



B.C. government providing temporary housing units to Nanaimo's homeless

170 units will be provided, split between Labieux Road and Terminal Avenue locations

[NICHOLAS PESCOD](#) / Oct. 5, 2018 3:25 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)

When an illegally formed homeless camp in downtown Nanaimo closes, its occupants will have somewhere to go.

The provincial government announced on Friday that it has purchased land at 250 Terminal Ave., near Townsite Road, for \$2 million in order to build 80 units of temporary "workforce" modular housing. The province will also

build 90 units of temporary housing on city-owned land at 2020 Labieux Rd. The cost to supply and install the modular housing at both locations will be approximately \$1.6 million.

Selina Robinson, minister of municipal affairs and housing, told the News Bulletin the decision to provide 170 units of temporary housing is in response to the ongoing homelessness situation in Nanaimo and the impending closure of Discontent City. She said the units have been purchased and will be ready for occupancy in November.

“It’s going to take four to six weeks to get these homes open; we have to get water and sewer hooked up,” she said.

Robinson said she believes the units being provided will get the majority of those living at Discontent City off the streets and into a home. She said the Terminal Avenue and Labieux Road sites will come complete with around-the-clock supportive services that will be provided by various non-profits and local agencies.

“The key component to getting people housed and having them successful in housing is bringing in the 24/7 wrap-around services,” Robinson said.

“That is the most important part in all this.”

The temporary housing units, which are being provided by B.C. Housing, won’t be ready until after an injunction against Discontent City has come into effect. A B.C. Supreme Court judge ruled last month that the camp on Port Drive be closed by Oct. 12.

Robinson said the province is expecting the city to co-operate on a phased plan to close the camp that includes allowing the occupants to remain beyond the Oct. 12 deadline.

“It is best to work with the people who are already in that tent city and leave them where they are for the four to six weeks so we can already start the decampment by identifying who can live independently with rent

supplements,” she said. “So, leave the tent city for four to six weeks so we can move the people from the tent city into housing. If the city doesn’t go along with that plan and they come in once they can enforce the injunction ... and just force the people to move, then, from my perspective, that has the potential for chaos. People will scatter and we won’t know where they are.”

Robinson said the province could begin the decampment process as early as next week but that it is “up to the city” to determine how it wants to close the camp. She also said that providing temporary housing is a far better solution than having people camped outdoors illegally.

“The citizens of Nanaimo want this tent city gone and I get that,” she said. “I imagine that everybody wants these people housed because it is better for them, it is better for neighbourhoods and it is better for the community.”

While Robinson said working with the City of Nanaimo has been a “challenge,” the province remains committed to the community. She said the sites selected for temporary housing are not intend to become permanent, adding that the province will work to add more housing in Nanaimo in the future.

“We need to continue to identify land that will work and ... we need to work with the city and the city needs to work with us to identify that land,” Robinson said.

Coun. Jerry Hong said the province’s comments about the city having two choices feels like an “ultimatum.” He said he wants to see Discontent City closed as soon as possible and doesn’t understand why it will take until sometime in November for the temporary housing to be ready.

“Why does it have to be late November when their press release says modular housing is on the way? They’re putting it at 250 Terminal, which is completely empty. Our public works yard needs two weeks to move

everything and set up fencing,” he said. “So why November? Why the end of the November? Why can’t we set up one facility and move half of them there?”

Nanaimo Mayor Bill McKay said the announcement of 170 temporary housing units is “fantastic” news. He said the court ruling makes it clear that the onus is on the occupants to leave Discontent City by Oct. 12 and does not specifically state that the city must evict.

“The court order is for the occupants to vacate, not for the city to oust people,” he said.

McKay said he had spoken to Robinson three times over the past few months about finding solutions for Discontent City and that the discussions were “difficult” at times. He said he’s pleased with the outcome, adding that Discontent City needs to be dismantled in a calm and orderly fashion.

“We need to keep in mind that we are dealing with people, we are dealing with human beings,” McKay said.

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