

NEWS RELEASE

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City of Nanaimo providing COVID-19 response for vulnerable populations

Summary

During their Special meeting on Wednesday, April 1, 2020, Council was updated with actions the City has taken and presented with motions for their consideration to provide support to vulnerable and homeless populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 26 and 27, 2020, the Province issued ministerial orders and directives for municipalities to ensure supports are in place for homeless populations during the pandemic. Local authorities have been directed to remove barriers to make it easier to support critical services such as food banks and shelters to respond to the pandemic. As well, communities must work with local health authorities and BC Housing on efforts to plan for people experiencing homelessness. In response to a request from the Province, a list of City facilities for the purposes of isolating those experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo, has been sent to the Province for their consideration. The Province will be responsible for tracking these sites and utilizing them as necessary.

City efforts to date include continuing the shower program, keeping washrooms in designated parks open from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. and expanding access to potable water. Further to this, Council passed motions to provide 24 hour access to existing and additional temporary washrooms and hand sanitizing facilities downtown and coordinate with the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, BC Housing and Island Health to sanction and resource a coordinated emergency response for individuals experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo.

Council also passed a motion to exempt the Health and Housing Task Force from the current suspension of committees. This enables the task force to provide additional support and guidance in planning for vulnerable populations during the pandemic.

The City takes its direction relating to COVID-19 from the Government of Canada, BC Government and the BC Medical Health Officer. To stay up to date, visit the COVID-19 information page at www.nanaimo.ca/COVID19.

Strategic Link: n/a

Key Points

- The City is working with Island Health and BC Housing to assist in planning for accommodating those experiencing homelessness who may need to be isolated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Health and Housing Task Force will reconvene to identify strategies to assist those experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo during the COVID-19 pandemic. One strategy includes the development a food

security plan to identify funding, procurement and distribution options to provide safe and consistent meals for individuals experiencing homelessness and the vulnerable population.

- The City is providing additional washroom, hand sanitizing and potable water facilities in the downtown for those experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo.

Quotes

"The orders and directives specifically refer to individuals experiencing homelessness or at the risk of becoming homeless. We are seeing service providers in the community facing a number of pressures during this time including reduced capacity to provide the critical services Nanaimo's homeless population needs. City staff have been, and continue to be, in regular contact with Island Health and BC Housing around addressing support for Nanaimo's homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic."

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