



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Police Union Raises its Concerns Over Escalating Violence in Community

Members feeling strain with violent crimes, property damage and priority calls

March 4, 2021 (Victoria, BC) – The Victoria City Police Union (VCPU) was disturbed to learn that one of its members was accosted by a male brandishing a metal pipe after leaving the Victoria police station after a shift last weekend. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated situation where members have reported being confronted with this sort of behaviour that threatens personal safety, when leaving the workplace.

This recent event is just one of several in the last two-week period where significant property damage, weapons seizures, and violent crimes have transpired in or near a homeless encampment. “We are sympathetic with the people of Victoria and Esquimalt who have been seriously impacted by the recent influx of anti-social behaviour. If our officers can’t feel safe walking to their own cars after shift, then how is the general population expected to feel right now?” said Len Hollingsworth, VCPU President.

Hollingsworth also added: “I am thankful that it wasn’t one of our civilian staff members or another member of the community that was confronted by that pipe-wielding individual. That officer has advanced training in diffusing these types of incidents and the training to deal with physical threats, it concerns me that had a less capable person been in this situation the results could have been much more serious.”

“We believe your community should be a safe, supportive place where all people can choose to live happy, healthy, productive lives. This includes citizens, visitors, and our own members. None of us should be afraid in our own community,” said Matt Waterman, VCPU Director, in response to the latest string of violent incidents reported.

The VCPU remains committed to working alongside community partners on the growing and evolving homeless situation. However, the Union is also calling for more support from the Municipality and the Province to ensure the city can manage the strain associated with increased violence and priority calls related to this issue.

“The current solutions aren’t working. It’s time that we start having bigger conversations to bring about real change in Victoria and Esquimalt that address the challenges with housing, mental health, addiction and resourcing of local law enforcement,” said Len Hollingsworth, addressing the second death in Beacon Hill in a 48-hour period.

Below is a summary of recent incidences that have occurred in the last several weeks, all accessible on the Victoria Police Department website:

March 4, 2021: Fatal Vehicle Fire in Beacon Hill Park Under Investigation

March 3, 2021: Information Sought in Beacon Hill Park Sudden Death Investigation

March 1, 2021: One Arrested After Gasoline Poured on Tent, Occupants Threatened

February 28, 2021: One Arrested After Confronting Off-Duty Officer with Metal Pipe

February 24, 2021: Victims, Witnesses, Surveillance Video Sought After Graffiti Spree

February 24, 2021: Officers Investigating After Queen Elizabeth II Statue in Beacon Hill Park 'Beheaded'

February 23, 2021: One Arrested After City of Victoria Vehicle Damaged in Beacon Hill Park

February 18, 2021: Man Disarmed at Gunpoint by Special Duty Officers After Shovel Assault on Bylaw Officers

February 17, 2021: Information Sought After Weapons Seizure (Bat with nails embedded)

Other facts and figures on police resourcing and public spend related to this issue:

- In February 2021, the City of Victoria approved additional funding to bring in additional police officers on overtime to accompany bylaw staff conducting their duties in the city's parks, as they do not feel safe in these spaces.
- In a 6-month period between June and November 2020 the Victoria Police responded to over 4,000 priority 1 and 2 calls to 13 shelters / temporary housing facilities in Victoria. To put this in perspective, priority 1 and 2 calls are the most serious ones, usually involving violence against persons. This number represents more calls of this nature than the total number of calls the next largest municipal police service responded to throughout their municipality in the same time period.
- In summer 2020, two additional shelters/temporary housing facilities were purchased in Victoria for over 33 million in tax-payer dollars. Collectively, those two locations received more than 400 calls between June and November 2020.
- In a three-month period at the end of 2020, police saw the following increases compared to the same time period in 2019:
 - A 250% increase in violence in Beacon Hill Park (8 incidents in 2019 vs. 28 in 2020), and an overall 56% increase in calls for service.
 - An increase from 1 violent incident in Central Park in 2019 to 15 in 2020

- An increase of calls for service to Hollywood Park of over 300%; Stadacona Park and Banfield Park of over 90%.
- The Burnside Gorge Community has experienced a 100% increase in calls associated to violent crime since 2017 (51% from 2019 to 2020 alone) and total increase in calls for service of over 20%.

More about the Victoria City Police Union:

Our dedicated members have been serving the people of Greater Victoria for more than 160 years. Today, we are 250+ members strong working in the neighbourhoods of Victoria and Esquimalt to make our community a safe, supportive place where all people can choose to live happy, healthy, productive lives.

For Media Related Inquiries:

Matt Waterman, VCPU Union Director

Email: media@vcpu.ca

Phone: 250-880-1394