

Report

Date March 4, 2026
Subject Overnight sheltering sites for the unhoused

File:

PURPOSE

To provide an update on the use of North Cowichan sites for sheltering by unhoused residents.

BACKGROUND

On October 7, 2025, staff presented to the Committee of the Whole a report outlining North Cowichan's possible contributions to the regional Community Wellness Plan. Staff were asked to "Prepare a report on potential locations for overnight sheltering within municipal parks." At the Regular Council meeting of November 5, 2025, Council received a report on overnight sheltering options in North Cowichan parks and public spaces from the Director, Social Planning and Protective Services, with the following sites being given consideration for overnight sheltering:

- 1) Hiddenluck Park (and road right-of-way),
- 2) Fuller Lake Park,
- 3) York Road, and,
- 4) Beverly Street.

On November 17, 2025, Social Planning and Protective Services staff undertook actions to displace a large encampment of homeless individuals from the streets and sidewalks in the area adjacent to the Canadian Mental Health Association Warmland shelter on Lewis Street. In support of this action, individuals encamped in this area were provided with information on what sites were eligible for overnight sheltering. Subsequently, North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers worked with the RCMP, Island Health, and local social service agencies to effect a transition from Lewis Street to three of the above-mentioned sites, specifically:

- 4015 Hiddenluck Street on the road right-of-way leading to the park,
- York Road north of the dyke, and,
- Beverly Street on the verge adjacent to the Somenos Marsh.

In the week prior to the decampment, the Bylaw team developed a "Notice to Vacate" and a brochure with the relevant sections on overnight sheltering from the Parks and Public Places Regulation Bylaw No. 3626 (Bylaw). Included in the brochure was a list of places that met the criteria for overnight sheltering identified in the Bylaw: Panorama Park and Stirling Ridge Park. Prior to the decampment on November 17, those parks were removed from the list, and only the York Road, Hiddenluck Park, and Beverly Street sites were referenced in the materials handed out to the unhoused.

The criteria for eligible parks established in the Bylaw are based on the BC Supreme Court's rulings in the [Shantz](#) and [Adams](#) cases, in which the court asserted a right to overnight sheltering in public spaces by unhoused individuals.

In addition, staff worked with the BC Housing Encampment Response Team and the Cowichan region Medical Health Officer to affect the provision of portable toilets and hygiene stations at these sites, and funding was obtained from BC Housing's Encampment Response Team to offset costs associated with the rental and cleaning of the toilets.

DISCUSSION

At the time of writing this report, the uptake on the three identified sites has been approximately 20 individuals.

The Bylaw department has received approximately 31 calls/emails from members of the public expressing their thoughts on the sheltering sites.

Several emails and calls were received from residents of Panorama Ridge in Chemainus; all were responded to by clarifying the information provided and the sites individuals were being directed to.

Members of the general public have also expressed their thoughts on the November 17 displacement of unhoused individuals from Lewis Street; the Bylaw department has received approximately 10 emails on this topic. Several community-based groups, including the Cowichan region Medical Health Officer and the Coalition to End Homelessness, have provided input on both the displacement of the encampment and the adequacy of the above-referenced sheltering sites. The majority of feedback received by the Bylaw department has come from local social service agencies and their associated outreach workers. Generally, that feedback was provided during regularly scheduled meetings, which we attend as a community partner. Staff continue to meet regularly with all parties tasked with responding to the homelessness, mental health and addictions crisis in support of enhancing our community response to these issues.

The main theme arising from that feedback was the difficulty outreach staff experienced in accessing their clients, and the wet conditions associated with winter flooding in the Somenos Marsh. To balance that perspective, we have also received feedback from residents of Lewis Street that things have much improved for them and their sense of safety in their neighbourhood since the decampment.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council receives this report and endorses the continued use of the following sites for overnight sheltering:
 - a. 4015 Hiddenluck Street on the road right of way leading to the park,
 - b. York Road north of the dyke, and,
 - c. Beverly Street on the verge adjacent to the Somenos Marsh.
 - The provision of these sheltering sites has enabled staff to relocate the encampment on Lewis Street, resulting in a considerable reduction in its size and a noticeable decrease in associated disruption to the surrounding community.
2. THAT Council provides the following direction: [insert alternate direction]
 - The Coalition to End Homelessness requested that North Cowichan look for better sites for overnight sheltering with drier conditions and that is more accessible to outreach staff.

IMPLICATIONS

The provision of sheltering sites supports both the Vision for Community Wellness and the implementation of North Cowichan’s Response to Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions, and enhances public safety.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receives this report and endorses the continued use of the following sites for overnight sheltering:

- a. 4015 Hiddenluck Street on the road right of way leading to the park,
- b. York Road north of the dyke, and,
- c. Beverly Street on the verge adjacent to the Somenos Marsh.

Report prepared by:



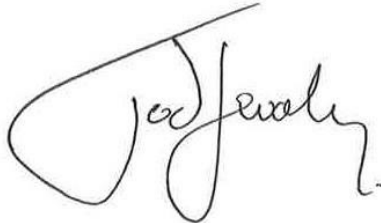
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