

From: **"Singh, Sandra"**
To: **"Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"**
Date: 1/24/2024 9:00:34 AM
Subject: By-law enforcement during cold and snow events: consolidated information

Hello Mayor and Council,

Over the recent cold and snow events, you received a lot of incremental information regarding By-law enforcement in relation to people without housing sheltering outdoors through updates related to various areas of work. We thought it might be useful for you to have all of the information in one concise email in advance of the next cold or snow event.

Please note, Communications has also published a webpage on [vancouver.ca](https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/maintaining-by-law-compliance-during-cold-weather.aspx) where we provide some proactive public information on the City's approach: <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/maintaining-by-law-compliance-during-cold-weather.aspx>.

We hope that this consolidated information below and the website above will support you through any inquiries during the next cold weather events. As always, please feel free to direct media inquiries to media@vancouver.ca.

Best,
Sandra

By-law enforcement during extreme weather
Proposed messages for use in responding to emails/messages
January 24, 2024

Background

During cold weather, questions often arise about how by-law enforcement is handled concerning people without housing as there is heightened concern regarding the health and safety impacts of extreme cold. These questions are important as we should all be concerned about people who are without housing.

Enforcement of Park Board and City By-laws is a necessary daily activity, even during cold weather events. This work ensures safe access to sidewalks, fire department building connections, and emergency exit egress from buildings, and also ensures the whole community has access to parks during the day, which are important for the health and well-being of the whole community.

Sheltering outdoors during extreme weather presents serious fire and other life safety issues for those sheltering outdoors and our efforts are focused on encouraging people to come inside. Our teams are dedicated to establishing connections with those sheltering outdoors, ensuring they have connections to shelter and the necessary supports. The City also continues to make significant investments in social and supportive housing, emergency shelter activation, and cold weather response spaces for people to come inside from the cold. For the 2023/2024 winter season, the City has worked with BC Housing, the Province, and non-profit organizations to activate an additional 422 spaces for people to come inside overnight.

Please use the following messages if you are asked for background information or to answer specific questions from your stakeholders.

By-law background

- Homelessness has devastating impacts on people and is something the whole community should care about addressing.
- The City strives to strike a balance between the needs of people without housing who are seeking to shelter outdoors and the public spaces that serve everyone who works, lives, and visits Vancouver. The City acknowledges the importance of compassion and empathy in our approach, recognizing the humanity of those experiencing homelessness.
- The City's Street and Traffic By-law seeks to balance diverse uses in the public realm and ensure public safety.

- In terms of sidewalks, the By-law seeks to ensure that people with all types of accessibility needs can safely travel along sidewalks, that fire department connections are accessible in the event of an emergency, that flammable materials are not too close to buildings, and that emergency exits are not blocked.
- The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's Park Control By-Law seeks to provide a balanced approach to managing the use of limited park spaces across the city, particularly in underserved communities. Recognizing the homelessness crisis, the By-law allows residents without housing to set up temporary shelters from dusk to dawn. This requirement to bring down structures in parks at dawn ensures that during the day, city parks are available to support the health and well-being of the whole community.

By-law Compliance and Enforcement

- Enforcement of Park Board and City By-laws is a necessary daily activity, even during cold weather events, to ensure public safety and to enable pedestrian access to streets, sidewalks, and other public spaces for the whole community. During weather events, By-law enforcement is also critical for safe access to sidewalks for pedestrians and for crews to conduct snow-clearing activities.
- Sheltering outdoors during extreme weather presents serious fire and other life safety issues and our efforts focus on encouraging people to come inside.
- During the day during cold weather, individuals are encouraged to stay warm in any Vancouver Public Library Branch, recreation centre, community centre or civic building during operating hours. There are also other social service drop-in centres across the community run by non-profit providers that can be accessed.
- Regardless of weather, an accumulation of materials alongside buildings still poses a significant fire risk associated with flammable materials, blocked exits and fire department connections.
- The City and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation recognizes that a thoughtful approach to people's belongings is important, and as we are working to ensure By-laws compliance, Park Rangers and Engineering crews are prepared to remove non-essential items and store essential items for people sheltering outdoors.
- Stored belongings can be accessed within 30 days by calling 311. Items that are damaged or soiled or any drug paraphernalia are disposed of as they cannot be safely handled or stored.
- 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.
- We acknowledge the importance of compassion and empathy in our approach to working with people who are without housing, recognizing the humanity of those experiencing homelessness.

Weather impacts on enforcement

- The City and Park Board may briefly pause enforcement during a severe snowstorm or other weather or public safety event when it is not possible to work safely.
- In very cold weather, impoundment is infrequent, but if needed due to immediate safety concerns, staff would proceed. Staff exercise discretion at these times.
- During weather events our focus is on urging people to come inside to Warming Centres or shelters. It is dangerous to be out in the extreme cold, both in terms of health risks (e.g., hypothermia) and the increased risk of fires due to heating attempts (candles, propane tanks, etc. have all caused tent fire deaths in the past).

Supports in place for shelter and spaces to keep warm

- For the 2023/2024 winter season, the City has worked with BC Housing, the Province, and non-profit organizations to activate an additional 428 spaces for people to come inside overnight (warming centres and extreme weather response shelters).
- Engineering crews and Parks Rangers all have the Warming Centre & Winter Shelter information sheet to ensure the most up-to-date information is shared, and they share this information with unsheltered people whenever possible.
- When requested, they also make connections to the City's Homelessness Services Outreach team. Independently, Outreach Services staff work with individuals sheltering outdoors across Vancouver, connecting them with supports, shelter, and housing when available.
- The City's response to homelessness continues to be working in partnership with the Provincial and Federal governments to build longer-term supportive and social housing and to support the activation of new emergency shelters.
- We have made significant investments to support people experiencing homelessness, more than any other municipality in the region.
 - Between 2018 and 2023 alone, the City committed to over 30 sites to create 750 supportive housing units and approximately 2,500 units of social housing.
 - Between 2000 and 2023, the City supported the creation of 443 new shelter spaces – 346 year-round

- and 97 seasonal.
- We partnered with senior government to implement a wide variety of approaches to deliver these social and supportive housing units and shelter spaces, such as opening purpose-built modular and non-modular housing, converting existing hotels to housing, deploying temporary worker housing, building tiny shelters, and renovating storage buildings for emergency shelter.
- The work continues, and we continue to explore a range of innovative approaches within the context of our dense urban environment.
 - Over \$600M allocated in the current 4-year capital plan is focused on creating new and preserving existing affordable housing.
 - We also continue to highlight that the need for a regional approach to homelessness. Vancouver has made significant investments to support people experiencing homelessness, more than any other municipality in the region. We have only 25% of the region's overall population, however, in terms of operational units and spaces, as of 2023 Vancouver had over 75% of the region's operating shelter spaces, over 77% of the region's supportive housing units, and 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 that we cannot manage this crisis moving forward without a regional approach.

Thank you,

Sandra

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.