

**VicPD Response to Tent City  
2017 Herman Goldstein Award Submission**

## SUMMARY

A 2008-2009 court ruling changed the landscape of homelessness in Victoria (Court Document 1: Victoria (City) v. Adams, 2009 BCCA 563; 2008 BCSC1363). The court decision allowed homeless persons to erect shelters for the purpose of overnighting in municipal parks when shelter beds were not available. For years the Victoria Police Department (VicPD) had been saddled with the task of dealing with homeless persons sleeping rough on the streets and parks. Every morning the police were tasked with waking up homeless people and getting them to move along. This approach was not solving the problem, but in many cases it exacerbated the situation, as it was displacing persons to another area of town.

This issue culminated in 2015 with the development of a large homeless encampment on the lawns of the Provincial Courthouse in Victoria. A population of some of Victoria's most marginalized people were living in make-shift shelters on their greenspace. Tent City's establishment on provincial land alerted the upper echelon of government that there was inadequate housing for this population.

The VicPD set out to adopt a different approach in dealing with the encampment. VicPD committed to keeping the peace and ensuring the health and safety of all members of the community including the homeless. A neutral position was adopted and voiced publically. The police would not get embroiled into the politics of the matter. For over 9 months the VicPD found themselves in the middle of a controversial and acrimonious situation between multiple community groups, various levels of government, homeless advocacy, service providers, and camp occupants. Police formed a safety committee, restructured deployment models, built meaningful relationships with the homeless population, and became partners with social service agencies and government groups. These responses decreased violent events and social disorder issues, and provided essential resources to Tent City residents. The

neutral stance taken by police resulted in the camp eventually being dismantled without one single arrest on the final day. All homeless persons at the camp were provided with housing. Perceptions of the VicPD had changed. The police are now seen differently and have been invited by the government and social services agencies to be integral contributors in discussion involving homelessness, mental health and addictions, and outreach. The VicPD are now at the forefront of developing long term solutions to a serious community problem.

## **DESCRIPTION**

### **SCANNING:**

The capital city of British Columbia, Victoria, is located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island with a population of 85,792 (Greater Victoria 367,770). Victoria is a picturesque harbour city with a mild climate and a thriving tourism industry, attracting 500 cruise ships annually. Victoria has seen its homeless population increase in the past few years with the latest count stating that there were 1387 homeless/homeless at risk persons in the capital region district as of February 2016 (*Table 1: Point In Time Count – Capital Region District – February 2016*). A lack of appropriate housing and health supports has resulted in a significant number of people sleeping outside.

The court decision (*Victoria v. Adams*) allowed homeless persons to erect shelters for the purpose of overnighting in municipal parks when shelter beds were not available. This decision affected police resources by requiring police and bylaw officers to attend municipal parks to ensure homeless people moved along in the morning as required to prevent entrenchment and the development of 'Tent Cities'.

The Provincial Courthouse Property at 850 Burdett Avenue had a reoccurring issue with homeless persons camping on their greenspace at the east end of their

property. This location did not fall under the municipal bylaw, explained above, as it was classified as provincial private property as opposed to a municipal park. In 2015 the number of police calls to remove campers from the courthouse increased over 500 percent from the previous year. Police asked provincial officials to consider the use of signage prohibiting overnight sheltering on their property. This signage would allow police to use authorities under the Trespass Act to remove campers without having to receive a call for service from the courthouse.

These conversations alerted provincial ministry officials, responsible for courthouse services and property, that their security personnel had been calling police to remove homeless people from their property on a regular basis. These provincial officials became concerned about how the public would perceive the removal of homeless persons on their property especially in November with the beginning of winter and inclement conditions. Initially the provincial officials decided to no longer call police to remove campers against the advice of police. Once the homeless population became aware that they could camp without disruption, Tent City was born on the Courthouse Greenspace in the middle of November 2015 (Photograph 1: Tent City Photo taken January 2016).

Tent City was located on the edge of downtown Victoria in the Fairfield neighbourhood. Multiple apartment buildings, houses, businesses, bars, restaurants, a church, an elementary school, and a YMCA fitness facility were located within a two city block radius of the site. The diversity of land use in the area heightened the complexity of the situation as there were multiple competing points of view the police needed to consider and manage. (Map 1: Aerial Map of Tent City and Surrounding Area)

The population of the camp increased exponentially from mid-November to February 2016, reaching capacity at approximately 120 people sheltering in 80-100 tents/structures. The population of persons residing there included an overwhelming

number of persons suffering from serious mental and/or severe substance use disorders. As the density of the population increased so did the calls for services for both Tent City and the surrounding area. Incidents quickly escalated and on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Tent City had its first reported violent serious incident with a stabbing involving two residents. Shortly after on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 a resident of Tent City died on site of a drug overdose. From Tent City's inception, the surrounding affluent neighbourhood were openly voicing their concern and frustration about social disorder issues and property crime increasing in the area.

While the Provincial Government were now navigating the process of pursuing judicial authority to remove the campers, the campers became more entrenched and asserted they would not be vacating the property. Without judicial authority the VicPD found themselves in a unique situation. The VicPD made a decision to adopt a peacekeeper approach, not getting embroiled into the politics, maintaining neutrality and began to build relationships with the Tent City residents and surrounding community. It became apparent that the Provincial Government and social services agencies, who work with the homeless, mentally ill and addicted, were not taking ownership for the site. Tent City residents were lacking in services and amenities which resulted in the site conditions worsening and the effect on the surrounding community continuing to grow. Serious violent incidents, public disorder issues, and the health and safety of the tent city residents became emergent priorities.

## **ANALYSIS**

The growing population of Tent City and the friction between some of the surrounding neighbours was first identified by the Community Services Division as a developing concern. Analysis of crime and calls for service were completed by the VicPD intelligence section on a monthly basis. Their analysis showed an increase in

calls for service in the three block area around Tent City. When comparing monthly statistics from the previous year the number of police calls increased by as much as 173%. The majority of the calls for service fell into the category of social order issues and were not predominantly crime related. Although calls involving violence and drugs were not the majority, these call types had increases equal to or larger than 300% during certain months (Press Release 1: Calls for Service for Tent City and Surrounding Area – July 2016). Nonetheless the effect of Tent City on surrounding areas was substantial, with adjacent streets experiencing the most significant impact.

Through direct observations of the area, media reports, neighbourhood meetings, and consultations, police quickly realized the area was in crisis. As police closely monitored the situation, they began to understand that reported crime in the area did not necessarily correlate to the impact Tent City was having on their surroundings. Additionally, neighbours were not always reporting through conventional police methods but instead going to the media or directing their complaints to the property owner, the Province of British Columbia. Circumstances like drug paraphernalia left on private property or smoke from the Tent City fire pit drifting into neighbouring apartment buildings were affecting the neighbourhood's well-being. Tent City residents were not requesting assistance from or reporting to police, which is a common practice within the street community. Instead, Tent City residents were policing themselves and setting up guidelines for acceptable behaviour on site.

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in response to the increase in calls for service in the area, Victoria Police implemented mandatory proactive visits to the site twice every 12 hours. To document occurrences a template was developed, that would be completed after each visit, which included the following headings: health concerns of campers, hazards to public, officer safety, fire hazards, youth noted and conversed with, demeanor of campers, concerns expressed by campers, concerns expressed by

neighbourhood, emergency service accessibility, and intelligence gathered. This tool helped gather information about the camp and surrounding areas. In addition to regular visits a Community Resource Officer, Cst. Dan O'Connor, was assigned full time to Tent City and the surrounding area. This officer was tasked with acting as a liaison for the camp and the community, reviewing all files/templates, monitoring conditions of the camp/surrounding area, and forming relationships/partnerships with residents, neighbours, and supporting agencies.

The problems caused by Tent City were not unique to Victoria's downtown core but the concentration of this unsupported homeless population was unprecedented. The people living at Tent City were some of Victoria's most marginalized individuals, and were often considered the hardest to house, with most involved in the criminal justice system and suffering from mental health issues and/or addiction. When Tent City became unmanageable, the Province launched their first attempt to obtain a civil injunction in March 2016 which would allow them to legally remove the campers. The injunction failed and it became apparent to all that the site would remain for the foreseeable future. VicPD realized the need to plan for continuing support and intervention.

The harm resulting from the encampment became more and more evident as time went on. A neighbourhood which previously had a relatively small number of calls to police had exploded into one of the most prolific areas of concern in Victoria. On site, the living conditions began to deteriorate with no running water, no cooking facilities, inadequate bathrooms, an increasing rodent infestation, fire hazards, and the beginnings of a province-wide opioid overdose crisis. In addition, a gang element moved onto the site which increased violence in relation to the control of the drug trade. An ad hoc leadership structure emerged but their governance was not universally supported as the camp was divided into distinct populations with differing views on life at the camp.

Community perspective on Tent City polarized the neighbourhood. There was a very vocal contingent of the community who were enraged and in disbelief that the Provincial Government would allow the encampment to stay in place. They believed that Tent City was destroying their neighbourhood with crime, fear, and intimidation. A group called 'Mad as Hell' was formed to speak up against the formation of tent city and the government's complacency in allowing it to continue. There were also sympathizers of the Tent City residents who would volunteer their time and donate food and belongings to the campers. Community support, at least in the way of donations, dwindled as the encampment continued on.

Through feedback from the neighbours, Tent City residents, documented occurrences, analysis of police calls to the area, community meetings, prominent stakeholders, and in accordance with policing obligations the Victoria Police focused on improving these four areas of concern throughout the duration of Tent City:

- I. Improve the health and safety of Tent City residents (Graph 1: Overdose Incidents in Tent City and Victoria)
- II. Decrease the number of violent incidents on site (Graph 2: Violent Incidents at Tent City)
- III. Decrease calls for service in surrounding area and improve community feeling of safety (Graph 3: Calls for Service in area surrounding Tent City)
- IV. Work toward a peaceful resolution while advocating for long term solutions and change.

## **RESPONSE:**

### ***Improving the Health and Safety of Tent City Residents:***

As VicPD continued to monitor tent city it became apparent that there was a dire need for the conditions in the camp to improve. Although many service providers were

coming to the site to provide food and other supports, no single group was taking leadership or coordinating services. No one knew how many people were living on site and what supports each individual needed to live safely in this environment. Legitimate health concerns surrounding overdoses, fires, clean drinking water, and appropriate bathroom facilities were affecting resident's wellbeing. Despite consistent police presence, health and safety at the camp continued to deteriorate. Police had been responding to calls for service in the area and had added mandatory proactive patrols. These two police actions provided intelligence about the worsening conditions but did little to improve the camp. Cst. O'Connor, who had worked in refugee camps in Sierra Leone, noted that the conditions in Tent City were worse than those he experienced in West Africa. In his experience, regular camp management meetings with all stakeholders ensured the continuing health and safety of refugees living there.

VicPD decided to establish and chair a similar concept to engage and hold agencies and stakeholders responsible at Tent City. The Safety Committee began to hold weekly meetings beginning on February 9, 2016, and eventually included participants from Island Health, Victoria Fire Department, Tent City Residents, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Social Service Agencies, Provincial Government, and the Victoria Police (Meeting Minutes 1: Sample Safety Committee Minutes). The police recruited members from various community based organizations by identifying areas of expertise that were needed as well as explaining the severity of the situation. Congruently, the Inspector in charge of the Community Services Division, Inspector Scott McGregor, was meeting with high ranking officials of the provincial government and Health Authority to ensure resources needed for the Safety Committee were available. Through this committee, health and safety deficiencies were identified and tasked to the appropriate agency/group. The committee meetings were colorful and challenging as the participants had differing views and backgrounds, levels of education,

and most of all life experiences. Despite their differences, the committee persevered with the goal of attempting to influence the following priorities:

- a) **Opioid Crisis:** Tent City members and police highlighted the need for overdose education and training to Island Health. Island Health provided residents with Naloxone training, Naloxone kits, and opioid use education.
- b) **Water / Washroom Facilities:** The committee advocated for Tent City residents to have running water, washrooms and showers. Health concerns were stressed to demonstrate the need.
- c) **Fire Prevention:** The committee, championed by the police and fire department, emphasized fire prevention as a top priority at every meeting. As numbers increased at Tent City, accessibility to areas of the site were compromised this put the camp in violation of provincial fire code, due to inadequate egress pathways. After observing residents using propane in their tents/structures, education and training on the use of fire extinguishers, and the dangers of carbon monoxide was given. Assistance was provided with planning of egress routes, creating designated smoking areas, and camp clean-ups.

***Decrease the Number of Violent Incidents on Site:***

Police closely monitored the calls for service inside Tent City especially when violence or danger to life was indicated. Police were aware that their calls for service within Tent City were only the tip of the iceberg. Under reporting was evident as most of the serious occurrences were reported by people living outside of Tent City as opposed to those within it. In April and May 2016 police noticed an increase in violent events (weapon offences, serious assaults, and domestic violence) at the site and confirmed from confidential sources that many others were going unreported. Police believed that the increased presence of a local Victoria street gang was responsible for the escalation

of calls. VicPD had been steadily increasing their presence on site with the mandated proactive visits, a designated community resource officer, and the Bike and Beat Sections attending daily. Despite these proactive measures violence did not decrease because Tent City residents knew when police were on site. An analysis of Tent City calls indicated that violent calls for service increased between 3pm to 3am. On June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016 VicPD implemented a two person static duty inside Tent City, during the hours listed above, in hopes of reducing violence and pushing out the gang element.

***Decrease Calls for Service in surrounding area and improve community feeling of safety:***

Through calls for service analysis, information highlighted from the proactive police visits templates, and media reports of community experiences. (News Article 1: Times Colonist Article 20160515) the VicPD realized that their current deployment model was not reducing calls for service in the area and/or giving the surrounding community a feeling of safety and security. At community meetings police heard from neighbourhood residents that they were afraid to walk past the site and took considerable detours to avoid the area. Some of the accounts were from elderly people living in senior-designated buildings within one city block of the site. Police considered this anecdotal information from the community and implemented a visible police presence daily between 1300 and 1900 hours, hoping it would have the most impact on the community. This time frame was chosen strategically as it covered people's commute home from work and the dinner hour. Wearing high visibility vests and travelling on foot, the officers were tasked with engaging neighbours, businesses, and providing a visible police presence.

***Work toward a peaceful resolution while advocating for long term solutions and change:***

VicPD was in a unique situation with the residents of Tent City as residents gained trust that police actually cared about their well-being and safety and were advocating for housing. This allowed officers to build trust and develop strong meaningful relationships. This approach was formalized when Inspector McGregor sent out an operational plan detailing objectives for officers working in Tent City (VicPD Document 1: Operational Objective at Tent City). Police took time fostering this relationship by partaking in Tent City resident meetings, sitting around the 'spiritual fire' with the large Indigenous population on site, and advocating for the needs of the Tent City residents. Police members, especially the ones who were on site frequently, became trusted fixtures in the camp. Police took advantage of this opportunity to educate residents about the prevalence of lethal drugs containing Fentanyl and advised the community to take precautions as there had been malicious attempts to set fire to the camp. Police ensured that the leaders amongst the camp were identified and empowered those leaders to undertake the responsibility of making the camp safe. Sharing of information and understanding the mood and needs of the camp proved vital for police to function efficiently in their role. Support for the VicPD at Tent City improved when the Tent City residents reviewed the affidavit of the police department for the court injunction process. The affidavit was viewed as unbiased and balanced.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### ***Improving the Health and Safety of Tent City Residents:***

The establishment of the Tent City Safety Committee looked at improving health and safety through the following objectives:

- a) ***Opioid Overdose Prevention:*** The education and training from Island Health, implemented through the Safety Committee, appeared to have the desired effect on the reduction of overdose deaths at the site. Although the number of

overdose calls at the site followed a similar trend to overdose calls throughout the Victoria area, the number of overdose deaths at Tent City was eliminated after the establishment of the Safety Committee. These statistics are in stark contrast to what was observed in the rest of the Victoria where numbers of deaths were directly correlated to number of nonfatal overdoses (Graph 1: Overdose Incidents Tent City and Victoria). The statistics at Tent City are even more impressive considering the fact that overdoses were not always reported to emergency services. Police were also told that non-residents had been coming to the site in order to use in a safer environment. The community and set-up of Tent City likewise aided in the reduction of overdoses as there was the potential to get help quickly. Tent City residents set up an improvised overdose prevention site in one of the structures where people could use while being monitored by peers. Overall the efforts in overdose prevention resulted in a positive outcome for the Tent City community while offering services to outlying community as well.

- b) **Water and Bathroom Facilities:** Washrooms, showers, and running water were installed on Tent City. The information and advocacy provided by the Safety Committee had a direct impact on securing these amenities.
- c) **Fire Prevention:** The Safety Committee was able to ensure proper training and equipment was on site should it be needed in case of a fire. Throughout the existence of Tent City there were compliance issues with accessibility and egress pathways in related to the fire code. Although progress was made in the removal of combustible materials and overheard tarps, Tent City never passed a fire inspection. The Tent City community was well developed and at capacity when the Safety Committee began to address this concern. Progress with pathways would be made one day only to be filled with a new tent the next. The failure to

abide by the fire code exemplifies the challenges with this population in an unstructured site. For many of the residents, cleaning up their belongings was an overwhelming task potentially putting them into crisis. In order to be successful in this regard early intervention and the allocation of camping spots would have been vital. Tent City had a handful of fires during its existence luckily none were fatal.

***Decrease the Number of Violent Incidents on Site:***

Following the implementation of the static duty inside Tent City the occurrence of serious incidents involving violence decreased. In May 2016, prior to the static duty, there were 5 violent events within 71 calls for service. In June 2016, during the deployment of the static duty, there were 2 violent events within 80 calls for service. In July 2016 there were 2 violent events and there were none in August 2016 (Graph 2: Violent Incidents at Tent City). With the constant presence of 2 police members on site violent occurrences decreased while other calls for service remained consistent. VicPD's policing model progressed throughout the duration of Tent City concluding with a constant police presence on site after less intrusive models did not deter violence.

***Decrease Calls for Service in surrounding area and improve community feeling of safety:***

Beat deployment in the surrounding area of Tent City started on May 21, 2016. At the beginning of this deployment police had received 198 calls for service in May 2016. Following the police officers walking the beat, the calls for service dropped to 147 for June 2016, 140 for July 2016, and 115 for August 2016 (Graph 3: Calls for Service in area surrounding Tent City). Statistically, the reduction in calls for the area demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach but the impact on the community appeared much greater. The number of neighbours and businesses that were constantly thanking police for their presence was significant. Feedback from the community, gathered through

neighbourhood meetings and the shift template, was positive and their perception of security and safety in their neighbourhood had increased. One challenge when measuring the effectiveness of this approach was the number of proactive police calls created by police when they walked upon an incident occurring in the neighbourhood. This deployment model did not appear to displace the problem to adjacent neighbourhoods as complaints remained consistent in outlying areas.

***Work toward a peaceful resolution while advocating for long term solutions and change:***

On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016 the Province's court application to have Tent City dismantled was approved on the condition that housing was provided to every occupant. The province had acquired a 147 room building in downtown Victoria to accomplish this. The court had given Tent City until August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to vacate the site. The last person vacated the Tent City site on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Not a single person was arrested and police officers walked off the site with the last residents. Leaving the site was not without its challenges or negotiations but the relationships formed through the nine months of Tent City stood strong. It was not only VicPD that believed they undertook this challenge in a progressive way as illustrated in a Facebook Post by Christine Brett, one of Tent City's leadership figures (Facebook 1: Brett Facebook post about police approach). In the post Brett talks about VicPD's approach to community policing, the formation of the safety committee, and that police worked with the community to keep everyone safe.

VicPD, throughout Tent City, acted as an organizer, advocator, and an educator. Police were able to use their expertise to influence decision making resulting in a safer more humane living conditions as well as better long term housing prospects for this population in the future. VicPD's response gave rise to relationships with social service providers and the street entrenched population being better than ever. The advocacy by

VicPD and others resulted in the Provincial Housing Ministry become heavily involved in Tent City. Tent City became a significant catalyst for change for Victoria as provincial funding established over 300 beds of supportive housing for the residents of Tent City and others. Currently VicPD continues to be involved with community initiatives by providing input, advocating, and providing leadership with respect to issues of homelessness, mental health and severe substance use.

**AGENCY and OFFICER INFORMATION:**

**Key Project Team Members**

Inspector Scott McGregor, Community Services Division

Staff Sergeant Colin Brown, Community Services Division

Constable Mike Darling, Community Services Division

Constable Terri Healy, Community Services Division

Constable Dan O'Connor, Community Services Division

**Project Contact Person**

Constable Dan O'Connor

850 Caledonia Avenue, Victoria, BC, Canada, V8T 5J8

1 (250) 360-6384

[vi5417@vicpd.ca](mailto:vi5417@vicpd.ca)

## **Appendices**

### **VicPD Response to Tent City 2017 Herman Goldstein Award Submission**

**Court Document 1: Victoria(City) v. Adams,2009 BCCA 563;2008 BCSC1363**

[145] In the present case, I conclude that the ability to provide oneself with adequate shelter is a necessity of life that falls within the ambit of the s. 7 provision “life”. The uncontradicted expert evidence establishes that exposure to the elements without adequate shelter, and in particular without overhead protection, can result in a number of serious and life threatening conditions, most notably hypothermia. The Bylaws and the operational policy prohibit the erection of the overhead protection that is necessary to protect the individual from this risk. I conclude that the Bylaws and the operational policy of the City engages the right to life.

Source: <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2008/2008bcsc1363/2008bcsc1363.pdf>

**Table 1: Point In Time Count – Capital Region District – February 2016**

## Enumeration results

Individuals enumerated on the night of the count

A total of 1,387 individuals were enumerated (unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and turned away) on the night of the count.

<b>Table 1 Overall number of people experiencing homelessness on February 10th, 2016</b>	
Facility Count (1,077 sheltered and 65 turned away)	1,142
Surveyed individuals - unsheltered (vacant building, makeshift shelter, tent, or shack, other unsheltered location unfit for human habitation, public spaces, or a vehicle)	192
Provisionally Accommodated: Surveyed individuals staying at someone else's place	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,387</b>

Source: <https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/housing-pdf/pitcount-report26apr2016.pdf>

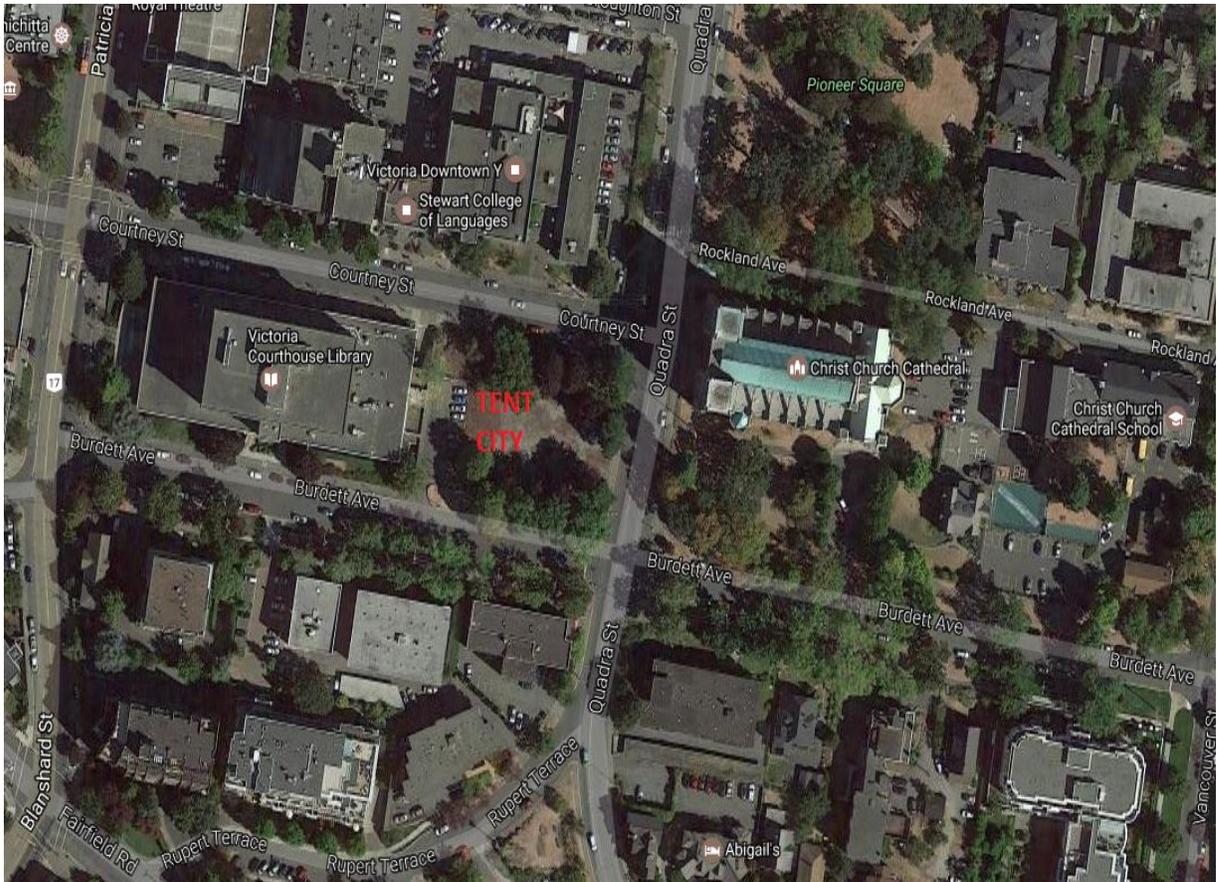
**Photograph 1: Tent City Photo taken January 2016**



Source: Cst. O'Connor's photo from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the Courthouse taken January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016.



**Map1: Aerial Map of Tent City and Surrounding Area**



Source: Google Maps – Satellite View

**Press Release 1: Calls for Service for Tent City and Surrounding Area – July 2016 (3 pages)**

## **July 7th Report On Calls For Police Service: “Tent City” & Surrounding Area**

Thursday, July 7, 2016

As a result of continued public interest in calls for police service in and around the “Tent City” area, this report provides information on calls for police service by month and call type in the area of “Tent City.”

The “Tent City” area is defined using an approximate radius of three blocks, with the BC Courthouse greenspace at the centre. While this data reflects calls for service in the noted area, it does not necessarily mean that all of the calls are related to the “Tent City” encampment.

The data has been extracted from the VicPD records management system and only represents incidents that have been reported to police. It is also important to note that data less than 6 to 8 weeks old is subject to change, due to the investigative and review process which sometimes results in call types being amended after their initial entry.

It is important to note that the information contained in this report represents calls for service to the police department. Calls for service reports represent a snapshot of reported incidents that have some type of impact on the community as compared with crime statistics alone. Calls for service include reports received by the public to police and incidents that are witnessed by officers and result in some type of police action. Calls for service represent both incidents that would be considered violations of federal criminal law (crimes) and situations that would be considered incidents of disorder that have an impact on the community (but are not necessarily crimes). Any reporting of this information should refer to this information as “calls-for-service” statistics, not “crime statistics.”

As a result of the ongoing issues in relation to the “Tent City” area, the Victoria Police Department has been engaged in a comprehensive response that includes regular attendance at “Tent City” as well as increased patrols in the general area. Officers have been specifically assigned to liaise with the “Tent City” occupants to ensure that safety concerns within the camp are addressed. This work has included the creation of a safety committee that involves representatives from the Victoria Fire Department, the provincial government, and local service providers.

Between November 2014 and June 17, 2015, there were **779** calls for police service to the neighbourhood around “Tent City”. There were **33,700** calls throughout Victoria and Esquimalt during that time.

Between November 2015 and June 17, 2016, there were **1272** calls for police service to the neighbourhood around “Tent City”. There were **33,826** calls throughout Victoria and Esquimalt during that time.

Chart 1, *Calls For Service By Victoria Police Report Period*, shows a line line graph comparison of calls for police service from November 15, 2014 through June 17, 2015 compared to November 15, 2015 to June 17, 2016. Note that the reporting periods reflect the 28-day cycle used by the VicPD Strategic Operations Council for intelligence-led policing throughout Victoria and Esquimalt.

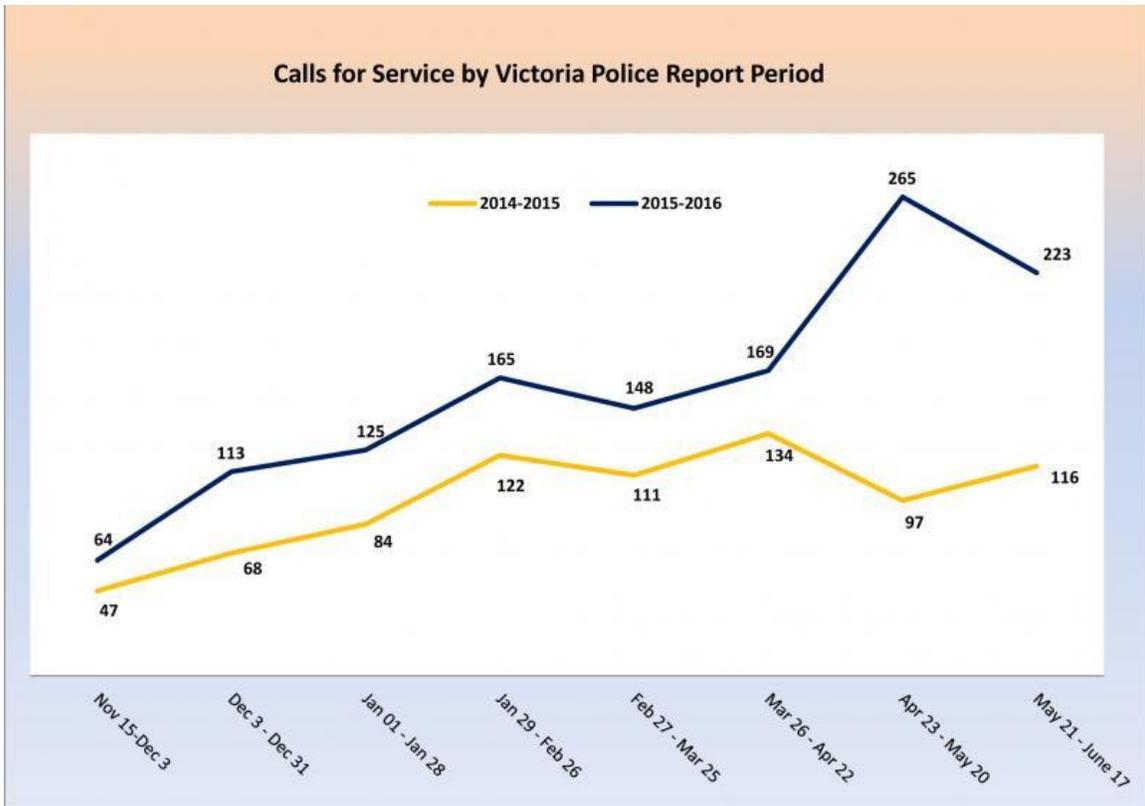
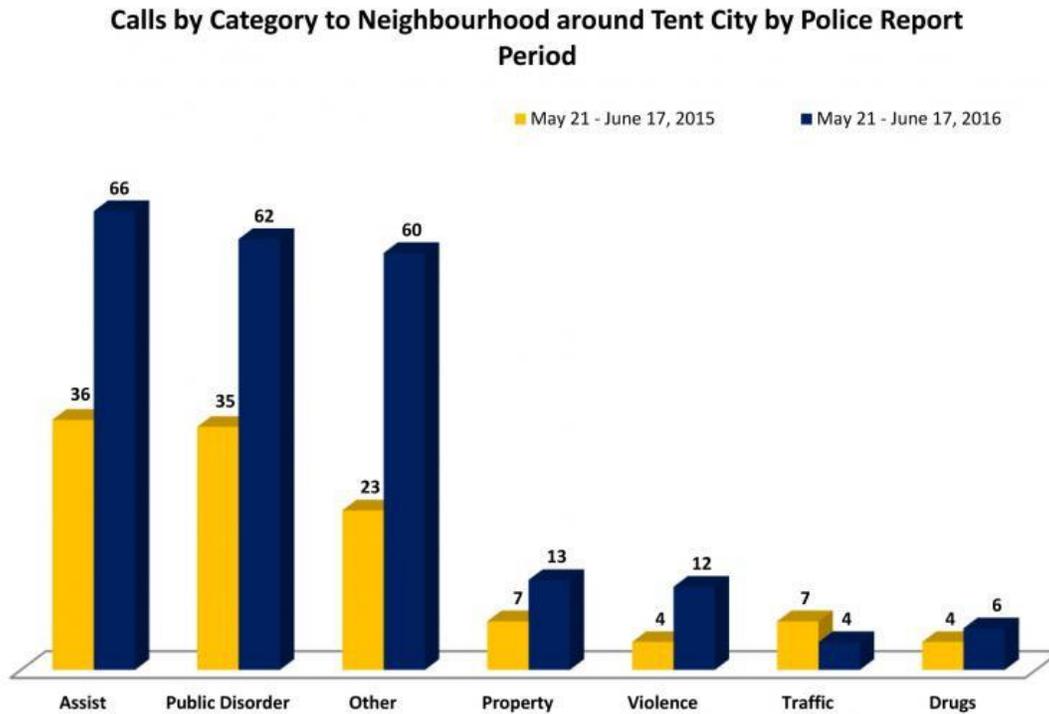


Chart 2, *Calls by Category to Tent City*, shows a bar graph comparison of calls for police service by incident type from May 21 to June 17, 2015 compared to May 21 to June 17, 2016.



*Examples of call types in each category:*

*Assist* – Abandoned 911, assist fire department/police, check well-being

*Public Disorder* – Causing a disturbance, noise bylaw, liquor act, weapons possession

*Other* – Missing persons, warrant arrests, suspicious circumstances

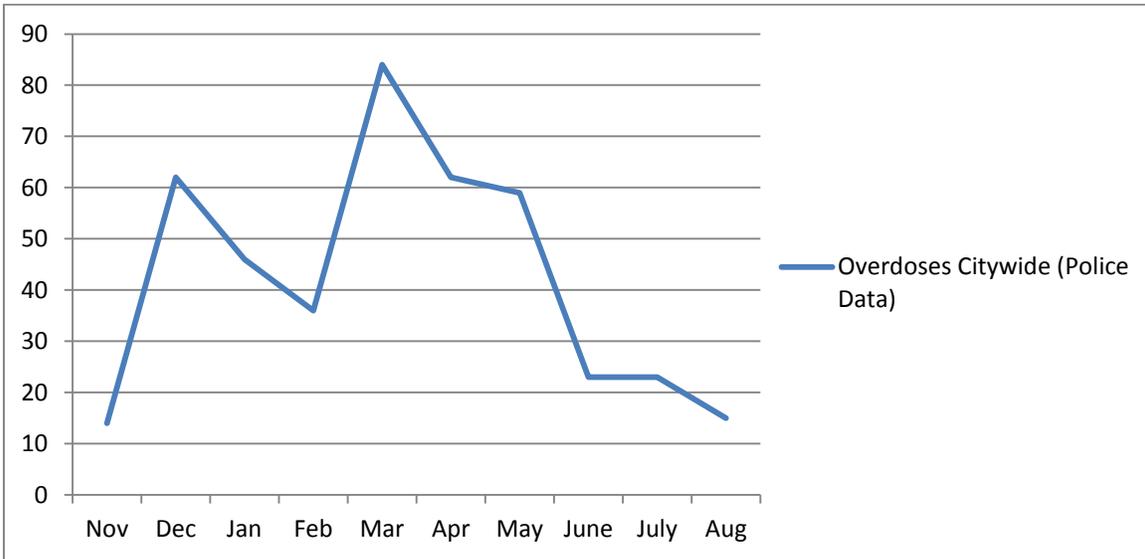
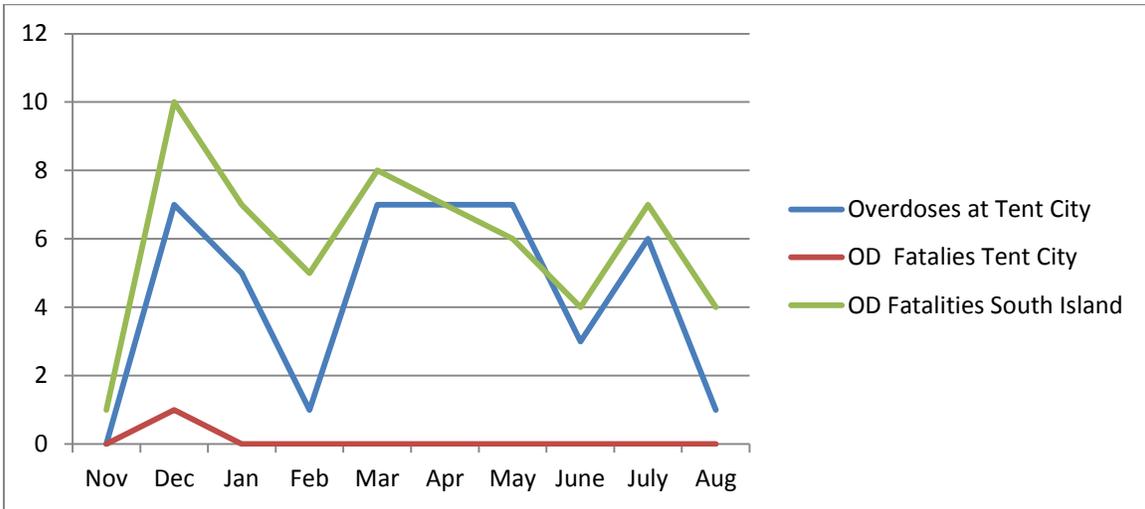
*Property* – Break and enter, fraud, theft, theft from vehicle

*Violence* – Assaults, harassment, uttering threats

*Traffic* – Driving prohibitions, collisions, alcohol driving offences

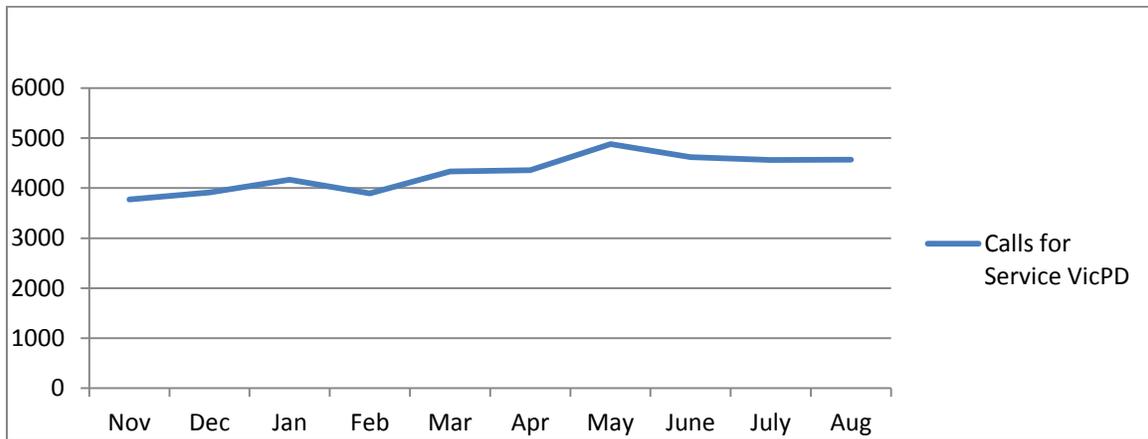
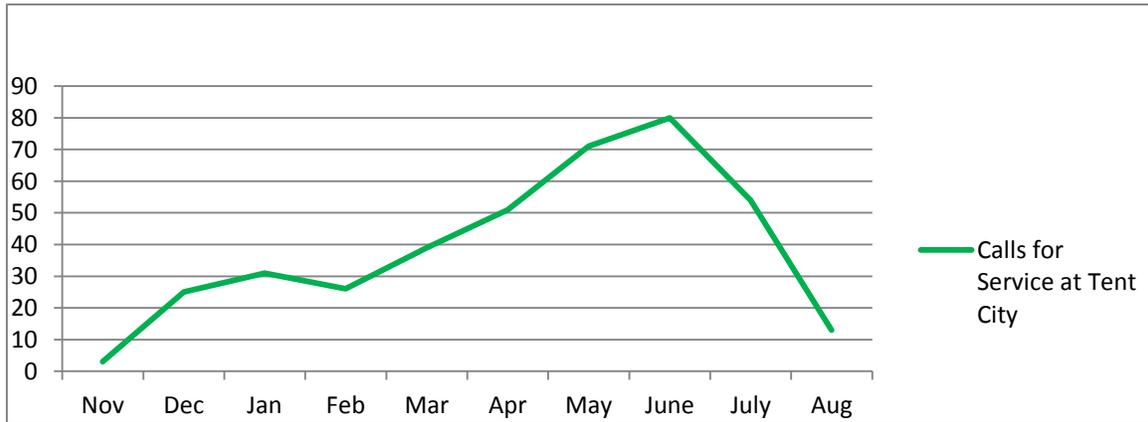
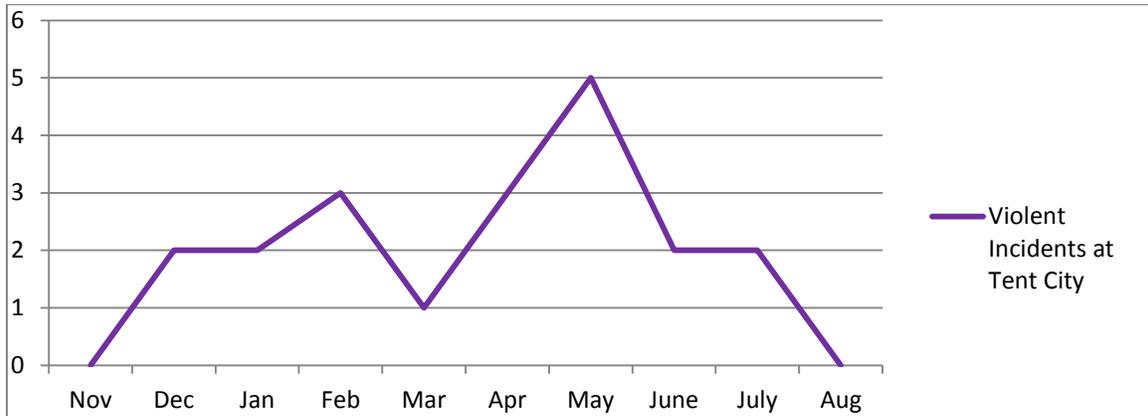
*Drugs* – Drug seizure, drug possession, drug trafficking

**Graph 1: Overdose Incidents in Tent City and Victoria**



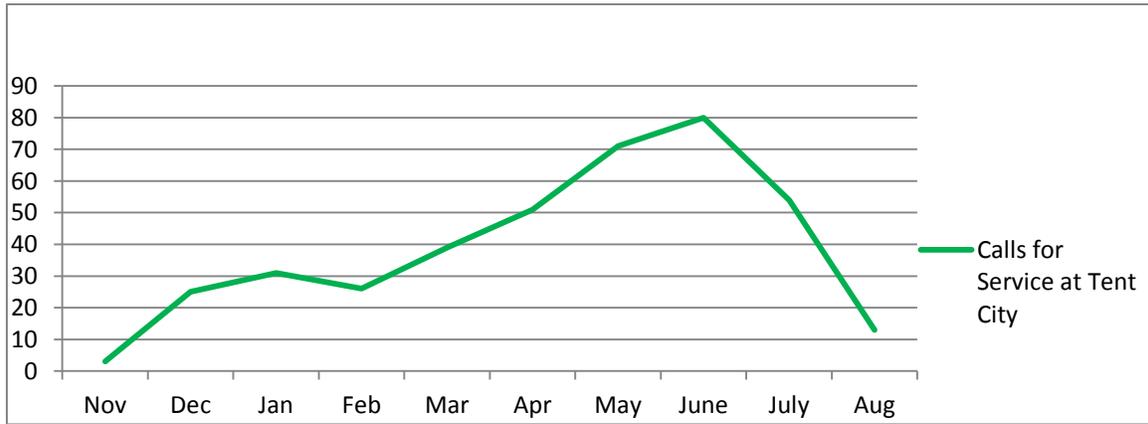
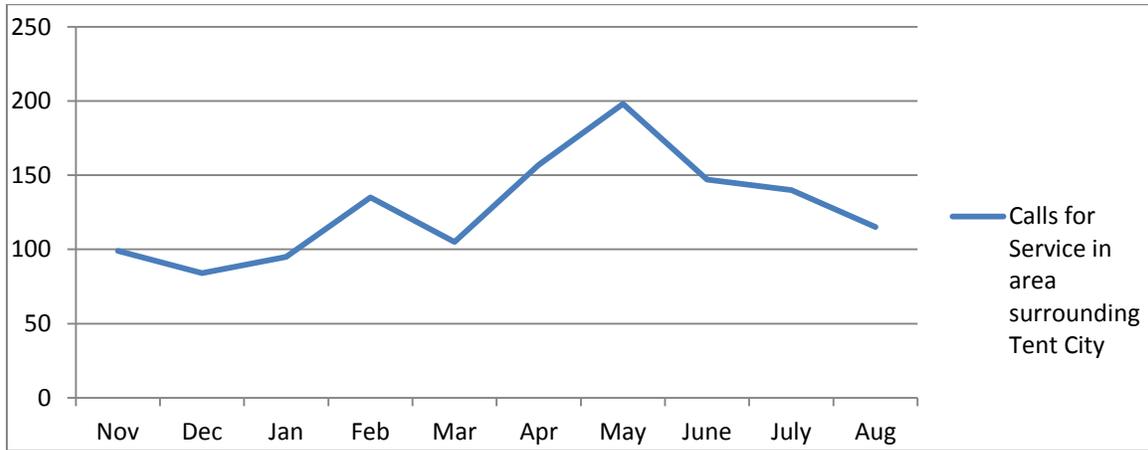
Source: Island Health and VicPD statistics

**Graph 2: Violent Incidents at Tent City**



Source: VicPD Calls for Service Statistics

**Graph 3: Calls for Service in area surrounding Tent City**



Source: VicPD Calls for Service Statistics

## Meeting Minutes 1: Sample Safety Committee Minutes (2 pages)

### Tent City Safety Committee Meeting – April 26, 2016

**Present: Andy Bond (PHS), Dan O'Connor (VicPD), Simon Goodspeed (PHS), Cleo Neville (PHS), Trish Patterson (MCFD), Colin Brown (VicPD), Bob Cooper (Provincial Fire Commissioner's Office), Megan Sabell (Victoria Fire), Susie (PHS), [REDACTED] (Tent City), Christine Brett (Tent City), and Jade Yehia (Island Health)**

#### 1. Follow-Up from past meeting

- a) Island Health Update: Street Nurses are available at the Pandora Health Clinic on Tues-Friday between 1pm-4pm. A street nurse will be attending tent city tonight (April 26) to drop off harm reduction supplies. Heat stress information has been provided to the camp. Other than the water jugs which are filled at the church another water source has not been identified. *(text in italic are not from island health but a round table group discussion) Discussion around water and cooling with the group: spoke about gastro-intestinal issues (potentially related to water), spoke about need for another water source, and talked about tarps overhead to keep cool (this option was discussed as a fire hazard and another solution needs to be found). PHS to follow up about alternative water source.*
- b) Site Visit by Fire: Fire site visit was met with opposition from a portion of the camp and was not completed. **Fire visit has been rescheduled for Thursday at 2pm. Police will be present to ensure things go smoothly.** Discussion around fire safety on site. Christine said that the ceremonial fire is no longer on site. Spoke about propane sources being safer than open fire. Suggested that barbeques be used as cooking source. **PHS to follow-up regarding BBQs.**
- c) Leaking Toilet: Police have contacted the site management company about the leaking porta-potty. PHS is looking at another solution in relation to washroom facilities.

#### 2. Roundtable to voice safety concerns

- a) Anna (Tent City): Smoke inhalation and access to regular handwashing stations. Follow up item created for camp/PHS for handwashing stations.
- b) Susie (PHS): None
- c) Andy (PHS): Discussed rodents on site and that traps will be set up (PHS). The need for a site map and communal access to fire extinguishers (Victoria Fire/Camp/and PHS) to work on site map.

Pathways to become more established and marked (PHS/Camp). Identified the need for more garbage and recycling pickup and receptacles (PHS).

- d) Megan (Victoria Fire): Will assist the residents in making their own fire safety plan. It will be the responsibility of the residents to take the initiative and Victoria Fire will provide them guidance and assist in the production.
- e) Bob (Fire): Concerns around propane tanks at tent city and using a cooking or eating source inside individual's tents. Ideally there would only be one central cooking area. Need to have cigarette disposal area – tins with sand would work. The camp needs to continue to work on placement of tents/structures around egress and site pathway issues.
- f) Trish (MCFD): Out of Rain Shelter has reopened until the end of May for youth.
- g) Christine (Tent City): Needs to hand over court support and appointments for a group of 10-12 people that she is currently supporting. If the individuals agree she would hand over responsibilities to PHS or other members of the camp.
- h) Cleo (PHS): The need for lighting, pathways and a defined kitchen area were discussed. Lighting options were brainstormed.
- i) Simon (PHS): Discussed the need for everyone on site to feel confident in their personal safety.
- j) Dan (VicPD): Stressed the importance of accessibility on site in order for emergency services to access all tent city residents in their tents/structures.

### **3. Tasks for Follow-Up**

- a) PHS/Camp: The camp and PHS will look into the following: providing an alternate water source, washroom facilities, and barbeques as a cooking source, establishment of pathways and accessibility, handwashing stations, setting up rodent traps, and improving garbage /recycling pickups/programs.
- b) Camp/Victoria Fire: Develop a Fire Safety Plan for the site. Camp to develop with Victoria Fire providing guidance.
- c) Provincial Fire Commissioners Office/Police: Site Visit on Thursday April 28<sup>th</sup> at 2pm.

### **4. Next Meeting: May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 at 11:30pm at YMCA Cafe**

### **News Article 1: Times Colonist Article 20160515 (3 pages)**

Calls to Victoria police requesting service in the three-block radius centred by tent city are up 46 per cent from the previous year. By comparison, the overall increase in police calls in Victoria and Esquimalt was 3.6 per cent.

Between November 2015 and April 2016, 760 calls were made to the tent city area, compared with 521 calls in the same six months a year earlier.

Victoria Police Insp. Scott McGregor, who is in charge of the community services division, said the tent city outside the Victoria courthouse on Burdett Avenue represents a convergence of homeless people into a small area, leading to **“a disproportionate amount of increased calls for service in this one concentrated area.”**

Drug calls in the area have tripled to 27 from nine, while calls about violence more than doubled to 39 from 15.

“Neighbours are watching a rise in violent crime as the group at tent city morphs into a younger, more confrontational crowd, and we just want the government to act,” said neighbour James Campbell.

Campbell said neighbours want those in tent city to be cared for.

“Tent city is major inconvenience for people living here, but everybody that I’ve talked to wants the best for the people in tent city,” he said.

“They want them to get help, they want them to get treatment, they want them to get housing if that’s what is required. But looking over there at what the living conditions are and what’s going on, having drug addicts next to drug addicts all day long is not helping any drug addict.”

Kathy Stinson, executive director of the Victoria Cool Aid Society, which provides emergency shelter, health care and other services to homeless people, said some of the growth in call volume comes from increased vigilance by neighbours and concern for the well-being of campers.

“It’s not all about theft and violence. There are people calling in because they’re concerned about people that they see,” she said. “That’s a good thing.”

Still, police recognize that the tenor of tent city has taken a turn for the worse, causing concern among both neighbours and campers fearful of others staying at or visiting the camp, a situation they say they are trying to control through legal channels.

“We believe there’s a real drug element that’s on the site, no question about it,” McGregor said.

“There are some people who traffic drugs that are on the site and they bring a level of violence onto the site.”

Two incidents last Thursday prompted considerable concern from the community.

Just before noon, a woman was accosted by an aggressive man who grabbed her scarf from behind and demanded her mobility scooter at Rockland Avenue and Quadra Street, about half a block from the tent city.

In a letter to the Times Colonist, Ernie Kuemmel said his wife told her assailant she could not walk, but he persisted until she hit him in the groin with a book.

“She has used her disability scooter on her own throughout various parts of the downtown area and has never felt unsafe, but she now fears going near the tent city area when she is alone because of this encounter,” Kuemmel wrote.

Victoria Police spokesman Bowen Osoko said the woman, a member of the Mad as Hell group, was unable to give police a detailed description of her assailant.

Stuart Hall, principal of Christ Church Cathedral School, which is barely a block away from the encampment, said he had to escort a man off the school property.

The agitated man headed to tent city, “where it took several emergency response people to subdue him so he could be taken to hospital for treatment.”

The incident took place about 1:45 p.m. “No kids saw it, thankfully,” Hall added.

In an email, the principal said the school wants a resolution to the tent city. “The rapid increase in the number and severity of incidents in the neighbourhood in recent weeks, especially around the school and cathedral, is very concerning.”

Steven Hammond, a neighbouring homeowner and spokesman for the Mad as Hell Victoria group, which is opposed to the tent city, said the man in the school yard was so hyped up that he vaulted a high fence.

“People are terrified” of what is happening in the neighbourhood, he said.

Osoko said it is not clear that the man lives in tent city, but he was “suffering a state of excited delirium, which is often caused by a drug reaction and is an immediate medical concern.”

The man was taken to hospital and police are considering charges, possibly violating a court order to stay away from narcotics.

McGregor said there is a need for accurate numbers and statistics on concluded files that accurately reflect the incident, not just the description in the call for services. Police recently asked city council for additional funding for a policy and audit analyst, who is now in the process of being hired.

“Is it appropriate that police are now expected to gather and produce and analyze those types of statistics, or would it be more appropriate for a government agency to do that?” he asked.

Some calls to police about disturbances can result in mental-health apprehensions that won’t generate a crime statistic because there wasn’t a crime, McGregor said.

But for the caller, the sense of disturbance is great. “The person looking out their window now doesn’t feel safe in their own home,” he said. “Now they feel like a crime’s been committed and they feel victimized by crime, but it just doesn’t generate that crime stat.”

## VicPD Document 1: Operational Objective at Tent City

### **OBJECTIVES and Guiding Principles**

- 1) The overarching objective of the VicPD is to ensure public safety for all in and around the area of the courthouse green space. Short of a court injunction all actions by the VicPD will be based on this fundamental objective.
- 2) To maintain public order and provide support a safe environment in and around the camp area.
- 3) The police will monitor the situation and take a measured approach and intervene if/ when public safety is or potentially at risk.
- 4) To respond to criminal activity or persons as per normal operating procedures, with consideration for officer safety as well as all emergency service providers at all times.
- 5) This group has responded positively to the police. NCO's and/or members are encouraged to liaise with the organizers on site.
- 6) To work cohesively with all other partners involved in ensuring the safety of all campers.

Source: VicPD Operational Plan for Courthouse Encampment

**Timeline 1: Tent City - Important Dates**

TIMELINE - Tent City Important Dates	
Mid November 2015	Start of Tent City
02-Dec-15	50+ tents
05-Dec-15	First attendance with PAS to non -fatal overdose
18-Dec-15	Ops Planning - Patrol and CSD in a proactive capacity
24-Dec-15	Stabbing - Aggravated Assault - Victim and Suspect living in the camp
26-Dec-15	First overdose death at the camp.
05-Jan-16	First wooden structures being built.
07-Jan-16	Multiple youth reported on site.
08-Jan-16	Request/ask to leave: posted notices
24-Jan-16	Stabbing no suspect - No one in the camp will tell us anything
31-Jan-16	Ops Plan - Public Safety - Planned presence on site by patrol - 2 x per shift - template
02-Feb-16	Fire department attends to first fire
04-Feb-16	Notice stating you must vacate site by Feb 25th
09-Feb-16	Report of male with a firearm running into the camp
09-Feb-16	Start of Safety Committee Meeting
10-Feb-16	Assault - Campers yelling we 'police ourselves'.
25-Feb-16	Deadline to Vacate site - Notice given by Province - Celebration
11-Mar-16	Court March 11, 14, 15
05-Apr-16	Injunction not granted.
21-May-16	Surrounding Area Deployment - 1300-1900 hours
24-May-16	Provincial Representative designated to be on the ground at Tent City
27-May-16	News Camera Man gets assaulted
08-Jun-16	Search of Tent City - 16-25154
11-Jun-16	Tent City Deployment - 1500-0300 hours
27-Jun-16	Court June 27,28
05-Jul-16	Court Decision - Injunction granted
08-Aug-16	Court Injunction Deadline Date
12-Aug-16	Tent City Closed - Last Person leaves the site. No arrests