

From: Derek Brindle
Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2020 12:44 PM
To: Inquiries <Inquiries@rdn.bc.ca>
Subject: Board Meeting April 28 - Motion to prohibit homeless camping in the Gabriola 707 Park

Chairman Thorpe and Board members,

This e mail is in support of the motion to be brought forward on behalf of all Gabriola residents by Director Craig , to effectively suspend , on terms, the exemption of the 707 park from the prohibition on homeless camping contained in Park Use Regulations Bylaw 1801.

I am a Gabriola resident and like many others , reside on lands contiguous to the 707 Park .

Before drafting this e mail , I reviewed the Bylaw and related Staff Reports of November 5/19 and February 4/20 and have spoken with many Gabriolans , including Director Craig and Fire Chief Sprogis . I have also read the BC Caselaw which has reportedly reportedly animated the Bylaw exemption.

It is apparent that there was no meaningful , or any, consultation with the fire department, emergency services or the Gabriola public before the Bylaw was adopted. Had there been , Staff and the Board would have been made aware of the extreme risks of wild fire that may reasonably be anticipated in the event of homeless camping in 707 Park.

I will not repeat here what I anticipate will be conveyed by Fire Chief Sprogis to the Board on April 28. Suffice it that there is a uniform alarm within Gabriola's population that the permitting of homeless camping in a large fire sensitive rural park , which has no amenities and only extremely limited fire road access for motorized equipment and personnel , presents an unacceptable threat to property and public safety .

Unlike the urban parks that were typically the focus of the caselaw (Shantz and others) , on Gabriola , with its small permanent population , little infrastructure , and a small local volunteer fire department , it is reasonably foreseeable that declining to prohibit homeless encampments in the 707 would pose an unusually high risk of wildfire . The Bylaw moves the Bylaw and implementation into the operational , not merely , the policy realm .

It would seem obvious that there are unique behavioural risks associated with homeless encampments , and that relying on a complaints based after-the-fact bylaw enforcement regime involving the imposition of fines that will go unpaid and serve no real deterrence to the irresponsible use of combustibles (camp stoves , smoking materials , campfires) is not a realistic mitigation strategy . It is unlikely that any Park Management plan , no matter how onerous or fully resourced , will adequately mitigate the risks of wildfire in the 707 , when weighed against the foreseeable losses.

The 707 is uniquely unsuited for overnight camping . There are no amenities (hygiene , waste disposal , water) . Our small island community has no human resources office , no local social services or alternative shelter facilities . Only limited community based medical services and emergency services are available for campers and non-campers alike . Our small RCMP contingent is inadequately resourced .

The minimum off-trail camping requirements in the current bylaw virtual force encampments into the heavily forested and hard to locate locations . Ascertaining the presence and risks posed by encampments will be operationally difficult . The effect of the Bylaw is to , by default , channel persons without a home away from other more accessible urban locations to a heavily forested largely inaccessible fire sensitive area within the 707 .

There will be considerable more pressure put upon our fire department to increase resources to address the enhanced risks posed by homeless encampments in the 707 . If so , there will likely be additional costs to the Gabriola public through increased fire district taxes .

Any implicit view that actual risks are minimal because it is unlikely that homeless persons would prefer to relocate to the 707 , in lieu of urban public spaces on Vancouver Island , is not only speculative but based on a risky assumption . It only takes one careless person and one discarded cigarette after which its too late .

Every summer carries fears of increasingly drier island conditions and the terrible consequences associated with wild fires that are becoming increasingly prevalent throughout BC . This is not a risk that should be required by exemption of the 707 from the general prohibition on overnight camping in Bylaw 1801.

Derek Brindle