

## **Strathcona Residents Association demands action on Strathcona Park Encampment**

- The SRA believes every single person deserves a safe, accessible home, but we do not support the growing encampment in Strathcona Park.
- Strathcona is the lowest socioeconomic neighbourhood with the least green space per capita in Vancouver. This encampment punishes many marginalized groups, particularly during a pandemic where green space is extremely limited.
- The SRA asks all levels of government to step up—and work together—to come up with creative solutions to this complex problem

**VANCOUVER, July 13, 2020** – The Strathcona Residents Association has been doing its best to encourage discussion and find consensus among residents about the growing homeless encampment in Strathcona Park.

The vast majority of Strathcona residents are sympathetic to anyone who finds themselves homeless. In a healthy and prosperous society, everyone should have a safe, accessible home. We would add, everyone deserves a community where they feel a sense of belonging and control.

### **A public park is not the place to fix homelessness**

“Strathcona Park is not an appropriate nor sustainable place to support a 200+ person homeless camp and camp organizers themselves recognize this,” says SRA president Dan Jackson. “Strathcona is Vancouver’s lowest socioeconomic neighbourhood and has the least green space per capita in Vancouver (1.7 hectares). Strathcona Park makes up around 80% of the green space in our neighbourhood.”

Strathcona has many young families, social housing residents, refugees, seniors, recreational users and day camps who need access to park facilities and public washrooms (which we're told now have to be closed due to stress on the septic system). With Oppenheimer Park closed for repair, we cannot afford to have a second local park taken out of commission. We cannot ignore the shootings, murders, sexual violence, overdoses, and the horrific assault that took place in the Oppenheimer encampment and do not want to wait until similar violence forces authorities to act. We have already received a number of concerning safety reports from Strathcona Park, including reports of multiple assaults and arson.

### **Park Board should amend its bylaws and cede jurisdiction**

We support the Park Board's efforts to amend its bylaws to be reconciled to people's Charter rights. We also recognize that the task of supporting and overseeing a large encampment is beyond the Park Board's mandate and resources and ask the Park Board, which will soon recess until late September, to cede jurisdiction over the Strathcona Park encampment to the City of Vancouver.

### **A better location needs to be found: now**

We call upon the Province, the Port of Vancouver, the City and the Park Board to select a better location quickly. We support the camp organizers' request for "a secure, safe and appropriate place to stay temporarily (as well as support and resources for moving)... until a more permanent solution is found." Here are some suggestions provided to us by camp organizers and others:

- The now-empty provincial land set aside for the new St. Paul's
- Parking Lot 5 at CRAB Park

- The PNE
- The Brockton Oval

### **The Provincial Government must come up with creative housing solutions**

We call upon all the Provincial government, in particular Premier John Horgan, Ministers Simpson, Robinson, Farnworth and Darcy, as well as Shayne Ramsey, CEO of BC Housing, who jointly have the primary responsibility and authority to address homelessness and related issues of addiction and mental health – to find appropriate housing for the people in the camp who need it.

We recognize that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Navigation Centres are needed to triage housing needs. More housing in converted hotels and modular units has to be made available. Creative housing ideas that have worked in other cities, like tiny house villages; smaller, properly-managed and supported sanctioned camps; partnerships with charitable organizations and home-sharing plans like HomeShareOregon, need to be seriously considered.

### **The Federal Government must live up to its commitment to cut homelessness by 50%**

We call upon the Federal government – in particular Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Ministers Hussen and Duclos and CMHC CEO Evan Siddall – to live up to the commitment made in the Federal Housing Strategy to cut homelessness by 50%. The COVID-19 crisis has stretched Federal resources like never before and has also made the housing crisis worse. That is no excuse to avoid it.

More infrastructure funding for housing is desperately needed—now. We urge the Vancity Community Foundation and Lu'ma Native BCH Housing Society to use their access to federal funds and links with local non-profits and charities to explore and implement creative solutions.

### **Mayor Stewart and Council must take a leadership role**

We call upon Mayor Kennedy Stewart to step up and take a visible leadership role to acknowledge this problem and use his many connections to put forward short and long-term solutions publicly.

We call upon City Council and staff to stop telling us that this is not your jurisdiction and you have no power. We elected you to run this city. Run it.

### **We are all in this together**

We call upon PHS Community Services Society and other Vancouver non-profits that have done much to address marginalized people's challenges to work in conjunction with camp organizers and the broader community to promote and manage solutions.

We call upon the activist organizations and individuals who support the camp and social justice to join us in civil and productive discourse that isn't about inciting righteous anger but about finding workable solutions to complex problems.

We share their frustration watching government and non-government officials play whack-a-mole with society's most vulnerable.

Yes, it's a tough problem. Let's work together as a nation, a province, a city, and a community and keep going until we fix it.

Come to the table.

*For more information or to arrange an interview, email us at [sra@strathcona-residents.org](mailto:sra@strathcona-residents.org).*