



City Asks Court to Enforce Safe Sheltering in Beacon Hill Park

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC – The City of Victoria is seeking a court order to require people without homes sheltering in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas of Beacon Hill Park to relocate to less vulnerable locations within the park.

The application, filed today in B.C. Supreme Court, seeks an order that would require people experiencing homelessness to shelter only in permitted areas of the park and prohibits anyone from sheltering in sensitive areas designated under the City's Parks Bylaw. The Garry oak ecosystems in Beacon Hill Park are part of a protected and endangered natural system, which less than 5% remains in B.C. Protecting these areas is critical to maintaining biodiversity in the city.

"This is a challenging time for everyone, especially for people in our city who don't have a home," said Mayor Lisa Helps. "While we acknowledge previous court decisions that recognized the rights of people experiencing homelessness to shelter in municipal parks, we all have a responsibility to protect sensitive ecosystems and the natural environment.

"No one is being forced to leave Beacon Hill Park, but we do expect people to relocate to one of the many less vulnerable areas."

City staff and community outreach workers have been meeting regularly for weeks with the approximately 100 people sheltering in Beacon Hill Park, requesting that they move to less sensitive areas of the park and will continue to meet daily to assist them with moving to appropriate areas and to connect them with provincial housing supports and health services. Many people have already relocated, and the City expects everyone to move willingly.

The relocation plan is being coordinated in a compassionate way, and in a way that is safe for people who need to sleep outside while indoor shelters have either closed or significantly reduced services during the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 180 people are currently sheltering in parks throughout the city.

As people move out of the ecologically sensitive areas into more open areas of the park, Helps said vulnerable members of our community will be more visible and she hopes residents will be understanding of their need for safe shelter and support.

“Everyone deserves a home. No one should have to live outside in a tent because they don’t have a place to stay,” Helps said. “Getting everyone housed indoors will take continued leadership and investment from the provincial and federal governments, as well as cooperation and coordination throughout the region.”

It is expected the B.C. Supreme Court will hear the City’s application during the week of July 27, and if an injunction is granted, people who have not already moved to permitted areas within the park will be ordered to do so by the court.

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For More Information:

Sheldon Johnson
Manager, Engagement
Cellular: 250.812.2108
sjohnson@victoria.ca