

Good evening, Mayor Alto and Councillors.

I am speaking as a member of Neighbourhood Solidarity with Unhoused Neighbours.

The National Working Group on Homeless Encampments has provided all Canadian municipalities with engagement guidance.

Saskatoon and Halifax, albeit informally, have signed on. We are asking you, the city of Victoria to adopt these guidelines thereby contributing in a significant geographical way to a movement that is upholding the right to housing for all Canadian residents.

As a council, you have already begun this advised approach by requesting the province to fund 24/7 access to a toilet for the encampment on Pandora, by working with the province to identify sites in the CRD where homeless people are welcome, and by calling on the Federal Government to double the number of social housing units.

The next most important action is meaningful engagement with encampment residents and their chosen supporters. I know some of you are reluctant to do this, but I also know you know that viable solutions to community problems are not found without the input of all community members particularly those who will be most affected by the decisions made.

Despite your efforts to work with the provincial and federal governments to build more housing, the reality is that housing is years away for many people living unhoused in the CRD. And yet, many more people will flow into homelessness and people will continue to live in doorways, and tents on sidewalks and boulevards.

Engaging encampment residents is a necessary step in the process of effectively dealing with homelessness. Dialogue will support not only the dignity and human rights of encampment residents but also their basic survival needs. It will ensure the best outcomes for those living in encampments while they await housing and for residents and businesses neighbouring encampments.

Neighbourhood Solidarity urges you to adopt the municipal guidance provided by the National Working Group on Homeless Encampments so that we can all co-create solutions to close encampments in the CRD just as soon as they are no longer needed.

Thank you.

