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To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"
Date: 4/5/2023 9:02:12 AM
Subject: Upcoming information bulletin: City of Vancouver to bring East Hastings encampment to a close

CONFIDENTIAL

Good morning Mayor and Council,

As you are aware, the operation to bring the East Hastings encampment to a close will begin today. The City will be issuing the below information bulletin shortly. Please keep this information bulletin embargoed until it goes live from the City media email account this morning, sometime between 9-9:30 am.

A media availability is scheduled to take place at 10:30 am at City Hall to hear from the Mayor and representatives from the City, the Vancouver Police Department and Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services.

The media availability will be live streamed on the City's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/live/qOiTu_fWPrQ?feature=share (link will go live when media availability begins)

Best,
Paul

City of Vancouver
Information bulletin
April 5, 2023

City of Vancouver to bring East Hastings encampment to a close

The City of Vancouver has requested support from the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) to bring the East Hastings encampment to a close, following a steady deterioration in public safety and an increase in fires in the area and the encampment zone.

Today, City staff, with assistance from members of the VPD, will be working to remove all remaining entrenched tents and structures in the area, approximately 80 in total. The VPD will be present to ensure staff safety as they do their work and enforce the Streets and Traffic Bylaw as necessary.

City crews have been working along East Hastings daily to address fire, life and safety concerns as identified by the July 2022 Fire Chief's Order. The persistent fire risk posed by the encampment and recent fires in neighbouring buildings has made the situation on East Hastings even more precarious. Fires are occurring too regularly in the area and with escalating intensity due to an accumulation of materials and propane tanks. More than 400 outdoor fires on East Hastings have occurred over the last eight months. Four people have already been injured this year.

Additionally, the VPD has reported a nine per cent increase in assaults in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) since last August when the encampment began, with the encampment zone accounting for 28 per cent of all assaults. The VPD also has noted an increase in weapons from tents in the zone being used in the commission of crimes.

The VPD has also identified concerns about sexual violence in the area. This alarming trend is reflected in the results of a recent Atira Women's Society survey in which all respondents reported feeling unsafe and having experienced violence including sexual assault.

Where individuals are required to remove their structures and have indicated that they do not have housing, and want shelter, the City will continue efforts to connect them with available beds. The City's Homelessness Services Outreach Team will remain connected with people from the encampment zone with whom they have been working and support them with access shelter, and housing as it becomes available.

The City appreciates the cooperation and understanding of the community during this time, as we work towards a compassionate resolution that reflects the City's commitment to public safety.

As longer-term housing options come online, the City encourages those sheltering along East Hastings to accept shelter offers. While shelters are far from ideal, they provide a safer option than sheltering in an entrenched encampment.

Background

In July 2022, the Vancouver Fire Chief issued an Order (FCO) to remove structures along East Hastings due to the extreme fire risk posed by structures adjacent to buildings.

Since last August, City staff have been engaged in daily work to seek compliance with the FCO and the Street and Traffic Bylaw 2849, Section 71A, and encourage the voluntary removal of structures from the East Hastings encampment, which at its height numbered 180 structures. Since August, more than 600 structures have been removed from the area. Despite these efforts, there are still approximately 80 tents and structures remaining in the area as of April 4, 2023.

The City of Vancouver has been working since August to connect those without housing to appropriate supports and housing options, and outreach teams have made multiple contacts and offered housing and shelter options to those in need. The City also added two City owned spaces for daytime use and programming, storage, and additional washroom options.

To date, more than 90 people have been able to accept and move into housing, and more than 165 people have accepted referrals to shelter.

Note to Editors on filming on East Hastings

Media should coordinate access to the work zone perimeter via media@vpd.ca

We ask that media be sensitive to the needs of those sheltering outdoors as well as staff and community partners in the area as they attend the site. If gathering footage, media are asked to respect requests for distance and/or instructions by City staff or police while filming.

Media are advised that interviews with staff on the ground are not available as they will be engaged in the work.

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), Skwx̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.