

ISSUE:

Provincial Government policy decisions related to COVID-19 homelessness support have been implemented in the absence of input from the majority of local governments. Limited local government engagement is likely to negatively affect support initiatives and result in related adverse impacts on those community’s hosting BC Housing COVID-19 shelter sites/spaces.

BACKGROUND:

In April of 2020 under the authority of the *Emergency Program Act* (Ministerial Order M128/2020) the Provincial Government ordered homeless camps in the City of Vancouver and City of Victoria to shut down and transition residents into secured shelter locations (e.g. hotel rooms). Although not directed through ministerial order, BC Housing and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions similarly began to transition individuals experiencing homelessness in other communities throughout the province into local hotels. BC Housing has disclosed the number of sites and spaces in each community (see Table 1). However, specific locations have not been disclosed to allow “the facilities [to] operate privately and focus on helping people who need a safe space to self-isolate”¹. This practice of non-disclosure extending to local governments has left many responsible for the effects of these actions without an understanding of the root causes limiting informed solutions, wasting time/resources, and leading to increased resident public health and safety concerns.

It is suspected that many local governments are having a similar experience to the City of Courtenay and are struggling to respond to the emergence of new high intensity criminal hotspots, increased demand on emergency response services (including fire, bylaw, and RCMP), operational response for maintenance of public spaces and complaints from local businesses and residents in neighbourhoods located near suspected BC Housing Shelter sites.

Table 1: BC Housing Secured Location, Number of Sites, Number of Spaces²

| Vancouver Island Region | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Location | Number of Sites | Number of Spaces |
| Campbell River | 2 | 10 |
| Courtenay | 2 | 34 |
| Duncan | 3 | 46 |
| Nanaimo | 4 | 69 |
| Parksville | 1 | 16 |
| Port Alberni | 1 | 1 |
| Port Hardy | 1 | 1 |
| Salt Spring Island | 3 | 8 |
| Sooke | 1 | 17 |

¹ BC Housing Community Self-Isolation Sites & Shelter Expansion, <https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19/community-sites>, accessed February 22, 2021

² BC Housing Community Self-Isolation Sites & Shelter Expansion, <https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19/community-sites>, accessed February 22, 2021

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----|
| Tofino | 1 | 3 |
| Victoria | 6 | 300 |
| Vancouver Coastal | | |
| Gibsons | 1 | 2 |
| North Vancouver | 1 | 30 |
| Powell River | 2 | 19 |
| Richmond | 1 | 45 |
| Sechelt | 2 | 26 |
| Squamish | 1 | 3 |
| Vancouver | 8 | 516 |
| Northern Region | | |
| Burns Lake | 1 | 5 |
| Dawson Creek | 1 | 1 |
| Fort St. James | 1 | 5 |
| Kitimat | 1 | 2 |
| Masset | 1 | 2 |
| Prince George | 3 | 57 |
| Prince Rupert | 2 | 40 |
| Quesnel | 2 | 7 |
| Smithers | 2 | 13 |
| Terrace | 1 | 5 |
| Valemount | 1 | 1 |
| Interior Region | | |
| Castlegar | 1 | 2 |
| Cranbrook | 4 | 109 |
| Grand Forks | 3 | 15 |
| Kamloops | 6 | 191 |
| Merritt | 1 | 26 |
| Nelson | 4 | 52 |
| Penticton | 3 | 101 |
| Salmon Arm | 2 | 61 |
| Trail | 1 | 6 |
| Vernon | 4 | 64 |
| West Kelowna | 1 | 40 |
| Williams Lake | 1 | 9 |

| Fraser Region | | |
|---------------|---|-----|
| Abbotsford | 3 | 68 |
| Burnaby | 1 | 64 |
| Chilliwack | 3 | 58 |
| Coquitlam | 1 | 30 |
| Hope | 1 | 16 |
| Langley | 2 | 56 |
| Maple Ridge | 2 | 35 |
| Mission | 1 | 41 |
| Surrey | 5 | 197 |

It is the City of Courtenay’s perspective that the previously mentioned positive intent of non-disclosure is hindered by the omission of local governments in response and support planning processes. If included in the planning phases, local governments could work to align land use zoning, assist in identifying suitable locations, share local knowledge and histories, coordinate on bylaw enforcement approaches, and seek solutions to mitigate negative community impacts leading to frustration and the continued stigmatization of homeless individuals.

Further, advanced communication and collaboration with local governments would allow municipalities to address operational capacity issues, coordinate local supports more effectively, and identify solutions that protect rather than erode historical service levels. In the absence of a deeper level of consideration in the form of meaningful consultation and collaboration, local governments are left to deduce root causes of dramatic and sudden changes in metric indicators and identify responses and solutions to complex issues in the absence of input from unknown or unconfirmed stakeholders.

IN SUMMARY:

The City of Courtenay, like many local governments is not disputing the necessity of the provision of expanded shelter spaces to support homeless individuals and combat the transmission of COVID-19 and commends the Provincial Government for taking swift action to secure and fill shelter spaces across the province. Like the Provincial Government, local governments including the City of Courtenay have similarly sought to support its most vulnerable populations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic through the opening of a warming centre and extreme weather shelter, taking a more flexible and compassionate approach to bylaw enforcement issues related to homelessness, and supporting non-profits that provide complimentary or ancillary services through grants and access to civic facilities and City-owned spaces.

The request presented in the following resolution seeks recognition from the Provincial Government of the integral role local governments’ play in supporting vulnerable populations and combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution further seeks early engagement and local government input on response initiatives, supports and referral capabilities to meet the service expectations of community residents and businesses prior to implementation.

AVICC RESOLUTION

WHEREAS there has been limited communication with local governments regarding Provincial COVID-19 response initiatives to ensure the health and safety of individuals experiencing homelessness and local governments play an integral ongoing role in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness through the support of non-profits, emergency response services, pursuing long-term affordable housing options, and formal communication between governments is vital to enhance homelessness response and support initiatives; and,

WHEREAS homelessness response actions undertaken by the Provincial Government have a direct impact on local government resources such as bylaw enforcement, policing, fire response, land use planning, and the maintenance of public space to ensure safe enjoyment.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that AVICC and UBCM ask the Provincial Government to recognize local governments as a key stakeholder in homelessness response and support efforts and be included in related planning processes prior to implementation.

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