



City of Victoria COVID-19 Update

Date: Wednesday, April 22, 2020

For Immediate Release

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

Today the federal government announced the Canada Emergency Student Benefit, which will help students whose education and employment plans have been disrupted due to COVID. For those post-secondary students who are eligible, there will be a \$1,250 monthly payment from May to August to make up for lost work.

There will also be grants for students who will be spending the summer in volunteer roles. An additional 76,000 summer jobs in essential services will be available for students, on top of the Canada Summer Jobs program.

“The federal government’s new student benefit and summer jobs announced today are great news for students, who might otherwise fall through the cracks caused by this pandemic,” said Mayor Lisa Helps.

City staff are working on two “green” initiatives that are well-aligned with today being the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Earlier this month, Council directed staff to use the City’s nursery and greenhouses in Beacon Hill Park to grow vegetable plant starts for distribution in the community. Named *Get Growing, Victoria!*, the program will see as many as 75,000 edible plant starts grown.

Since then, the City in partnership with the Urban Food Table, has procured 100,000 local seeds from Southern Vancouver Island farms and through the BC Eco Seed Co-op. The City is also partnering with community organizations and non-profits to distribute the edible plant starts later this spring to those who need them most. For more information, visit: victoria.ca/growinginthecity.

The initiative garnered the interest of the Honourable Janet Austin, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, who is providing the resources of Government House to provide practical support to the community through their own *Victory Over COVID Gardens* project. Government House will promote food security and engage students and local volunteers in growing fresh vegetables for distribution to food banks and non-profit organizations serving vulnerable populations in Victoria.

“I would like to thank Her Honour and the staff of Government House for their leadership and collaboration. Her Honour was one of the first to reach out to us to learn more about what we were up to as they, too, were looking at ways to put their large gardens and volunteer gardeners to work to help those in need,” said Mayor Helps.

As well, Victoria was the first city in Canada to join the *Trees in Cities Challenge* earlier this year, a global campaign launched by the United Nations to promote climate action in cities. The City has pledged to plant 5,000 trees on public and private property in 2020. As part of this pledge, City Parks staff are planting 33 trees at Banfield Park this week.

Residents and groups can join in the *Trees in Cities Challenge* in four easy steps: pledge to plant a tree, learn about tree health, plant and record your trees, and become a tree champion.

"I invite you to take the *Trees in Cities Challenge* pledge today on Earth Day and plant a tree sometime this year, then enter it into the City's online tracker," added Mayor Helps.

To learn more and take the pledge, visit: victoria.ca/treesincities.

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.

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