

Mayor, Council and audience – thanks for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. I'll start by stating the obvious – the best way to address homelessness is to provide housing. We have done a poor job of this in the last few years here in Victoria. Yes, BC Housing has opened 5 supportive housing sites since 2021 but each was at least a year late in opening and the 6th – at 953-959 Balmoral – is still not open nearly 2 years after its originally stated opening date. And taken altogether these 6 sites only represent around 280 spaces – woefully inadequate in the face of the size of this crisis.

As other speakers have alluded to those stuck waiting for housing on our streets or in the parks must live their lives to the tune played by city bylaw officers no matter how punitive, harmful or inconsistent that tune is. It seems this situation is unlikely to change.

There is another option that can address many of the needs of the unhoused in a better way than living on the sidewalk or boulevard or in a park and that would also fit better with what I believe most Victorians want – a compassionate, humane and organized response. This would be to create several sanctioned encampments in Victoria. These encampments should not contain more than about 20 people at most and would be made up of tents on hardscape. They should be rapidly established – meaning in weeks not months – and should be provided with washrooms, showers, electricity, drinking water and an opportunity for those residing within them to be involved in everything from siting, planning, implementation and day-to-day operations.

There is precedent for this in Victoria – the 2021 940 Caledonia site which I am sure at least some of you are familiar with from Councillor Loughton's film of the same name. A report was created about 940 Caledonia and there are several other reference documents that would help the City in making sanctioned encampments a reality. Additionally, I believe that language within the recently signed MOU between the province and the city indicates that the Province sees this as a viable and preferred approach.

In closing, sanctioned and supported encampments are a potential interim solution that has worked in other jurisdictions and that I hope you will consider for Victoria. I would be happy to talk with you further about sanctioned encampments and the documents I have referenced here. Thank you for your time.