

File No.: 04-1000-20-2020-498

October 28, 2020

s.22(1)

Dear s.22(1)

Re: **Request for Access to Records under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (the "Act")**

I am responding to your request of September 14, 2020 for:

Records of correspondence to and from info@kennedystewart.ca. Date range: July 1, 2020 to September 14, 2020.

All responsive records are attached.

Under section 52 of the Act you may ask the Information & Privacy Commissioner to review any matter related to the City's response to your request. The Act allows you 30 business days from the date you receive this notice to request a review by writing to: Office of the Information & Privacy Commissioner, info@oipc.bc.ca or by phoning 250-387-5629.

If you request a review, please provide the Commissioner's office with: 1) the request number assigned to your request (#04-1000-20-2020-498); 2) a copy of this letter; 3) a copy of your original request for information sent to the City of Vancouver; and 4) detailed reasons or grounds on which you are seeking the review.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Freedom of Information Office at foi@vancouver.ca if you have any questions.

Yours truly,

[Signature on file]

Barbara J. Van Fraassen, BA
Director, Access to Information & Privacy

Barbara.vanfraassen@vancouver.ca

453 W. 12th Avenue Vancouver BC V5Y 1V4

*If you have any questions, please email us at foi@vancouver.ca and we will respond to you as soon as possible. Or you can call the FOI Case Manager at 604.871.6584.

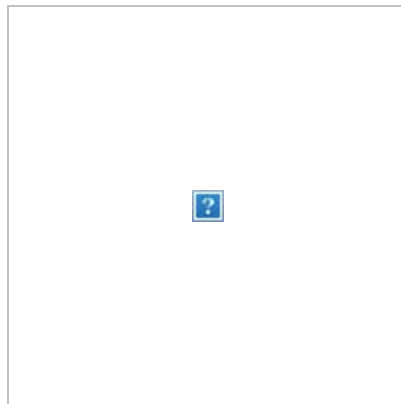
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From: [Monckton, Neil](#)
To: [Sebastian, Lorraine](#)
Subject: FOI Request: Our File No. 2020-498
Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:51:02 AM

From: Kennedy Stewart [mailto:info@kennedystewart.ca]
Sent: Monday, August 24, 2020 9:26 AM
To: Monckton, Neil
Subject: [EXT] The first five months

City of Vancouver security warning: Do not click on links or open attachments unless you were expecting the email and know the content is safe.



Dear Neil,

It's hard to believe that it's now over five months since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared.

Looking back on this unprecedented time, Vancouver has experienced several important turning points. Here are the three that stand out for me.

The early days of the pandemic

Probably the moment I will never forget was the decision to close down the city, as infections in B.C. and across Canada began to mount.

No one knew what was coming in the days and weeks ahead. But in early March, I felt we had to take fast action to prevent the virus from overwhelming Vancouver, like it had the cities of Europe.

Following the World Health Organization's declaration of the pandemic on March 11, I spent the weekend talking with my staff and other Metro Vancouver mayors about what we should do. On March 16, Vancouver started to close city services and by the next day, we moved to shutdown other major parts of the local economy.

I particularly remember speaking with Minister of Health Adrian Dix and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority chief medical health officer Dr. Patricia Daly on March 17 – St. Patrick's Day. We discussed closing the city's bars before thousands turned out to celebrate later that day. Within a couple of hours, the order was given and the downtown was virtually empty by nightfall.

Would this stop COVID 19 from spreading? No one knew. But we now can look back and see that the actions we all took made a difference.

I would like to again express my heartfelt thanks to essential and frontline workers across Vancouver. Through your dedication and hardwork, we flattened the curve here and across the province within a few weeks. Everyone played their part splendidly, working everyday to provide the services critical to Vancouver residents and businesses.

With the recent surge in new cases, I want to stress the importance of social distancing. Do not attend big parties. Do not make your bubble too big. And please do not ignore physical distancing.

Let's not lose sight of what we achieved earlier this spring and how far we have come to combat the virus.

Shutting out COVID-19 in the Downtown Eastside

With the city in lockdown, I then turned all my efforts to the Downtown Eastside.

It was clear to me that if the virus got a foothold in that neighbourhood, the lives of our most vulnerable residents would be at risk.

Across that neighbourhood, thousands of people are underhoused – rooming in privately-operated single-room occupancy hotels and shelters, or homeless on the streets. With the threat of outbreaks looming, many experts and advocates told me that too many residents would find it impossible to safely distance from one another and the threat of infection was extremely high.

In response to this looming disaster, your city government stepped in to ensure that our neighbours in the Downtown Eastside could fend off COVID-19 and quickly setup a special response unit to keep residents safe.

Springing into action, the unit made early moves that would prove critical to preventing community spread of COVID-19. From coordinating food deliveries to securing regular cleanings of private rooming houses, from establishing a new hub for distributing personal protective equipment to installing handwashing stations and portable toilets throughout the Downtown Eastside, the city put in supports quickly.

On top of the amazing efforts of city employees, the dedicated workers who provide services and housing to the residents of the Downtown Eastside - - from the health authority to the non-profit agencies -- also jumped in with both feet to fight the virus. And while other Canadian cities saw outbreaks among their most vulnerable residents, Vancouver has yet to record a single one.

Sadly, while we successfully beat back COVID-19, the other health emergency – the overdose crisis – that has ravaged residents for more than four years rages on and has turned more deadly. This year, we have already lost 178 lives of loved ones, friends, family and neighbours.

However, recent developments give me some hope. In January, Victoria and Ottawa backed the opening of a facility to provide a safe drug supply and later this year that site is expected to open.

Then in March, in response to the pandemic, senior governments announced a temporary exemption so that health professionals could prescribe

medications as alternatives to deadly illicit drugs. And while not enough people are yet accessing safe prescription alternatives, earlier this month, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Judy Darcy announced new supports to expand access.

But we can't stop there. In the coming months, I will continue to push for solutions to flatten this other, more deadly curve, so we can save lives.

Getting to a new normal

Barely two months into the pandemic, on May 18 we began to re-open the city.

No one, including me, could imagine the pent up desire of residents to reconnect with one another and their city when the Province announced the move to phase two and the re-opening of many businesses. And perhaps the most anticipated and desired openings were for the city's patios.

Within ten days of the start of phase two, I called a special council meeting to adopt an expanded patio program. By mid-August, we now have over 360 new patios providing expanded and safe spaces for residents to share a drink, a bite of food, or simply shop.

Of course, the city is more than just patios. We also created parklets in the Downtown Eastside, pop-up plazas and tens of kilometres of slower streets for walking, cycling and rolling for residents to hang out, exercise or access businesses.

But to re-open, Vancouver also needs financial help from senior governments. Over many months, I worked with Canada's 21 other big city mayors to push for emergency funding to protect essential community services and keep public transit running.

By late July, the mayors' dogged advocacy paid off. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the premiers announced the safe restart agreement, a multibillion dollar aid package for the country's financially beleaguered cities.

Now with the promise of aid from Victoria and Ottawa, Vancouver has re-opened libraries, public

pools and service centres for vulnerable residents. Later this summer childcare facilities and community centres will also welcome back residents.

Looking ahead, there will be more challenges for our city, as we move into the next several months under COVID-19.

We still have a housing and homeless crisis. Poverty, mental health and addiction have been made worse by the pandemic. And inner city neighbourhood residents and businesses struggle under this new normal.

But I remain committed to making this a city that works for everyone. I will be working even harder this fall to build more housing for working people, reduce homelessness, expand safe supply and support neighbourhoods most impacted by the pandemic.

While we still have sunny and warm days, I hope you and those close to you enjoy the final few weeks of summer.

Stay well and stay distanced.

- Kennedy

Kennedy Stewart
Mayor of Vancouver

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Kennedy Stewart · Canada

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stop receiving emails, [click here \[kennedystewart.ca\]](#).

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From: Monckton, Neil
Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:52 AM
To: Sebastian, Lorraine
Subject: FOI Request: Our File No. 2020-498

From: Kennedy Stewart [mailto:info@kennedystewart.ca]
Sent: Thursday, July 30, 2020 12:53 PM
To: Monckton, Neil
Subject: [EXT] Mayors secure aid for cities | Overdose deaths mounting | More affordable rental passes | Childcare re-opens

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KENNEDY STEWART

Dear Neil,

For this week's update, I want to share with you some good news about senior government support for cities, council approving another affordable housing project, ending street checks and more city services coming online for residents.

I also want to catch you up on the challenges we are still facing with overdoses – B.C.'s other health emergency – and the heart-breaking rise in the number of deaths over the past two months.

Ottawa and Victoria respond to big city mayors' call for aid

Since the early days of the pandemic, I have worked with 21 other big city mayors from across the country to call for emergency funding to protect essential community services and keep public transit running.

On July 16, governments in Ottawa and Victoria answered that call.

First, the federal government put forward a \$19-billion safe restart funding package that covers seven different areas, including direct aid for cities and transit. Then, the Province agreed to match – dollar-for-dollar – the federal amount set aside for municipal and public transit operations.

Now, while some people said seeking support from senior governments was a waste of time, this outcome shows what can happen when mayors of Canada's biggest cities come together. With the support of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, we made a compelling case that the economic restart includes support for the vital services residents and local businesses rely on.

It's a big thanks from me to Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Horgan for recognizing how important cities are – and will continue to be – as we head into the next several months of the global pandemic.

Details of the aid package are not yet released, so I will report back when I have more about how this recovery support will land on the ground here in Vancouver.

Overdose crisis deepens

It's with great sadness that I share with you this next update.

Poisoned drugs killed 175 people in June and 171 in May – the two worst months on record since the overdose emergency was declared in 2016. To date, we have lost more than 5,700 of our neighbours, friends, families and loved ones in Vancouver and across B.C.

The work of my overdose emergency task force is still ongoing and the goal remains the same – save people from dying from overdoses.

One of the task force's recommendations was the creation of an innovative pilot program that sees Vancouver firefighters and Vancouver Coastal

Health (VCH) staff follow up with overdose patients to connect them to treatment and support services. The goal is to break the overdose cycle and create pathways to harm reduction, safe supply and treatment.

In addition, in March 2020, the federal government announced funding for a safe supply pilot project I am supporting. Called Safer Alternatives for Emergency Response or SAFER, it will be run in partnership with VCH, the BC Centre on Substance Use and the Portland Hotel Society. The pilot centre will expand access to safe supply and the goal is to have it opened later this year.

But the work does not stop there for me or my office.

This is a health emergency and the way forward to fix our broken drug policy is to provide a safe supply. I will continue to work with the federal and provincial governments to reduce overdose deaths in Vancouver and save more lives.

More moderate-income rental on the way

On July 21, city council passed another moderate-income rental housing pilot project (MIRHPP) development. The Broadway and Birch St. project will create 258 new rental homes along the second largest employment corridor in B.C.

Among the 258 new rental homes, 58 are permanently vacancy-controlled homes with rents starting at \$950 per month for people like retail workers and artists. The other 200 will be market rentals units ideal for healthcare professionals and firefighters.

Like the other eight MIRHPP projects approved by city council, this project will provide much-needed rental homes that Vancouver is sorely lacking. Furthermore, the project is located steps away from a future Broadway subway station at Granville, giving residents of the new tower access to the region's rapid transit network and reducing reliance on private automobiles.

Plus, as part of the construction of the project, more than 900 new jobs will be created. This will be a great boost for us to restart our economy post-pandemic. I am so glad that five other councillors joined with me to pass this project!

City council calls for an end to police street checks

If we want to make meaningful changes to policing in Vancouver, then I believe ending street checks will be part of that work.

That's why I was so proud when my motion to abolish street checks was passed unanimously by city council on July 22, after dozens of speakers from the public came out in support. Over the course of the council meeting, many presenting shared stories about this unjust and unfair practice which disproportionately impacts the Black, Indigenous and people of colour communities in our city.

As for next steps, while city council doesn't have the authority to abolish street checks on its own, this matter will now likely head to the Vancouver Police Board. I expect the Police Board will consider its own motion later this fall to review street checks and make a final decision on a ban.

Please stay tuned for updates here, as I keep pushing for an end to street checks.

More city services to support residents

Lastly, two quick updates on childcare and heat relief services.

Even before the pandemic, access to affordable, quality child care was a challenge for many Vancouver families and that stress weighs heavily on parents – especially women who remain the primary caregivers today.

With the restart now well underway, I know many parents are concerned about the availability of childcare to help them return to work. So, I am

pleased to report that we will be reopening childcare and preschool care services across 20 communities centres starting September 1.

This is a good start, but I know a lot more needs to be done. I will keep pushing for more childcare to be included, as a key element of the restart plan.

With summer weather officially here, so is the heat. And in response, the City is actively rolling out services in the event of a heat warning, including the opening of air-conditioned cooling sites in four community centres and one library branch.

As well, the City will also provide funding to Atira Women's Resource Society to run a daily drop-in centre in the Downtown Eastside for cooling.

Thank you for reading this update.

Stay well and stay safe.

- Kennedy

Kennedy Stewart
Mayor of Vancouver

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Kennedy Stewart · Canada

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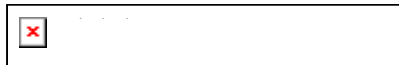
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Piche, Danica

From: Monckton, Neil
Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:51 AM
To: Sebastian, Lorraine
Subject: FOI Request: Our File No. 2020-498

From: Kennedy Stewart [mailto:info@kennedystewart.ca]
Sent: Saturday, September 5, 2020 9:36 AM
To: Monckton, Neil
Subject: [EXT] It's been a quick start to September

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Dear Neil,

This first week of September has gotten off to a fast start.

First, thanks to strong partnerships with both the provincial and federal government, I made several announcements about new investments to reduce homelessness, improve rapid transit, support green infrastructure and renew important health care facilities in Vancouver.

In addition, I announced steps I am taking to ensure our 2SLGBTQ+ neighbours and other communities who are the target of hate are made safer from harm and violence.

More supportive housing for Vancouver's homeless

I am pleased to share with you that the **City of Vancouver and BC Housing are partnering to build nearly 450 supportive homes** for those that need it most. This commitment includes 350 permanent supportive homes, as well as 98 temporary modular homes which will be ready by

spring 2021.

Before the pandemic, we were already in the middle of a housing and homelessness crisis. This crisis has only been exacerbated by COVID-19, as important health restrictions mean less space in shelters and single rooms due to physical distancing. That's why partnerships between the City and senior levels of government are key to addressing homelessness in Vancouver.

As I have said many times, the only one way to tackle homelessness is to build more housing. In total, the Province has invested in nearly **1,500 supportive homes** for Vancouver. Thanks again goes to Premier John Horgan and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Selina Robinson for investing in housing for the city's most vulnerable population.

Broadway Subway construction to begin this fall

On Thursday, I joined the Premier, B.C. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Claire Trevena and Vancouver MP and federal Minister of Digital Government Joyce Murray to announce the contractor for the Broadway Subway project that will see the Millennium Line extended from Commercial Dr. to Arbutus St by 2025. Hats off to our provincial and federal partners for making crucial investments to improve public transit and fight climate change.

Once complete, it will mean **14 million less cars on the road and 7,300 fewer tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions** annually by 2030. Plus, the Broadway Line will support the second largest employment centre in British Columbia that provides more than 85,000 jobs to our region. The expansion will also alleviate growing traffic congestion and transit overcrowding that is limiting workforce productivity, impacting economic growth, and the quality of life for the region's residents.

Meanwhile, I will continue to work with the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and the University of British Columbia to advocate for extending the line all the way to the University. With more than 50 per cent of UBC's 16,000 staff and 56,000 students travelling from

municipalities beyond the City of Vancouver, extending the line to UBC is the right thing to do and remains a high priority for me.

\$10 million investment towards renewable energy

Last January, City Council voted to declare a climate emergency. This declaration means Vancouver must take big moves to address the climate crisis. But our city cannot tackle the climate crisis alone – we need other levels of government to support action with us.

That's why on September 1, I announced a joint partnership with federal and provincial Ministers of the Environment and Climate Change Jonathan Wilkinson and George Heyman for a **\$10 million investment to provide low-carbon heating to homes across False Creek**. To make this happen, we will be transitioning the City-owned neighbourhood energy utility from today's 70 percent renewable energy to 100 percent renewable energy before 2030.

New complex care transition centre for children

Last week, B.C. Minister of Health Adrian Dix and I unveiled the Province's plans to invest in a **new health care facility for Vancouver – the B.C. Children's Complex Care Transition Centre – to provide vital services for children** moving between acute hospital care and community or home care. In addition to the services for children, the new centre will provide better treatment and training for both parents and caregivers.

The new centre will be located at the existing Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children. Sunny Hill will move to the B.C. Children's and Women's Hospital site.

Action to support 2SLGBTQ+ community fight hate

The troubling incidents directed against 2LSGBTQ+ residents in the West End's Davie Village in August were a strong reminder that **there is much more to do to fight hate in our city**. These actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated – hatred has

no place in Vancouver.

However, I know this is a widespread problem that goes beyond Davie Village. For example, the West End preachers and their associates are also issuing anti-Muslim statements. Again, this harm and violence has no place here. To combat these hateful acts across neighbourhoods and communities, I'm engaging with 2LSGBTQ+ representatives and other impacted communities, as well as the Attorney General of B.C., to explore legal tools to prevent this type of hate in our city.

Vancouver is a vibrant city made up of many diverse communities and we need to stand up and take action in the face of hatred. I'm committed to finding new ways to protect all our neighbours.

That's my update for this week. But before I sign off I want to wish a happy Labour Day to all the workers across our city.

Even though we can't gather this Monday to recognize those who fought, and continue to fight, for workers' rights, I want to recognize the important contributions of the labour movement. The gains it has won for working people and the unwavering advocacy for a better society continue to drive my efforts to make Vancouver a city that works for everyone.

Enjoy the last long weekend of summer – safely!

- Kennedy

Kennedy Stewart
Mayor of Vancouver

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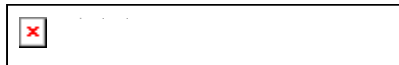
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Piche, Danica

From: Monckton, Neil
Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:50 AM
To: Sebastian, Lorraine
Subject: FOI Request: Our File No. 2020-498

From: Kennedy Stewart [mailto:info@kennedystewart.ca]
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 12:40 PM
To: Monckton, Neil
Subject: [EXT] Housing is the solution

City of Vancouver security warning: Do not click on links or open attachments unless you were expecting the email and know the content is safe.



Dear Neil,

COVID-19 has put an immense strain on our friends and neighbours, especially when it comes to housing and homelessness.

We have reached a tipping point in Vancouver, not just in Strathcona but in how we support all our marginalized neighbours. I'm sympathetic to both residents who live near encampments, and our vulnerable neighbours who have nowhere else to go.

I don't think anyone believes that sleeping in parks is the solution. *The answer to homelessness is to build more housing.*

I am proud of the Province's record investment in supportive housing, including the recent purchase of three Vancouver hotels. And I am still calling on the federal government to come to the table and invest in emergency housing now, but our city can't wait. **We all know we need to take action now.**

That is why I have called a special council meeting. Tomorrow, city council will vote on my motion that asks staff to investigate three options to

accelerate emergency housing creation for homeless Vancouver residents:

1. Leasing or purchasing housing units including hotels, single-room occupancy residences, and other available housing stock;
2. Establishing a temporary emergency relief encampment on vacant public or private land; and,
3. Temporarily converting City-owned buildings into emergency housing or shelter space.

[If you would like to learn more about why I have called the special council meeting, I encourage you to listen to my recent radio interview with Lynda Steele. \[kennedystewart.ca\]](#)

As I said in the interview, I hope I can count on the support of the whole Council, who have already shown a commitment to addressing homelessness. Together, we can respond to this critical moment with compassion and generosity.

[You can watch the special council meeting live tomorrow online at 1:00 p.m. here. \[kennedystewart.ca\]](#) I look forward to updating you on our progress.

- Kennedy

Kennedy Stewart
Mayor of Vancouver

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Kennedy Stewart · Canada

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Piche, Danica

From: Monckton, Neil
Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:50 AM
To: Sebastian, Lorraine
Subject: FOI Request: Our File No. 2020-498

Hi Lorraine,

Here is the first of a few emails I have received from the info@kennedystewart.ca account.

Aside from receiving these, I have no other correspondence.

Neil

From: Kennedy Stewart [mailto:info@kennedystewart.ca]
Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020 2:31 PM
To: Monckton, Neil
Subject: [EXT] New - Building homes for the middle class

City of Vancouver security warning: Do not click on links or open attachments unless you were expecting the email and know the content is safe.



Dear Neil,

Housing affordability for everyone is my top priority. That is why I am excited to share my new plan, [Making HOME \[makinghome.ca\]](http://makinghome.ca) (Housing Options for Middle-Income Earners). Making HOME allows middle-income households in Vancouver to realize the dream of owning a home in single-detached neighbourhoods across the city.

Here's how it works. Instead of building one big house that only 2.5 percent of residents can afford, [Making HOME \[makinghome.ca\]](http://makinghome.ca) allows up to four market homes on a standard residential lot, if they also build **up to two additional permanently affordable homes.**

[Find out more about my revolutionary plan here. \[makinghome.ca\]](http://makinghome.ca)



[\[makinghome.ca\]](http://makinghome.ca)

We know that tens of thousands of middle-class residents are looking for better options to create vibrant communities and stay in Vancouver. **But these homes currently don't exist.**

Right now, Vancouver reserves almost 60 percent of residential neighbourhoods for homes that only the top 2.5 percent of income earners can afford. If the pilot project is successful, we can expand the program to build small-scale, multi-family homes affordable to households earning \$80,000 per year all across Vancouver.

[I encourage you to check out Making HOME today and sign up for updates \[makinghome.ca\].](http://makinghome.ca)

I hope all of Council will support my pilot program because a **Vancouver that works for everyone builds homes for everyone.**

Together, we can increase housing choices across our city, relieve pressure on the rental market, and unlock homeownership for a new generation of residents.

Kennedy Stewart
Mayor of Vancouver

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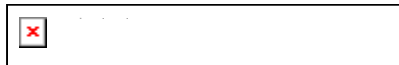
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Piche, Danica

From: Monckton, Neil
Sent: Tuesday, September 15, 2020 11:51 AM
To: Sebastian, Lorraine
Subject: FOI Request: Our File No. 2020-498

From: Kennedy Stewart [mailto:info@kennedystewart.ca]
Sent: Monday, August 24, 2020 9:26 AM
To: Monckton, Neil
Subject: [EXT] The first five months

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Dear Neil,

It's hard to believe that it's now over five months since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared.

Looking back on this unprecedented time, Vancouver has experienced several important turning points. Here are the three that stand out for me.

The early days of the pandemic

Probably the moment I will never forget was the decision to close down the city, as infections in B.C. and across Canada began to mount.

No one knew what was coming in the days and weeks ahead. But in early March, I felt we had to take fast action to prevent the virus from overwhelming Vancouver, like it had the cities of Europe.

Following the World Health Organization's declaration of the pandemic on March 11, I spent the weekend talking with my staff and other Metro Vancouver mayors about what we should do. On March 16, Vancouver started to close city services

and by the next day, we moved to shutdown other major parts of the local economy.

I particularly remember speaking with Minister of Health Adrian Dix and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority chief medical health officer Dr. Patricia Daly on March 17 – St. Patrick's Day. We discussed closing the city's bars before thousands turned out to celebrate later that day. Within a couple of hours, the order was given and the downtown was virtually empty by nightfall.

Would this stop COVID 19 from spreading? No one knew. But we now can look back and see that the actions we all took made a difference.

I would like to again express my heartfelt thanks to essential and frontline workers across Vancouver. Through your dedication and hardwork, we flattened the curve here and across the province within a few weeks. Everyone played their part splendidly, working everyday to provide the services critical to Vancouver residents and businesses.

With the recent surge in new cases, I want to stress the importance of social distancing. Do not attend big parties. Do not make your bubble too big. And please do not ignore physical distancing.

Let's not lose sight of what we achieved earlier this spring and how far we have come to combat the virus.

Shutting out COVID-19 in the Downtown Eastside

With the city in lockdown, I then turned all my efforts to the Downtown Eastside.

It was clear to me that if the virus got a foothold in that neighbourhood, the lives of our most vulnerable residents would be at risk.

Across that neighbourhood, thousands of people are underhoused – rooming in privately-operated single-room occupancy hotels and shelters, or homeless on the streets. With the threat of outbreaks looming, many experts and advocates told me that too many residents would find it

impossible to safely distance from one another and the threat of infection was extremely high.

In response to this looming disaster, your city government stepped in to ensure that our neighbours in the Downtown Eastside could fend off COVID-19 and quickly setup a special response unit to keep residents safe.

Springing into action, the unit made early moves that would prove critical to preventing community spread of COVID-19. From coordinating food deliveries to securing regular cleanings of private rooming houses, from establishing a new hub for distributing personal protective equipment to installing handwashing stations and portable toilets throughout the Downtown Eastside, the city put in supports quickly.

On top of the amazing efforts of city employees, the dedicated workers who provide services and housing to the residents of the Downtown Eastside - from the health authority to the non-profit agencies -- also jumped in with both feet to fight the virus. And while other Canadian cities saw outbreaks among their most vulnerable residents, Vancouver has yet to record a single one.

Sadly, while we successfully beat back COVID-19, the other health emergency – the overdose crisis – that has ravaged residents for more than four years rages on and has turned more deadly. This year, we have already lost 178 lives of loved ones, friends, family and neighbours.

However, recent developments give me some hope. In January, Victoria and Ottawa backed the opening of a facility to provide a safe drug supply and later this year that site is expected to open.

Then in March, in response to the pandemic, senior governments announced a temporary exemption so that health professionals could prescribe medications as alternatives to deadly illicit drugs. And while not enough people are yet accessing safe prescription alternatives, earlier this month, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Judy Darcy announced new supports to expand access.

But we can't stop there. In the coming months, I will continue to push for solutions to flatten this other, more deadly curve, so we can save lives.

Getting to a new normal

Barely two months into the pandemic, on May 18 we began to re-open the city.

No one, including me, could imagine the pent up desire of residents to reconnect with one another and their city when the Province announced the move to phase two and the re-opening of many businesses. And perhaps the most anticipated and desired openings were for the city's patios.

Within ten days of the start of phase two, I called a special council meeting to adopt an expanded patio program. By mid-August, we now have over 360 new patios providing expanded and safe spaces for residents to share a drink, a bite of food, or simply shop.

Of course, the city is more than just patios. We also created parklets in the Downtown Eastside, pop-up plazas and tens of kilometres of slower streets for walking, cycling and rolling for residents to hang out, exercise or access businesses.

But to re-open, Vancouver also needs financial help from senior governments. Over many months, I worked with Canada's 21 other big city mayors to push for emergency funding to protect essential community services and keep public transit running.

By late July, the mayors' dogged advocacy paid off. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the premiers announced the safe restart agreement, a multibillion dollar aid package for the country's financially beleaguered cities.

Now with the promise of aid from Victoria and Ottawa, Vancouver has re-opened libraries, public pools and service centres for vulnerable residents. Later this summer childcare facilities and community centres will also welcome back residents.

Looking ahead, there will be more challenges for

our city, as we move into the next several months under COVID-19.

We still have a housing and homeless crisis. Poverty, mental health and addiction have been made worse by the pandemic. And inner city neighbourhood residents and businesses struggle under this new normal.

But I remain committed to making this a city that works for everyone. I will be working even harder this fall to build more housing for working people, reduce homelessness, expand safe supply and support neighbourhoods most impacted by the pandemic.

While we still have sunny and warm days, I hope you and those close to you enjoy the final few weeks of summer.

Stay well and stay distanced.

- Kennedy

Kennedy Stewart
Mayor of Vancouver

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