

STATEMENT

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City expresses commitment to ongoing supports for vulnerable populations

The City of Nanaimo continues to support our community's most vulnerable populations during this difficult time of snow and cold weather. The City attempts to balance the inevitable necessity for homeless individuals to shelter with the interests of other residents and the protection of public lands and facilities by providing an array of supportive services including facilities and spaces for shower programs, public toilets, warming centers, temporary and permanent housing. It is well recognized that there is insufficient service capacity, so the City permits sheltering in a number of undeveloped parkland spaces where people can shelter overnight.

Recently, Council approved funding for the establishment and operation of a temporary daytime extreme cold weather space at Caledonia Park which began operations on December 27, 2021. Operated by the Nanaimo 7-10 Club Society, the cold-weather space is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on days when cold weather conditions are deemed severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of vulnerable persons.

The City would like to clarify misinformation in the community regarding vulnerable peoples that were dispersed from an encampment under the Bastion Street Bridge, and in the adjacent Bastion Street Parkade. The recent winter storm with heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures saw emergency shelters filling to capacity, and a small group of unsheltered individuals set up tents under the Bastion Street Bridge adjacent to the City-owned Bastion Street Parkade.

Enforcement officers did not disrupt this gathering through the most inclement weather. Instead, they requested those present to refrain from moving into the parkade facility, lighting fires or accumulating large quantities of materials, as they would be required to take down and remove their temporary shelters when weather improved.

Unfortunately, the situation deteriorated quickly through the holidays. The encampment grew in numbers to 30 or more individuals. People settled through three levels of the parkade and in the staircases, rendering them inaccessible to pedestrian traffic. Fires were set inside the parkade and in the stairwells and five propane tanks were removed. In addition, a number of parking ticket kiosks were taken out of service after they were extensively damaged and had the power cables severed.

Parking pass holders reported being obstructed and harassed and expressed concern for the safety of their vehicles. Maintenance staff were unable to access areas of the parkade to clean up increasing accumulations of garbage, graffiti and human waste. Businesses in close proximity reported concerns for the safety of their staff and clients.

Weather conditions improved after the New Year, and enforcement officers directed individuals to leave the parkade facility on Sunday, January 2 (Public Nuisance Bylaw 7267 prohibits entry or remaining in a City parkade except for the purpose of parking or removing a vehicle from a parking facility) and everyone was given notice that City crews would be attending early the next week to clean up the entire area. They were directed to leave the parkade again on Tuesday, January 4, and advised that all shelters would have to be packed up and removed for a clean up the following day. RCMP officers also went through the parkade advising everyone that the encampment would be closed in the morning.

City sanitation work crews commenced the clean up around 8 a.m. the morning of Wednesday, January 5, with the assistance of police and bylaw services, giving everyone ample opportunity to pack up and remove their belongings. Clean team staff distributed dozens of garbage bags, and the campers packed up waste material and unwanted items that were loaded into the truck.

Five propane tanks, four shopping carts, and a large container of discarded needles were collected during the clean-up. The clean-up proceeded without incident.

Continued... City expresses commitment to ongoing supports for vulnerable populations

Quotes

“Council absolutely sympathizes with individuals experiencing homelessness in our community, especially during extreme weather events such as what we have been experiencing the past two weeks. However, we also have a duty to other City residents and business owners to ensure that our City is safe, and our public lands and facilities are accessible. The misinformation we have seen regarding the recent dismantling of the encampment in the Bastion Street Parkade is both inaccurate and unfair. Bylaw officers, RCMP and City sanitation crews have an extremely difficult job and do excellent work in balancing the needs of everyone in our community. We cannot stand by idly and allow actions that threaten public property, and the safety of our community, to take place.”

-Mayor Leonard Krog

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