the City’s design guidelines.
4. That the City of Victoria works with the **Province and other partners to offer housing or indoor shelter with a path to permanent housing for everyone currently sheltering in City parks by March 31st 2021** and directs staff to bring forward amendments to the Parks Regulation Bylaw so that the temporary measures including 24/7 camping expire on March 31st 2021. Final adoption of these amendments are to be scheduled once it is clear that adequate housing and shelter space will be made available by the March 31st deadline.

We must find alternatives to living outdoors so that sheltering in city parks can end by March 31, 2021. Sheltering in parks is not a viable solution for anyone, from a health, safety, or community wellness standpoint.

North Park Neighbourhood Association Call For Housing

North Park Neighbourhood Association

Further, we ask that you support homelessness prevention - a proactive, not reactive, response - which includes increased mental health and addictions support to those both at risk of becoming homeless, and those currently experiencing homelessness. There is no one size fits all solution to homelessness. More resources need to be committed to a variety of proactive interventions to prevent vulnerable populations falling into homelessness.

The crisis of homelessness in a pandemic worsened by an opioid crisis merits a disaster response from the CRD and provincial government.

I ask the provincial government and BC Housing to demonstrate their plan to address this crisis.

Sincerely,

Sarah Murray

Executive Director

North Park Neighbourhood Association

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