

‘The best night ever:’ Vic West shelter resident grateful to be indoors

ROXANNE EGAN-ELLIOTT
Times Colonist

Monday night was one of the best sleeps in a long time for Nancy, one of the first people to move into a new Vic West shelter.

Nancy said she was grateful to move out of a tent in a nearby park and into the newly opened shelter space managed by Our Place Society at 225 Russell St. on Monday.

“This is the first good thing that’s happened to me in a long, long time. And I’m super grateful,” she said, becoming emotional. “I had the best night ever.”

Nancy is one of about 10 people who moved into the shelter on its opening day, and more were trickling in Tuesday morning. Outreach workers welcomed them with intake forms, going over the shelter’s rules barring physical violence, weapons, sexual harassment, verbal abuse and drug use in a two-block radius outside of the property, among other expectations.

Cathy Mingo, manager of housing and shelter for Our Place Society, said they’re working to build relationships between shelter residents, as well as with the rest of the neighbourhood.

On Monday, she invited a couple of people from the neighbourhood into the space to meet their new neighbours.

Grant McKenzie, communications director for Our Place, said fear of the unknown often drives neighbourhood concerns when a new shelter opens. “If you can break down some of those barriers and they get to know somebody’s name, it takes away a lot fear,” he said.

Our Place staff are planning on assembling a “clean team” of shelter residents who are interested in picking up litter from



Nancy relaxes in her own space at a new shelter on Russell Street in Vic West. Each shelter resident is assigned a pod containing a single bed and bedside table, surrounded by low walls.

ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

the surrounding neighbourhood, and two people have already expressed interest, Mingo said.

Shelter design and management are aimed at mitigating the risk of drug overdose, with communal areas where people are encouraged to use in the presence of someone else and shower doors that include a small communication area that allows staff to speak to and hear residents inside without seeing them.

Staff will check on people using the shower units after 10 minutes, and if they don’t get a response, they’ll go inside to see how they’re doing, Mingo said.

Our Place staff will be on site 24/7, and outreach workers from PEERS Victoria Resources Society and AVI Health and Community Services will provide some daytime harm-reduction support.

Residents are also asked to provide information about what substances they use, how they use them and how often, to give staff a sense of residents’ baselines and what signs of distress to look out for.

While the shelter has space for about 70 people, the capacity is currently limited by the province to 30, Mingo said.

Arranged in tight rows, each

pod contains a single bed and bedside table, with low walls on three-and-a-half sides. Some pods have been made larger, with two single beds to accommodate couples.

The province bought the building for \$9.3 million as part of an effort to house more than 200 people living in Victoria parks during the pandemic.

B.C. Housing says 124 people have already moved indoors.

A tiny-home village in the parking lot at Royal Athletic Park is expected to open next week, providing shelter for 30 people.

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Highlands group heads to court for quarry appeal

Times Colonist

The Highlands District Community Association plans to be in court today appealing a B.C. Supreme Court decision to allow a rock quarry on Millstream Road to proceed.

The community group, which has vowed from the start to do whatever it takes to stop the project, said it will argue the courts have not taken into account climate change in giving the project the green light.

Association chair Scott Richardson said approval of the mining permit flies in the face of the global climate crisis.

“Not taking action on a project like this is the new climate-change denialism,” he said.

Richardson said of all the detrimental environmental and health and safety impacts of the



mine in the residential community, the biggest and most worrying threat is to the groundwater

on which Highlands’ residents rely for their drinking water. “This strip mine site sits

right next to a CRD toxic-waste dump. The devastating potential for groundwater contamination is too great a risk to allow,” he said.

The project is being developed by O.K. Industries, which bought the 64-acre property in 2015 for \$4.2 million. The company initially applied to have it rezoned to accommodate commercial and light industrial activity from its green-belt designation.

When the District of Highlands rejected the proposal in 2016, O.K. applied to the province for a mines permit for a quarry. That permit was granted last year.

That approval triggered the community association’s application for a judicial review of the mines permit, which the courts denied, and has spurred the appeal.

RCMP called to Victoria General Hospital after suspicious package found

A suspicious package found at Victoria General Hospital on Tuesday was destroyed by the RCMP bomb squad.

West Shore RCMP said the Vancouver-based team determined the package was not

an explosive.

Hospital activity was not suspended during the incident, though people were advised to avoid the south side of the building.

— Times Colonist



City of Langford

www.cityoflangford.ca

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The City of Langford has received a request to amend a condition of rezoning approval. All persons who believe that their interest in the property is affected by the proposed amendment will be afforded an opportunity to be heard by presenting written submissions prior to 3 pm on the day of the Public Hearing or by making oral submissions at the Public Hearing. Please be advised that no submission may be received by Council after the close of the Public Hearing and any submissions made to Council, whether orally or in writing, will form part of the public record.

Meeting Date and Time	Monday, 10 May 2021	Time: 5:30 pm
Meeting Place	City Hall Council Chambers, Third Floor, 877 Goldstream Avenue	

Proposal: Rezoning Application No. Z06-0013 secured, as a condition of rezoning, the establishment of a 10-16m landscaped buffer area along the southern property line of both the subject property and the adjoining property at 2400 Echo Valley Drive. The proposed amendment is to reduce this landscaped buffer on the subject property to no less than 5m.

Applicant: City of Langford

Location: The land that is the subject of this proposal is 1000 Gade Rd as shown shaded on the included plan.

PLEASE NOTE: This meeting will be held electronically, and not in-person. Information about how to connect to this meeting may be found on the City’s Website: www.cityoflangford.ca

The Public Hearing is not an information session and Council will not answer questions about the proposal except to provide clarification. The purpose of the Public Hearing is for Council to hear the views and opinions of those members of the public who wish to make comments. Please have all your questions answered in advance of the Public Hearing by contacting the Planning Department as noted below.

Requests for COPIES of the complete information package that the Council may consider in relation to the proposed amendment, or questions related thereto, may be submitted by emailing planning@langford.ca, in writing to Langford City Hall, 2nd Floor, 877 Goldstream Avenue, Langford, BC, V9B 2X8, or by calling 250-478-7882.

Braden Hutchins
Director of Corporate Services

Man arrested after vehicle windows smashed in Fernwood

Times Colonist

Victoria police arrested a man suspected of smashing vehicle windows in Fernwood and threatening a witness.

Officers arrived in the area of Chambers and Grant streets, near Victoria High School, about 8:30 a.m. Monday.

Several people had called 911 to report the man. Officers were told he had fled after threatening to stab someone who had seen what was happening.

Police were given a description by onlookers and were able to locate a suspect near Haultain Street and Avebury Avenue. He was seen throwing an object to the ground that turned out to be a knife.

The man is suspected of break-

One of the vehicles damaged in Fernwood on Monday.

VICTORIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

ing windows of at least three vehicles and faces additional charges of breaking vehicles and windows at businesses in the downtown area and the Burnside Gorge neighbourhood.

Three people escape fire at Nanaimo house

Three people escaped uninjured from a house fire on Nanaimo’s Departure Bay Road early Tuesday.

Brad Wood, Nanaimo Fire Rescue’s assistant chief of operations, said the fire began about 5:35 a.m. in the road’s 3100-block. By 9 a.m., fire crews were wrapping and fire investigators were on the scene, Wood said.

A closure was in place between Newton Street and Hammond Bay Road, with only local traffic and school dropoffs allowed through.

The cause of the fire has not yet been determined.

Wood said Emergency Social Services workers are assisting the people who have been displaced. — Times Colonist

Qualicum Beach sees surge in freedom of information requests

CARLA WILSON
Times Colonist

The Town of Qualicum Beach is experiencing such an “astronomical” jump in the number of freedom of information requests that at times, some senior staff work on nothing else, according to its chief administrative officer.

In the past 18 months, city hall has received what Daniel Sailland describes as an “incredible spike” in such requests that has kept key staff handling FOI requests busy full-time, and has led to staff often working overtime.

“We just aren’t equipped for the volume,” he told council members representing the waterfront community of close to 9,000.

Not only has the number of requests increased, municipal responses are sometimes appealed, leading to more work, Sailland said.

Administration staff are watching to see if the higher volume becomes the new norm, he said.

Heather Svensen, Qualicum Beach’s corporate administrator, said she has never seen anything like it in her 17 years with the municipality. Appeals require the town to go through additional documents, she said, adding: “We are talking thousands and thousands of pages” in the past year and a half.

Staff juggle workloads and shift priorities because freedom of information requests have a 30-day deadline, Svensen said.

Extensions have been granted by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of B.C., she said.

“I will say it settled down in the last little while, so hopefully we are on a better trajectory for the next little bit.”

The most recent number of requests was not immediately available on Tuesday because staff are busy with an upcoming byelection to fill the seat left vacant by former councillor Adam Palmer, who was elected MLA for Parksville-Qualicum in the 2020 provincial election.

Advance polling starts Wednesday, followed by another opportunity on May 12. The main voting day is May 15.

According to its annual reports, Qualicum Beach saw 67 freedom of information requests in 2019, 57 in 2018 and 52 in 2017.

Names of the applicants are confidential and are not provided to council, Svensen said.

She suggested that a planned new communications contractor could help educate the public on how to write such requests.

When a broad request is made, staff will contact applicants to see if it is possible to streamline it, but some choose not to do so and want every piece of paper, including emails, reports and letters, she said.

Coun. Scott Harrison said he suspects the requests are being submitted by a small group. “What better way to make sure administration can’t do its work?”

Sailland said the town is “dangerously close” to devoting the equivalent of a full-time position to answering the requests. A standard full-time position with the town, including benefits, ranges from \$75,000 to \$115,000 annually.

Coun. Robert Filmer said there is nothing wrong with submitting a freedom of information request, noting some members of the current council have submitted their own such requests.

Qualicum Beach is not alone. Nanaimo was swamped in 2018 with 420 FOI requests, up from 229 in 2017, and said staff were devoting large amounts of time to the applications.

At the time, Nanaimo city hall was known for infighting among council members and some senior staff.

Early this year, Nanaimo failed to win approval from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to disregard current FOI requests and limit future ones from a former staffer who filed a complaint against the city with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal.

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