

MEDIA RELEASE

City of Williams Lake



For Immediate Release

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450 Mart Street
Williams Lake, BC
V2G 1N3

Measures to address homelessness issues ongoing

The City of Williams Lake is continuing to take steps to address the complex issue of homelessness in the community.

At its Tuesday, May 2 Regular Council Meeting and at the recommendation of City staff, Council endorsed bylaw staff to mitigate the adverse impacts of homeless encampments in the community for the short-term by identifying temporary, overnight outdoor shelter locations. Council's future plans also include looking at piloted models that other municipalities such as Kelowna, Kamloops, Victoria and Nanaimo have used to address homelessness.

Legally, the City cannot prohibit all its parks and public spaces from being used for overnight sheltering; however, it can identify which parks or public spaces the prohibition against overnight sheltering will not be applied to.

Currently, the demand for indoor shelter space has exceeded the number of available spaces and labour resources in the community, which has resulted in an estimated 50 people sheltering outdoors or requiring temporary housing.

Through consultation with the Williams Lake RCMP and various related organizations, the optimal temporary location was determined to be at the south end of Boitanio Park away from the disc golf course, bike park and Boitanio Day Camp. This decision was made based on proximity for accessibility, security and access to medical and health services.

The location will allow access to waste receptacles, sharps containers, and public washrooms and will allow for overnight shelter from 10 pm to 7 am. Each morning, bylaw staff and RCMP will visit the area to ensure tents are removed and the area is clear. City public works staff will remove any remaining debris each day.

"The City, BC Housing, Canadian Mental Health Association – Cariboo Chilcotin Branch and other partners are continuing to work together to increase the number of indoor sheltering spaces available in Williams Lake," said Chief Administrative Officer Gary Muraca. "We are taking immediate action to work with senior levels of government to eliminate the need for anyone to shelter outside. In the meantime, this is the best temporary solution for those people living in our community who do not have homes for a variety of reasons."

While staff are aware of the City's role as a key stakeholder with regard to homelessness, it is important to recognize providing housing and healthcare services is not the responsibility of local governments and that local governments do not have the authority or resources to take the lead on these matters.

The City is aware homelessness is an evolving, dynamic crisis in our community and there is no simple solution.

“Williams Lake is not alone in attempting to deal with this important and complex issue,” Muraca said. “Ultimately, the plan is to continue to lobby and to apply pressure on senior levels of government to provide long-term solutions to mental health, addiction and homelessness in the community.”

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