



June 20, 2022

Dear Vancouver Mayor Stewart and City Councilors,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition](#), composed of 80+ organizations and community mobilizations. The Coalition advocates for public policy solutions to end poverty, homelessness and inequality in B.C, specifically a targeted and comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that prioritizes equity-seeking groups, and a whole government, cross-ministry approach to end poverty. Our work is grounded in the foundation of universal human rights.

I am specifically writing to express our support of [Councilor Jean Swanson's motion B3](#) entitled "Street Care, Not Street Sweeps: Ending Daily Displacement in Vancouver". As you know, "Street Sweeps", in the practice of daily sweeps, have been framed as helping clean up public spaces in Vancouver. However, in practice, they severely disrupt and displace many unhoused people who are experiencing poverty and who rely on public space and key services, particularly in the downtown eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, where poverty is disproportionately high.

As organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness and poverty, we are deeply concerned about the impact of the current *Street Sweeps* practices on people's lives, wellbeing, and sense of dignity and belonging. We know that criminalizing folks who rely on public space is not an effective engagement tool, and we have heard from many that the current practice of sweeps is "[dehumanizing and disruptive](#)."

The excellent research that [Pivot Legal Society](#) has led in this area, and their [comprehensive report](#) on this issue, clearly demonstrates that different and new approaches are needed, that the impacts on people experiencing these sweeps are incredibly harmful, and that throwing people's belongings out does not solve the complex issues that people experiencing homelessness and poverty face.

In endorsing the motion, we are calling on you to:

1. Engage community partners, specifically the Alternatives to Street Sweeps Working Group (Coalition of Peers Dismantling the Drug War, VANDU, WAHRS, Pivot Legal Society, individuals with lived/living experience) to develop and implement a non-punitive and community-led alternative to Street Sweeps that does not displace people who rely on public space.
2. Work with the Alternatives to Street Sweeps Working Group to create directives, best practices, and systems of accountability for their implementation, related to the confiscation of belongings from people who rely on public space, in recognition that this practice has continued potential for harmful and discriminatory impacts.
3. Create appropriate storage facilities for DTES community members.
4. Expand amenities throughout the DTES, including permanent parklets, seating areas, green and blue spaces, hygiene facilities (i.e. washroom trailers), garbage disposal sites, and other public outdoor amenities such as covered cooking facilities, and cultural programming sites.
5. Ensure all programming and policies that impact Indigenous people are implemented in compliance with *UNDRIP, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, and the City of Vancouver's Reconciliation goals.
6. Review bylaws that are inconsistent with the human and Charter rights of people who have no homes.
7. Advocate for the addition of "social condition" as a protected ground in BC's *Human Rights Code*, as recommended by the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner.

These recommendations fall within our policy platform entitled [Blueprint for Justice](#), which further recommends that the BC Human Rights Commission prioritizes stigma-auditing areas of law and policy that most directly impact highly stigmatized

populations including sex workers in areas such as: Public space governance, Income assistance and disability policy, Housing policy and residential tenancy law, Child welfare law and policy, Policing law and policy, Health policy related to mental health and substance use, and Privacy law as it relates to people who live in public spaces and who are criminalized as a result of poverty/substance use, for which we continue to lobby. **We believe that a letter from the mayor asking for the addition of “social condition” as a protected ground in BC’s Human Rights Code, as recommended by the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, would be a powerful step towards implementing this critical and impactful change.**

As the Pivot report states, “Through the continued practice of Street Sweeps, City Engineering workers and VPD officers (including beat enforcement police officers) are enforcing bylaws that collide with systemic injustices of the housing crisis, drug policy crisis, mental health crisis, and the continued dispossession of Indigenous people”. Ceasing this practice is also an important step in anti-racism and decolonization work, as disproportionate numbers of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups are amongst Vancouver’s homeless and unhoused people¹.

We urge you to vote in favour of, and support the clear, excellent, and well researched motion that is being tabled, and demonstrate leadership with a human rights based approach to addressing poverty in Vancouver that sets a clear and strong precedent to other communities across BC. Your leadership in this area sends a clear message to other communities and municipalities that there are kinder ways to engage with people who rely on public spaces, and that these methods can be developed in collaboration with communities with lived expertise, peers, and folks experiencing the impact of the current inadequate and extremely harmful practices.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Rowan Burdge

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Provincial Director

BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

¹ [Disproportionate number of Black, Indigenous, Latin people counted in Metro Vancouver homeless survey | CBC News](#)