

Memorandum of Understanding on Support for Unsheltered Vancouver Residents

1.0 Parties

Between:

The Ministry of Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing (Ministry)

and

City of Vancouver (CoV)

and

Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (Vancouver Park Board)

2.0 Preamble

Homelessness is a humanitarian crisis which continues to grow in Vancouver and across the region. Incomes – earned or government-subsidized – are not keeping pace with rising housing costs and residents are forced to compete in an overheated housing market with near zero vacancy rates. Homelessness has devastating consequences for the individual and is, at its simplest, the result of the compounding impacts of lack of affordable housing, deep poverty, and a mental health and addictions crisis. Often both driven and compounded by trauma, stigma, discrimination, unsupported mental health conditions, deep poverty, and racism, homelessness is a condition almost impossible to move from without public, social, and health supports or interventions.

Vancouver has been home to a significant homelessness population since starting an official homeless count in 2005. The most recent 2020 Homeless Count identified 2,095 people who were experiencing homelessness. This count is an undercount – not everyone who is experiencing homelessness is identified by volunteers, and not everyone identified wants to participate in a survey.

People without adequate housing are forced to rely on friends or acquaintances for a place to sleep, or hope for 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 or parks.

Important for our Canadian and local context, the over-representation of people of Indigenous ancestry experiencing homelessness in Vancouver reflects the continuing and intergenerational impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. This over-representation clearly points to the need to decolonize the systems and programs that inform our lives, such as education, health care, criminal justice, and other government services.

In 2020, COVID-19 policy responses intensified the impacts of homeless for many people as their previous informal indoor temporary accommodations were no longer available (e.g., no-guest policies) and social distancing in overnight and day shelters impacted capacity of these critical spaces which also provided access to water and hygiene. In short, the many people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver, were further marginalized and put at risk due to the impacts of COVID policy responses on service operations. A further outcome of COVID space impacts is that activity on sidewalks and in parks – already a challenge in Vancouver due to high levels of

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homelessness – increased, frustrating local neighbours and businesses who experience a different set of impacts resulting from encampments in front of their businesses or in their neighbourhood parks.

While Vancouver has the largest population of people experiencing homelessness in the Metro region, it is important to note that a regional and provincial approach to the homelessness is critical to resolving homelessness in Vancouver, as are partnerships across all levels of government, public health, and community services.

The parties to this MOU recognize that a collaborative approach to bringing unsheltered residents indoors is essential for the well-being of some of B.C.'s most marginalized and vulnerable residents, as well as for the well being of the broader community. The parties also acknowledge recent B.C. jurisprudence affirming the right of individuals to erect temporary shelters in public spaces overnight should there not be adequate shelter or housing options available.

3.0 Purpose

This MOU has been developed to formalize the parties' 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.

The objectives of the 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.
- 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.

4.0 Partner Commitments Regarding Strathcona Park

Ministry

- To partner with the City of Vancouver and lead the planning, coordination and provision of housing, transition and supports for unsheltered residents.
- Through BC Housing, lead the Province's operational planning and supports for temporary support services (e.g., warming spaces and washrooms), encampment transitions (e.g., the provision of shelter and housing through coordinated access, housing outreach services, decampment coordination, selection of operators, and making necessary renovations to new indoor accommodations for unsheltered residents), coordination of First Nations territorial welcome and closing ceremonies, and as a partner in other service coordination.
- To liaise with other Ministries, including Health, to coordinate supports for unsheltered residents in encampments and when transitioning into temporary housing – including COVID-

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19 or other infectious disease prevention, primary nursing support and outreach, harm reduction and addictions supports.

City of Vancouver

- To lead the City's operational supports, including City of Vancouver housing outreach teams, participate in operational planning, provide land for housing, land use decision-making, and bylaw enforcement.
- To liaise with community partners.

Vancouver Park Board

- To lead the physical management of Strathcona Park in coordination with partners, including fencing, storage, and logistics to support unsheltered residents transition out of Strathcona Park.
- To offer information to unsheltered people living in Strathcona Park on how to connect with service providers, including the CoV and BC Housing.
- To ensure Strathcona Park is secured and remediated for future community use.
- To enforce the Parks Control By-Law.

5.0 Partner Commitments in Public Communication

All Partners:

- To ensure that partners co-ordinate public statements and communications.

6.0 Partner Commitments in Responding to Future Encampments

Ministry

- To provide housing outreach through BC Housing and to act as the provincial liaison for coordinated health, housing, cultural and social supports to address the needs of people forming encampments in parks and public spaces.
- To work with government partners to fund and develop temporary and permanent housing options to reduce the number of unsheltered residents in parks and public spaces to zero and to create flow in established shelter and supportive housing.

City of Vancouver

- To work with provincial, federal and community partners to provide outreach, supports and connection to a range of housing options to unsheltered people, including those in parks and public spaces.
- To bring forward available land for housing or shelter and to expedite land use decisions necessary to rapidly respond to housing need.
- When suitable spaces are available for people to move indoors, to provide enforcement of City of Vancouver by-laws.

Vancouver Park Board

- When suitable spaces are available for people to move indoors, to enforce the Parks Control By-law.
- To work with the City, provincial and community partners to provide amenities and to facilitate outreach and services to unsheltered people when suitable indoor spaces are not available.

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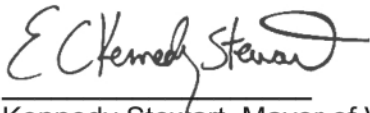
Signatures:



David Eby, Q.C.
Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing

March 31, 2021

Date



Kennedy Stewart, Mayor of Vancouver

March 31, 2021

Date



Camil Dumont
Vancouver Park Board Chair

March 31, 2021

Date

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