



## City of Victoria COVID-19 Update

Date: Thursday, April 16, 2020

For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — Victoria City Council continues to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and look at ways to support the community.

On behalf of City Council, Mayor Lisa Helps has written to the provincial government requesting they use their powers under the Emergency Program Act to requisition hotel and motel rooms in the Capital Region for all unhoused people and provide the health, mental health and addictions support for people moving in.

“I have said many times that we *all* need to be able to follow Dr. Bonnie Henry’s advice around physical distancing, handwashing, and staying at home if we are able. If you don’t have a home, this is impossible,” said Mayor Lisa Helps. “I’m grateful for the 160 motel rooms that BC Housing has been able to secure. However, this number of rooms is not sufficient to house and provide health supports for the hundreds of people from across the region who are living in Victoria’s parks and on our streets.”

The City of Victoria is currently facing compounding health crises: the COVID-19 pandemic along with critical housing shortages, a lack of mental health and addictions supports, and continuing overdose deaths.

Despite limited funding and capacity, the City, working with BC Housing and Island Health, has taken steps to ensure the health and safety of residents and to protect them from the spread of COVID-19.

“Our community partners have hit a wall with the valuable work they’ve been doing to protect our most vulnerable citizens. BC Housing requires increased powers to secure motel and hotel rooms, and Island Health needs more resources to provide supports to people once they are sheltered,” said Mayor Helps.

Council also passed a motion to allocate a grant of up to \$50,000 from previously approved COVID-19 response funds toward emergency outreach services for vulnerable populations. The funds will be allocated to AIDS Vancouver Island, SOLID, Peers Victoria and the Indigenous Harm Reduction Team, organizations that are currently providing mobile outreach services in Victoria.

Today, the Prime Minister announced a plan to help small businesses pay commercial rents for April, May and June. This is something that City Council and other community leaders have been advocating for since the federal relief plan was initially announced. Details of the plan will be worked out among the premiers as rent issues fall under provincial jurisdiction. In addition, the federal government expanded eligibility for its business loan program, which offers businesses a loan of up to \$40,000. It will now be available to businesses with payrolls between \$20,000 and \$1.5 million. Up to \$10,000 of the loan is forgivable.

The B.C. Government announced several important new measures to help businesses weather the pandemic. The province will reduce most commercial property tax bills by an average of 25 per cent and introduce new measures to support local governments facing temporary revenue shortfalls as a result of COVID-19. City staff are currently reviewing the details, some of which include changing the due date for school taxes to the end of the year and deferring the commercial and industrial property tax penalty date to October.

“For municipalities such as Victoria that have a large commercial tax base, deferring the penalty date to October means we’ll need to manage our cash flow a little bit differently,” said Mayor Lisa Helps. “Almost 50 per cent of our tax base is commercial. But we are all in this together and because this is a positive announcement for businesses, we are okay to do whatever is necessary to make this work.”

For information on the City’s response to COVID-19, the public is invited to tune into the Mayor’s Facebook Live weekday updates at 2:30 p.m. on the City of Victoria Facebook page, and to visit [victoria.ca/covid19response](https://victoria.ca/covid19response).

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**For More Information:**

Bill Eisenhauer

Head of Engagement

Cellular: 250.858.1061

[beisenhauer@victoria.ca](mailto:beisenhauer@victoria.ca)