



The Corporation of the District of Saanich | Mayor's Office

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October 5, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

VIA EMAIL: pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister:

Re: Opioid Drug Crisis and Overdoses

On September 14, 2020, Saanich Council considered a Report to Council from Mayor Haynes and resolved as follows:

"That Council write to the Offices of the Prime Minister, the Premier, and the Federal and Provincial Ministers of Finance, Health, Mental Health and Addictions and Municipal Affairs and Housing, requesting they commit to providing adequate funding, new policy frameworks and legislative changes to effectively and holistically address the opioid crisis, mental health issues and their connections to homelessness in the municipalities in British Columbia and Canada and this approach include the decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use and the provision of a safe supply of opioids"

Saanich greatly appreciates the support the Federal government has shown in ebbing the opioid drug crisis by providing \$2M for a safer supply pilot project in Island Health.

On September 16, British Columbia announced the provision of expansion of access to safer prescription alternatives to the toxic drug supply. New policy frameworks will allow access to substance-use services, including harm reduction, treatment, counselling and mental health supports and recovery-oriented services.

On behalf of Saanich Council, please consider this request to slow the opioid public health emergency through providing further funding, new policy frameworks, and legislative changes outlined above, including decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use.

A copy of the report and excerpt of the draft meeting minutes are enclosed for reference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Haynes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Fred Haynes

Mayor

Enclosures

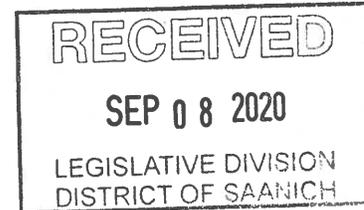
cc: Saanich Council
Paul Thorkelsson, CAO



The Corporation of the District of Saanich

Report

To: Saanich Council
From: Mayor Fred Haynes
Date: September 4, 2020
Subject: Opioid Drug Crisis and Overdoses



RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council write to the Offices of the Prime Minister, the Premier, and the Federal and Provincial Ministers of Finance, Health, Mental Health and Addictions and Municipal Affairs and Housing, requesting they commit to providing adequate funding, new policy frameworks, and legislative changes to effectively and holistically address the opioid crisis, mental health issues and their connections to homelessness in the municipalities of British Columbia and Canada; and that Council request that this approach include the decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use and the provision of a safe supply of opioids.
2. That Council direct staff to forward this report to our regional Mayors, the Capital Regional District and the British Columbia Urban Mayors' Caucus, requesting their support.

BACKGROUND:

Saanich residents, Council and our staff are aware of the damaging impacts of the opioid crisis across the region and British Columbia. Unintentional drug overdoses are presenting a major public health crisis. British Columbia's chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, reports 175 people died of drug overdoses in July, following the record death toll of 177 reached in June.

On Monday August 31, 2020, the International Overdose Awareness Day was marked by an online candlelit vigil. Over 5,560 British Columbians, made up of family, neighbours, colleagues and friends, have passed away since 2016. Paramedics responded to 2,706 non-fatal overdoses just in July, a record high.

Recently Canada's police chiefs called for decriminalization of personal possession of controlled substances for personal use as a way to address substance abuse, addiction and these tragic deaths. They also proposed increasing access to health care, treatment and social services to help guide people away from the criminal justice system.

Our Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, has long called for the decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use. These calls are echoed by Moms Stop the Harm, a Canada-wide advocacy group pushing for more effective harm-reduction strategies, including the decriminalization and safe supply of drugs.

Government and health care experts report that at the centre of the current epidemic of overdose death is the replacement of diverted pharmaceutical pills and imported heroin with extremely potent synthetic opioids, primarily in the forms of Fentanyl and Carfentanil. Overlaid on top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic adds its turmoil to those using illicit drugs. Important in-person services have shifted online. The resulting isolation has caused more people to use in isolation, exacerbating overdose deaths. In March, the Government of British Columbia announced a program to enable a safe supply of opioids. This program is recognized to be saving lives by reducing overdose deaths from toxic street drugs.

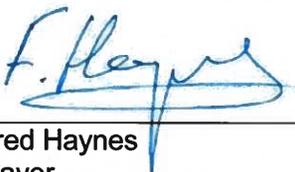
The Honourable Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of British Columbia, acknowledged that after years of underfunding, the gaps in the system are enormous. Recently in a well-regarded action, the Government of British Columbia announced \$13.5 million for 50 to 70 new addiction-treatment beds for adults and \$36 million for 123 new beds for youth. Providing this funding through the Canadian Mental Health Association, Minister Darcy recognized that adding addiction treatment beds is just one part of the continuum of care.

Opioid addiction, overdose deaths and mental health need to be treated holistically. Minister Darcy noted the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions has been providing more and better training for people in emergency rooms to deal with both mental health and addictions issues, especially in the case of overdoses. "We have been working to try and connect those people, not just have them discharged but have them connected to services in the community."

In Saanich our Police Department participates in and supports the Integrated Mobile Crisis Response Team (IMCRT) made up of Island Health nurses, counselors, child and youth mental health clinicians and police officers from Saanich and Victoria. The team responds to people in psychiatric or situational crisis providing consultation, mobile crisis response and assessment and short-term follow-up and referral services as needed. While the IMCRT operates seven days/week its hours are limited to 1pm until midnight which restricts the team's ability to address mental health incidents that occur outside those hours. This results in front line police dealing with all *Mental Health Act* calls when IMCRT is unavailable. There is also a regional Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team. Made up of mental-health nurses, police, parole officers and social workers, this team helps connect vulnerable people with longer term support services.

These holistic models have proven their effectiveness, however in each case, there is only one team so it cannot respond to all those with mental health or addiction issues who could benefit from these supports. Funding resources to provide additional mental health nurses, social workers, expanded community support, more teams and 24/7 supports are needed.

Mental health, addictions, opioid overdoses and overdose deaths are intimately connected with the issues of homelessness across our region. These massive societal problems are collectively outside both the capacity and the scope of municipalities. They need to be addressed by appropriate funding and commitments to new policy and legal frameworks from the Federal and Provincial governments.



Fred Haynes
Mayor
Chair, Saanich Police Board

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- There is a heightened need for creative ways to provide residents with outdoor places to socialize.
- These will be helpful to those residents who do not have access to yards.
- The size of the structures may need to be quite big to safely maintain social distance.
- Shade and shelter is needed in summer and winter.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services stated:

- Options will consider physical distancing requirements and include different structure types including temporary and permanent structures.

MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Brice: “That the motion be amended to change the words “asking them to create” to “asking them to consider creating”.”

The Amendment was CARRIED

The Main Motion, as Amended, was then Put and CARRIED

Main Motion, as Amended:

“That:

- 1. Council endorse the report.**
- 2. Council direct staff to report back on the options and costs for the construction of permanent and/or temporary outdoor structures that will help support a diversity of activities in our parks during the adverse weather to come.**
- 3. Council advise staff that parks in proximity to higher concentrations of multifamily residences should be prioritized.**
- 4. The Mayor write on behalf of Council to the owners and managers of shopping malls and shopping centres in Saanich asking them to consider creating temporary and/or permanent sheltered space for people to socialize and play.”**

1410-04

Report - Council

OPIOID DRUG CRISIS AND OVERDOSES

Report of the Mayor dated September 4, 2020 recommending that Council:

1. Write to the Offices of the Prime Minister, the Premier, and the Federal and Provincial Ministers of Finance, Health, Mental Health and Addictions and Municipal Affairs and Housing, requesting they commit to providing adequate funding, new policy frameworks and legislative changes to effectively and holistically address the opioid crisis, mental health issues and their connections to homelessness in the municipalities in British Columbia and Canada and this approach include the decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use and the provision of a safe supply of opioids; and
2. Direct staff to forward this report to our regional Mayors, the Capital Regional District and the British Columbia Urban Mayors’ Caucus requesting their support.

MOVED by Councillor de Vries and Seconded by Councillor Harper: “That Council:

- 1. Write to the Offices of the Prime Minister, the Premier, and the Federal and Provincial Ministers of Finance, Health, Mental Health and Addictions and Municipal Affairs and Housing, requesting they commit to providing adequate funding, new policy frameworks and legislative changes to effectively and holistically address the opioid crisis, mental health issues and their connections to homelessness in the municipalities in British Columbia and Canada and this approach include the decriminalization of controlled substances for personal use and the provision of a safe supply of opioids; and**
- 2. Direct staff to forward this report to our regional Mayors, the Capital Regional District and the British Columbia Urban Mayors’ Caucus requesting their support.”**

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Funding is beyond the capacity and outside the mandate of local governments.

The Motion was then Put and CARRIED

REPORTS FROM DIRECTORS

2860-20
Tillicum Road

UPDATE ON SAANICH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLACE CONSTRUCTION

Report of the Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services and the Director of Planning dated August 19, 2020 recommending that Council receive for information the report regarding the construction of the Saanich Neighbourhood Place daycare at 3100 Tillicum Road.

MOVED by Councillor Mersereau and Seconded by Councillor Plant: “That Council receive for information the report of the Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services and the Director of Planning dated August 19, 2020 regarding the construction of the Saanich Neighbourhood Place daycare at 3100 Tillicum Road.”

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Improved oversight with municipal-owned properties is appropriate.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Planning stated:

- The proposed Biodiversity Strategy could address protection of parkland.
- The separate leased lot was a requirement of financing.
- The Resilient Saanich process could consider sensitive ecosystems mapping.
- An application for amendments, which will come forward to Council, has been received from Saanich Neighbourhood Place.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services stated:

- Parks assets could be captured in the update to the Urban Forest Strategy.
- The current bylaw protects all municipal trees; the bylaw when the Development Permit came forward was different.