

From: Robertson, Gregor  
To: undisclosed-recipients:  
Sent: Monday, June 29, 2009 1:56 PM  
Subject: HEAT Shelters

Dear Resident:

As some of you know, I visited your neighbourhood last weekend and I talked with residents in the condos and people staying in the Granville and Howe shelters. It was an eye opener, to say the least, and I want to thank those of you who took the time to share with me your thoughts and observations about what's been going on.

As a result of your concerns, as well as our continuing commitment to dealing with homelessness in our city, we are taking steps with the Province to address a number of issues related to the shelters.

But first, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the difficulty this has put you in. I have heard from many people in the community who are fearful and concerned about the situation. I want to assure you that I am taking those concerns very seriously.

In the meantime, I wanted to provide you with an update on the immediate steps that are being taken to address the problems.

I know that there have been serious problems in trying to shelter the hardest to house. The situation at the Granville shelter is not tolerable. While the shelter provides less than 10% of the beds across the HEAT shelters, it is causing a disproportionate amount of the problems.

As of Wednesday, the Granville shelter will be closed. I made it clear that we needed housing or shelter options in place to ensure that these shelter users aren't just ending up back on the street, potentially making things worse. Over the last few days, I worked closely with the Provincial Minister of Housing Rich Coleman to find spaces that we could transfer the Granville shelter residents to.

The shelter on Howe Street will remain open for a 30-day probation period. It will include the changes announced last week to significantly raise the barriers at the shelter. These include:

- o Individuals that have been identified creating problems due to drug use in the neighbourhood will not be allowed in the shelters;
- o Anybody seen purchasing or using drugs in the vicinity of the shelter will not be allowed in;
- o People staying at the shelter will no longer be able to wander in and out at night.

They can step outside for a cigarette, but will not be able to come and go throughout the night.

The City and BC Housing will be engaging in consultations with your community to discuss issues that arise from the Howe shelter. We want to find ways to make this work, because there is a homeless population in the south downtown area that we can't ignore. I've received emails from a number of you stating that you support shelters for the homeless, but that the drug use and the population it attracts is the reason you want the shelters closed.

I am hopeful that by closing the shelter that has caused the most problems, combined with implementing stronger restrictions on who can access the Howe shelter, that we can eliminate the causes of tension and fear in the neighbourhood, while at the same time provide shelter to 36 people who would otherwise be sleeping in doorways or under bridges.

Again, I want to assure you that I am paying close attention to the problems in your area. This has been a very difficult challenge for us all to work through and I appreciate your patience. I apologize for the unforeseen trouble that emerged in your neighbourhood with these shelters, it demonstrates how tough the problems of homelessness, drug addiction and mental illness are to solve.

I look forward to working with you to find solutions to the immediate issues with shelters in your neighbourhood, and also to develop longer-term housing solutions across our city.

Respectfully,

Mayor Gregor Robertson