



VANCOUVER
BOARD OF
PARKS AND
RECREATION

August 19, 2019

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Malcolm Bromley
General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **Oppenheimer Park Encampment GM Order – Board Briefing Memo**

Dear Commissioners,

This morning at 9:00am, I will be providing notice to people who have erected tents or other structures in Oppenheimer Park that they must remove all these structures by 6:00pm on Wednesday, August 21.

BC Housing, in partnership with the City and non-profit housing providers, has secured more than 100 units of safe and stable accommodation for people experiencing homelessness who have been sleeping overnight in the park and who have engaged with the City's Homeless Outreach team (Carnegie Outreach) seeking housing assistance. All of the housing options are in publicly owned and non-profit run buildings, including SRO rooms, many of which have been recently renovated. A number of shelter spaces are also available as an option for individuals to come inside while suitable housing is identified.

Carnegie Outreach continues to be on site daily, working to support individuals to access housing and shelter, income and other support services. To help people with the transition, BC Housing has a team in the park to support people packing and transporting their belongings, once an offer is accepted. Park Board staff are offering longer-term storage options for any possessions that individuals are not able to move to their new accommodation right away.

As campers move out of the park and into accommodation, staff will cordon off sections of the park to ensure the area is safe and clean, and begin the process of restoring the turf, gardens, playground and other park amenities in order to return this valuable greenspace to community use. While grass areas may be closed for repairs, all pathways, walkways and sidewalk areas will remain open.

The safety of the people sleeping in Oppenheimer Park continues to be our top priority and we are strongly encouraging everyone to work with Carnegie Outreach to move into safe and stable accommodation.

We are sending an information bulletin to media with these details later this morning. We have also included speaking notes and an FAQ below to assist you with responding to inquiries from the public. If you have any questions, please reach out to me directly.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Malcolm Bromley'.

Malcolm Bromley
General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

Copy to: City Manager's Office, PB Senior Leadership Team, PB Communications



Speaking Points

- This morning, the General Manager of the Park Board provided notice to people who have erected tents and other structures in Oppenheimer Park that they must remove all structures by 6 pm on Wednesday, August 21.
- BC Housing, in partnership with the City, has secured more than 100 units of safe and stable accommodation for people who have been working with Carnegie Outreach seeking housing assistance.
- The housing options are in publicly owned and non-profit run buildings, including SRO rooms, many of which have been recently renovated.
- A number of shelter spaces are also available as an option for individuals to come inside while suitable housing is identified.
- The General Manager's order was issued in response to ongoing concerns about the serious health and life safety risks present in the park, and in light of housing options being secured for those living there who are experiencing homelessness.
- A Fire Chief's order has been in place since February which sets out a number of conditions to reduce the fire hazard for people living in the park, but compliance with that order has been limited.
- There have been 17 fires in the park since February. VPD has also expressed concern regarding the number of violent incidents occurring in the park.
- Carnegie Outreach, BC Housing and Park Board will be in the park daily to help people move into new homes, and to offer storage options for items that individuals are not able to move to their new space right away.
- The safety of the people sleeping in Oppenheimer Park continues to be our top priority and we are strongly encouraging everyone to work with Carnegie Outreach to move into safe and stable accommodation
- We are continually working to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness, including creating more affordable housing.
- This requires continued and increasing commitment from and collaboration with senior levels of government and creative approaches to addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, including the housing affordability crisis, lack of sufficient incomes, and service gaps that result in people having no place to turn but the homelessness services sector.



FAQs

What does the order mean for people sleeping overnight in the park?

The order posted by the General Manager of the Park Board requires people who have erected tents and other structures in Oppenheimer Park to remove all structures by 6 pm on Wednesday, August 21.

Carnegie Outreach, BC Housing and Park Board will be in the park daily to help people move into new homes, and to offer storage options for items that individuals are not able to move to their new space right away

Do you have enough accommodation for everyone in the park?

We believe we have enough accommodation for everyone we have been actively working with in the park. BC Housing, in partnership with the City, has secured more than 100 units of safe and stable accommodation for people experiencing homelessness who have been sleeping overnight in the park and who have engaged with Carnegie Outreach seeking housing assistance.

What kind of housing is being offered?

The housing options are in publicly owned and City and non-profit run buildings, including SRO rooms, many which have been recently renovated. These operators, including the City, are responsible for onsite management, including maintenance of the building to support a clean, safe and secure living environment for residents.

Why is shelter space being offered, are there not enough housing units for everyone?

Safe, secure and affordable housing continues to be an issue for many citizens. In addressing the encampment in Oppenheimer Park, we have also secured a number of shelter spaces as an option for individuals to come inside while suitable housing is identified.

Why can't we make the encampment permanent and offer services to campers?

Sanctioned tent cities are not a solution to homelessness. They are a redirection from the goal of connecting individuals experiencing homelessness with needed housing, income and supports.

We continue to have serious concerns regarding encampments given the history of serious health and safety incidents often associated with them. There is a consistent pattern whereby encampments become increasingly unsafe places over time because unlike shelters, they are not designed and managed to ensure the safety of residents. Additionally, the ability to provide adequate health and other support services is compromised due to the residents still living outside. From our research on managed encampments in other jurisdictions, the type of restrictions that are required to ensure safe and orderly operation are very likely to exclude many of the individuals presently living outdoors in our city.

A Fire Chief's order has been in place since February which sets out a number of conditions to reduce the fire hazard for people living in the park, but compliance with that order has been limited. Given the serious life safety risks present for those currently living in the park, the City does not support the encampment as adequate housing for those living there.