



Mayor's Report for Monday, September 17, 2018 Regular Council Meeting

Nanaimo has an ongoing crisis in housing affordability and homelessness, just like many other towns and cities across BC and North America. We are not alone in having a low vacancy rate and rising rents, unfortunately.

Since the encampment began in May, City staff have been working to minimize a disruption to downtown businesses and residents. We have also been reaching out to provincial government agencies and local organizations to coordinate our response.

The City has provided the basics for human health to tent city - water, toilets, garbage removal - as required by law. Fire services, bylaw enforcement, RCMP and public works are on site at tent city regularly to try to maintain order and safety. We have also stepped up police and bylaw enforcement patrols in the downtown and around all the homeless encampments in Nanaimo.

Today, I spoke with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Selina Robinson, to find out what options BC Housing can bring to the situation immediately. This is not our first request to the province for help. City staff have also been working with BC Housing over the past few months to find immediate and long-term solutions. There are no easy answers or quick solutions at hand, no matter how desperately we need them. We want to get this right. We want solutions that actually work for the community and for the people housed in whatever is developed or built.

We want nothing more than tent city to be down as soon as possible. We want to make sure there are alternatives that are acceptable to everyone. It may take some time to find these solutions and I fully expect the next Council will be grappling with how to make the best choices for all of Nanaimo. In the meantime, City staff are maintaining open communications with provincial agencies, including Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Ministry of Children and Families, to make sure we're doing everything we can to protect public health and the safety of the most vulnerable people in the camp and in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Last week, we saw the tent city swell in size and some of the occupants decided to move the fence to get more space. With cooperation from tent city occupants, bylaw and RCMP officers moved the fence back into place and secured it there. On the same day, Fire Chief Karen Fry, issued a second Provincial Fire Safety Order because the amount and types of combustibles and the overall state of the camp have increased the risk of fire there.

We are still waiting for the court to issue a final ruling on our request to be able to enforce the first fire safety order so that we can make things safer for everyone. We want to keep people safe inside the tent city and everywhere else in Nanaimo.

No one wants this situation to continue and we will continue to work to find solutions. In the meantime, I ask for your patience and understanding.

Thank you.