



## City's Support for Community During COVID-19 Pandemic

Date: Thursday, March 19, 2020

For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — Victoria City Council passed a number of important measures today to support residents, local business and the non-profit sector facing hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To further protect residents and City staff from the current threat of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Council also amended the way it will conduct Council meetings until the health emergency is declared over by the Provincial Health Officer.

"I want to thank Council members and staff for their proactive leadership for bringing forward these measures today. And I'd like to thank staff in advance for their hard work on implementation," said Mayor Lisa Helps.

"Some of the measures outlined here have already been implemented by the federal government. I am grateful to both the federal and provincial governments for their financial assistance to residents and businesses and the guidance and advice of both the federal and provincial medical health officers.

"In the coming weeks, Council will continue to take actions within our jurisdiction to help alleviate the suffering of our residents and businesses in these uncertain times. I also know that Victorians are working hard and displaying extraordinary generosity to help each other out and to get through these difficult times together," said Helps.

### **Business**

Council has directed staff to examine all of the City's fiscal, legislative and legal powers to support small businesses and jobs, the non-profit sector, arts and culture and the tourism sector in order to sustain the local economy during the pandemic and recover stronger and more resilient than before.

### **Financial Hardship**

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing substantial economic hardship for many people, businesses and community organizations in the City of Victoria as a result of reduced economic activity and compliance with directives of public health officials and government entities.

To support the well-being of individuals and safeguard the economic base of the community, Council is initiating the following actions:

- Direct staff to prepare bylaw amendments to allow for the temporary waiver of financial penalties for non-payment of municipal utilities fees and taxes during provincially declared emergencies.

- Direct staff to develop an Action Plan, without delay, identifying measures within municipal jurisdiction to reduce economic hardship on individuals and organizations impacted by COVID-19, including consideration of the following measures:
  - Repurposing under-utilized facilities for emergency shelter and healthcare for the unhoused, to allow for social distancing, proper care, harm reduction, and recovery.
  - Emergency regulations to restrict evictions of tenants who have suffered a loss of earnings due to quarantine, self-isolation, layoff or declining economic activity.
  - Temporary deferral of fees, taxes and other payments owing to the City from those suffering hardship.
- Council has authorized the City's Real Estate staff to look at potential options to provide relief for businesses located in City-owned properties on a case-by-case basis, and encourages all landlords to work with their tenants to explore options that work for both parties.
- Advocate to the Governments of British Columbia and Canada for immediate action on:
  - Emergency housing and healthcare for the unhoused through the retrofitting of underutilized facilities to allow for social distancing, proper care, harm reduction and recovery.
  - Income support through Employment Insurance, statutory Paid Sick Leave provisions and/or other programs to replace earnings that have been lost as a result of COVID-19, with immediate and retroactive effect, including eligibility for precariously employed workers in the service sector and "gig economy", self-employed workers and small business operators.
  - A temporary moratorium on evictions, foreclosures and payment of debt and utility fees.
  - Support for Indigenous communities that are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to substandard health, housing, water and social service systems.
  - Temporary deferral of payroll deduction remittances (i.e. EI, CPP, Income Tax) and income tax instalment payments where necessary to reduce pressure on business cash reserves and maintain payment to employees and suppliers.
- Request that the Mayor write, on behalf of Council, to the Premier of British Columbia and the Prime Minister of Canada, requesting immediate action along the lines outlined above, and indicating the City of Victoria's willingness to cooperate with those orders of government to ensure an integrated and effective response to COVID-19, including reducing economic hardship on individuals and organizations and safeguarding the economic base of the community.
- Request that the Province of British Columbia grant local governments the discretion to postpone payment of property taxes with no financial penalty in 2020 for those that meet a provincially determined threshold.
- Request that staff consider initiating emergency childcare services for essential services workers during the COVID-19 public health emergency, either as a City-operated service or in partnership with external childcare providers.
- Request that the University of Victoria reconsider the displacement of students currently living in student housing who have no alternate housing options.
- Council requests that landlords not increase rents at this time of crisis and defer rents for those in need.

### **Council Meetings and Public Meetings**

To protect the public and City staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, City Council has adopted amendments to its Council Procedures Bylaw to adjust the way Council meetings are conducted.

Based on recommendations by public health officials, Council suspended the holding of public hearings in accordance with the Class Order on COVID-19 from the Office of the Provincial Health Officer until further notice. Council also suspended the question period sections of Council meeting agendas for in-person participation.

Requests to address Council will be limited to six delegations through either telephone participation, where possible, and the reading out of submissions and/or broadcasting of recorded submissions, if necessary.

Council will review these temporary measures by April 16.

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#### **For More Information:**

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