



Office of the Mayor

Citizens of Cobourg,

By now many of you may have seen or heard the disturbing language embedded in the so-called proposed Parks Master Plan. I have received countless emails and phone calls from concerned citizens and rightfully so.

The following appears on page 61 of the proposed Cobourg Master Parks Plan, verbatim:

"While this Plan does not view encampments as a long-term solution to houselessness, it affirms access to housing as a fundamental human right."

Further recommends:

The plan then dedicates an entire section — PUBLIC HEALTH & PARKS — to encampments

"Unhoused individuals may choose encampments over available emergency shelters for a number of reasons including concerns about safety and violence in shelters, restrictive rules, and a desire for autonomy, personal space, and a sense of community belonging."

Syringe Disposal Bins Recommended for Cobourg Parks

The plan explicitly recommends:

"Installing safe syringe disposal bins in parks, a practice already used successfully in public libraries, is a proven way to handle drug paraphernalia."

Specific locations recommended: ***Victoria Park, Victoria Beach, Ecology Garden.***

The plan also recommends holding ***"regular meetings between municipal staff, local police, Public Health, and unhoused advocates"*** to keep the plan adaptive to real-time shifts in park usage —potentially disastrously embedding advocacy groups into the ongoing governance of Cobourg's parks.

Non-Stigmatizing Drug Signage Prescribed

The plan includes a full comparison table prescribing how Cobourg should communicate with drug users in parks — explicitly telling the Town to avoid ***"stigmatizing"*** language like ***"drug users," "addicts,"*** and ***"illegal"*** in favour of ***"non-stigmatizing"*** terms like ***"park users"*** and



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"community members." It even prescribes specific sign wording for the Ecology Garden:

"Welcome to the Cobourg Ecology Garden. We are a community of care." And again for overdose response stations.

What is laughable if it were not so disturbing is that drug use in any Park in Ontario is illegal!

This is social services advocacy language, not parks planning language.

So I am going to set the record straight from my perspective.

Do not be mollified in any way, shape or form by the seemingly harmless word **DRAFT**. Any **"Draft"** report can become reality if just 4 of 7 Town Councillors choose to adopt. I hope beyond words that it will not become a reality here.

Our Parks Master Plan as currently presented has beyond inflammatory phrases such as **"Housing is a Human Right"** in a plan NOT regarding housing or ANY form of social services for that matter. This wording was created by outside consultants not Town Staff.

In fact, this Master Plan in its current form as recommended fully goes against Ontario Provincial Criminal Law. Ontario passed on June 5th 2025. The Safer Municipalities Act. The Legislation makes encampments fully illegal in any public park in Ontario. From the Act: *The Act provides that a "public place" is a place to which the general public is invited or permitted. It includes any structure, such as a tent, used as a dwelling in a public place, if its use as a dwelling in the public place is not permitted by law. Failure to comply could mean An officer may arrest, without warrant, a person who the officer believes on reasonable grounds is guilty of an offence. A person convicted of an offence is liable to a fine of not more than \$10,000 or to imprisonment for not more than six months, or both.*

Also because certain municipalities and certain Police Services and their Boards have not fully endorsed Bill 6 Ontario's Solicitor General Michael Kerzner announced he will be bringing forth new legislation to compel all police services in Ontario to follow "Provincial priorities". But it is what the Solicitor General said in his remarks announcing these new powers that is germane to our proposed Master Parks Plan. *"If we're concerned about getting drugs out of our communities and out of parks, if we're concerned to get illegal guns out of our communities, we want to have a way to communicate that to the boards so the alignment of their local priorities are reflected in seeing what is important to the government,"*

Should this Parks plan as written be adopted we could as a Council be complicit in encouraging



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breaking the law. Plus, we would be encouraging breaking our own by-laws.

The Province which trumps virtually all Municipal authority is clear that public parks are a sacred right of the public not for illicit encampments. We are only now as a community just beginning to recover from the much reviled " Brookside Encampment". Which contributed to a myriad of criminal offenses and cost the taxpayers enormous sums of both public and private funds.

We can never ever allow these seeds of chaos to return to Cobourg. This certainly includes through possible back door maneuvers like this proposed park plan meant as a guide for the next term of Council to follow.

I will be accused of fear mongering...that is exactly what I am doing. This plan as written is to me beyond frightening for Cobourg's long-term future.

But that will not deter me from doing everything in my power to stop this so-called Parks Master Plan.

I encourage every concerned citizen to reach out to every member of Council raising your legitimate concerns. Please consider attending any Council meetings where this will be on the agenda, so Council hears your concerns.

I saw a quote recently that was accurate to this situation that I felt summed up any Cobourg's public parks plans

" These are your parks. Your trails. Your facilities. Your recreation programs. Your priorities."

This document **can not** be adopted as written. The language must be removed or the contract reconsidered. No plan adopted by this municipality will contradict provincial law or the convictions of the majority of people who live here while I serve as your Mayor.

Cobourg is not a laboratory. Our parks **are not campgrounds**. Our tax dollars are not a subsidy for your ideology.

Enough is once again enough

Lucas Cleveland, Mayor of Cobourg