

From: **"Singh, Sandra"**

To: **"Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"**

Date: 1/9/2024 10:03:34 PM

Subject: Update: Oppenheimer Park and Park Control By-law enforcement

Dear Mayor and Council,

You may have seen some media coverage of this morning's daily Park Control By-law compliance work at Oppenheimer Park. Please find below some additional information that provides the context for the daily work, an update on the issues Park Rangers were encountering, and some broader information about the City's support for people without housing.

- The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's Park Control By-Law seeks to provide a balanced approach to managing use of limited park spaces across the city, particularly in underserved communities such as the Downtown Eastside.
- Recognizing the homelessness crisis, the By-law allows for residents without housing to set up temporary shelters from dusk to dawn, so long as tents and structures are packed up in the morning. This requirement to bring down structures at dawn ensures that during the day city parks are available to support the health and wellbeing of the whole community.
- Park Rangers have been working in Oppenheimer Park and other parks to encourage By-law compliance on a daily basis for many months. This is ongoing daily work.
- Up until late December, we were seeing regular and productive voluntary compliance with the By-law in Oppenheimer Park.
- In recent weeks, Park Rangers began to experience a growing number of people who refused to comply with the By-law voluntarily.
- Given the number of structures in Oppenheimer Park (26) and the increasing resistance to voluntary compliance, a larger team is required to ensure staff safety while doing this work. As per standard By-law enforcement operating procedures, VPD accompanies By-law enforcement activities to ensure worker safety.
- This is daily By-law enforcement work that happens in parks across the city to ensure that while parks can be used by people without housing for overnight shelter, they are available for the whole community during the day.
- Additional information is below for broader context. We will share this information with some stakeholders.

Please let me know if you have further questions.

Thank you,

Sandra

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's Park Control By-Law seeks to provide a balanced approach to managing use of limited park spaces across the city, particularly in underserved communities such as the Downtown Eastside. Recognizing the homelessness crisis, the By-law allows for residents without housing to set up temporary shelters from dusk to dawn, so long as tents and structures are packed up in the morning. This requirement to bring down structures at dawn ensures that during the day city parks are available to support the health and wellbeing of the whole community. By allowing overnight sheltering but daytime structure removal, the By-law attempts to provide a balanced approach to managing the city's limited and highly valued public green spaces for the benefit of all Vancouver residents.

Across the city, on a daily basis, Park Rangers work with those sheltering in parks to ensure compliance. When requested, they make connections to the City's Homelessness Services Outreach team. Outreach staff work with individuals sheltering outdoors across Vancouver, connecting them with supports, shelter, and housing when available.\u8239

As one of the only parks in the Downtown Eastside – a park deficient neighbourhood – Oppenheimer Park is a highly used and valued community green space in the heart of this low-income community. The City also offers programs and services through the Field House in the Park during the day. Park Rangers visit Oppenheimer Park daily seeking compliance with the Park Control By-law to ensure that the park is accessible to the whole community during the day, even as it is used for sheltering overnight.

Until late December, people sheltering overnight in Oppenheimer Park were working productively with Park Rangers to comply with the By-law, enabling balanced use of the park. Over recent weeks, we started to see some people begin refusing to comply with the By-law voluntarily. The Park Board and City are very concerned about the growth of another encampment that is unsafe and would impact community access to Oppenheimer Park. The Park Board, supported by VPD to ensure worker safety, will continue to encourage compliance with and enforce the By-law on a daily basis to ensure this balanced approach for the whole community. We also hope that advocates will support people without housing to be in compliance with the By-law versus encouraging them to be in contravention of the By-law.

It is important to note that the daily By-law enforcement that happens at Oppenheimer Park and other City parks is not a decampment: people without housing are welcome to set up their tents or structures to shelter overnight. We are simply asking them to pack up in the morning to enable the whole community to have access to the park during the day.

We recognize that a thoughtful approach to people's belongings is important, and Park Rangers are prepared to remove non-essential items and store essential items for people sheltering in the park. Stored belongings can be accessed within 30 days by calling 311. Items that are damaged or soiled or any drug paraphernalia will be disposed. This is consistent with the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's approach in all parks. The City has also partnered with BC Housing to create storage at the corner of Main and East Hastings. Operated by a Downtown Eastside based non-profit, this storage service provides people without housing in the Downtown Eastside access to a safe place to store valued items.

In anticipation of winter weather, the City has already activated our Winter Response program, enabled through partnership with the Province and local service providers. This program activates additional spaces beyond the City's 1,400 shelter spaces between November and March each year. For winter 2023/2024, Homelessness Services staff have confirmed 373 additional indoor spaces to support people without housing to come inside: 67 Temporary Winter Shelter spaces across two sites, 70 Extreme Weather Response shelters across 4 sites, and 236 Warming Centres spaces across 7 sites. Staff continue to explore additional sites throughout the season. For information on shelters and other resources visit <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/shelter-bed-in-vancouver-map.pdf>.

The City acknowledges that shelter is not housing. However, these indoor options are safer and warmer than sleeping outdoors, especially as the temperature drops. Recognizing that demand is greater than available housing, and people are living in unsafe conditions on the street, shelter space is an important interim solution for people to come inside and stay safe and warm.

The City of Vancouver response to homelessness continues to be to work in partnership with the Government of British Columbia, including BC Housing, to build longer-term supportive and social housing and to support the activation of new emergency shelters. The City has made significant investments to support people experiencing homelessness, more than any other municipality in the region. Over \$600M in the current 4-year capital plan is focused on creating new and preserving existing affordable housing. Between 2018 and 2023 alone, the City committed over 30 sites to create 750 supportive housing units and approximately 2,500 units of social housing, and between 2000 and 2023, the City supported the creation of 443 new shelter spaces – 346 year-round and 97 seasonal. This work continues.

Vancouver has only 25% of the region's overall population, however, in terms of operational units and spaces, as of 2023 we had:

- over 75% of the region's operating shelter spaces
- over 77% of the region's supportive housing units
- 50% of the region's social housing

This demonstrates that the City's approach to homelessness is to partner with senior government to build housing and enable shelters so people can come inside, but we cannot manage this crisis moving forward without a regional approach.