

January 22, 2024

Dear Councillor,

I am writing you in regard to proposed city, bylaw No. 3121 and my opposition to it. I am writing in my role as an outreach worker and unhoused advocate here in the Comox Valley for over 13 years. A period of time in which the unhoused crisis has only increased tremendously as a number of interconnected societal challenges which I would label "system failure" have coalesced. A failure that we are all responsible for and therefore need to include all in decision making.

Bylaw 3121 fails to meet the necessity of inclusion especially from our teachers, those in the street community as well as the indigenous community who are tragically overrepresented in the unhoused population on their own ancestral homelands as one outcome of colonialism.

I am asking for more community, especially street community and indigenous leadership input in this matter.

The bylaw as it is now written is ambiguous, the word "camping" is used interchangeably with "shelter", additionally there is not clear guidance for bylaw officers and enforcement and ultimately there is not enough respect given and insight provided to the challenges the unhoused face.

An example, the constant cycle of housing materials and possessions being thrown out by bylaw and then additional supplies as provided by service providers to make up for the loss needs to end. Its not only wasteful but disrespectful of peoples properties.

Have you heard the voices of the street community and their advocates? I recently had the privilege of working for a week at the Native Sons Hall during the EWP, the wisdom, gratitude, street wise ingenuity of these folks is a marvel. I had the good fortune of working alongside peers- those with 'lived' experience and learned much working alongside with them. I witnessed the sense of community and love of community. One peer told me more history of the Native Sons Hall then I think has ever been accounted for! For me the greatest pleasure is in listening to their stories. I ask you to listen, pause and collaborate on pro active solutions to the housing crisis and how it impacts public spaces.

As a long time advocate for the unhoused in the Comox Valley I strongly ask that the City Council not adopt bylaw 3121 and reconsider how it works with others to solve the interface of the unhoused and public space in an inclusive, compassionate manner.

Sincerely,

Grant Shilling, Outreach Worker