



Memo

September 19, 2023

To: Mayor Gondek and members of Council
From: Ryan Pleckaitis, Chief, Community Standards, Emergency Management and Community Safety
RE: Exploring Response to Encampments in Seattle and Vancouver

This memo responds to Councillor Wong's question posed at the 2023 September 6 meeting of Executive Committee: "Seattle and Vancouver are two cities who have seen improvements recently in management of encampments and with social disorder and transit/public safety since implementing a series of strategies. Has Calgary looked at these strategies?" A high-level comparison between Calgary and these cities can be found in the attachment on the next page. Below you will find Calgary's overall approach to encampments, commitment to service improvement, and emerging legal considerations.

The City of Calgary stands firm in its position that homelessness is, primarily, a housing problem. Increasingly, members of our community are turning to alternatives, such as encampments, as a housing solution. Encampments are not an acceptable housing option, even in the short term. Addressing the needs of unhoused Calgarians will require complex, integrated, and long-term solutions.

As we continue to explore ways to improve our response to encampments and transit safety, Council will have several opportunities to engage Administration in the coming months on the effectiveness of community safety programs, including:

- Partner Agency Liaison (PAL) Team audit findings at Audit Committee on 2023 September 21; and
- The City's Public Transit Safety Strategy at the Community Development Committee on 2023 October 2.

As we move forward with service improvements, it is important to understand that the legal landscape surrounding encampments is shifting across Canada and the United States.

- In January 2023, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice found that the Region of Waterloo's attempt to evict encampment residents on public land was a violation of section 7 of the Charter. Previous British Columbia courts had recognized the "right to shelter", however, that right is only recognized when there are not sufficient shelter spaces available to house the current homeless population.
- In July 2023, a King County Superior Court judge ruled that The City of Seattle had been too broad in defining how and when it could clear homeless encampments without warning, deeming aspects of the city's approach unconstitutional.
- In August 2023, The Coalition for Justice and Human Rights initiated legal action against the City of Edmonton, saying the city's continual displacement of individuals in encampments has placed vulnerable communities in dangerous situations. This application has not been heard or decided by the Alberta court, but it relies on an alleged lack of adequate shelter space, like Waterloo.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

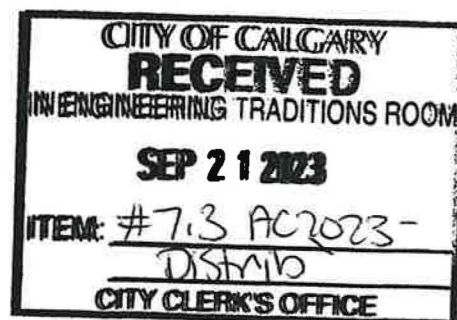
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Pleckaitis".

Ryan Pleckaitis, Chief, Community Standards,
Emergency Management and Community Safety

Attachments: Municipal Scan – Seattle and Vancouver

Cc: Executive Leadership Team



Attachment – Municipal Scan – Seattle and Vancouver

	Seattle	Vancouver	Calgary
Homelessness Count	Over 11,000 persons (2020).	Almost 3,000 persons (2020).	Almost 2,800 persons (2022).
Affordable Housing	Homelessness Action Plan focuses on decreasing wait times for affordable housing, robust data sharing for decision-making, and increasing the supply of affordable housing.	Govt of BC Homes for People Action Plan aims to increase the supply of affordable housing by optimizing the City's use of land, capital grants and incentives, and refining zoning approaches and rental incentives.	Home is Here - The City of Calgary's Housing Strategy 2024-2030 was approved on 2023 September 16.
Sanctioned Encampments	In 2015, Seattle declared a state of emergency for homelessness, and was the first city in the United States to offer public land and funding to support City-sanctioned encampments.	In 2021, Create A Real Available Beach committee park encampment residents won a BC Supreme Court allowing people to live in a designated section of the park. Thereby leading to the establishment of the city's only legal encampment.	None
Response to encampments and Community Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness Outreach and Provider Ecosystem (HOPE) Team was established in 2021. • The team coordinates shelter referrals as well as citywide efforts by outreach, shelter providers, city departments, and community to connect people living unsheltered in Seattle to services and shelter. • The city's mayor is working with local partners to establish innovative public-private partnerships to raise money for social service projects in the city and region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mayor's Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) increases shelter space during winter months. • In 2022, the City piloted Better Together, a neighbourhood-based initiative that works to collectively problem-solve issues related to poverty, homelessness, mental health, and addiction. • In 2023 April, The City removed the East Hastings encampment following a steady deterioration in public safety and increased fires. Approximately 80 structures were removed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Joint Encampment Team (JET) addresses encampments by proactively monitoring and removing abandoned encampments. This program also includes the Partner Agency Liaison Team (PAL) which pairs Peace Officers with the Alpha House HELP Team • PAL's primary objective is to connect occupants of these camps with social services. • The Coordinated Community Extreme Weather Response focuses on increasing coordination among outreach groups, decreasing barriers to shelters, and providing alternatives to sheltering in transit stations.
Addressing Social Disorder on Transit	In August 2022, SoundTransit in Seattle made their Fare Ambassador Program permanent, replacing fare enforcement officers. This program was developed in response to community feedback showing a preference for a friendlier, non-threatening presence on trains.	Metro Vancouver Transit Police used a community policing approach including three pillars: cross-regional policing; engaged community partners; and modern policing culture. Translink also has a community transit volunteer program greeting customers, sharing information and creating awareness of TransLink projects.	The Community Outreach Team (COT) works with vulnerable populations along transit lines and pairs City peace officers with Alpha House workers to facilitate connections with outreach organizations, educate vulnerable populations on treatment options, and remove barriers to housing supports.