



Memo to Council

Date: July 25, 2023

Subject: Ban on the Open Consumption, Use, and Display of Controlled Substances –
Motion Served by Councillor Knowles

Motion Served

Notice of the following motion was provided at the July 11, 2023 Regular Council meeting:

THAT the Port Moody Parks and Community Facilities Rules and Regulations Bylaw, 2021, No. 3321, be amended to include a ban on the open consumption, use and display of controlled substances (defined here as opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA per Schedules I and III to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*, SC 1996, c 19, as amended from time to time) in City Parks and playgrounds.

Background

The toxic drug crisis is now into its 8th year since the Province of BC declared it a public health emergency in April of 2016. In the first six months of 2023, 1,018 British Columbians lost their lives due to the toxic drug supply; 18 of those in the tri-cities. No community has been spared. Among 10- to 59-year-olds, unregulated drug toxicity is now the leading cause of death, outnumbering homicide, suicide, accidents and natural disease combined.¹

In January of this year, the Provincial government decriminalized the use of certain illicit drugs as part of a three-year provincial pilot project in an effort to reduce the mounting overdose deaths. Six months later in June, in responding to the concerns expressed by many British Columbians and municipal governments, Premier Eby stated that the Legislature may consider the banning of open drug use in public during the coming fall session.

Last month, neighbouring Port Coquitlam voted unanimously to update and strengthen its bylaws regarding illicit drug use in public areas where children congregate and play, including parks, playground and recreation centres. As PoCo's mayor stated at the time, "summer is upon us and playgrounds and parks are getting busy. We needed to act now."

Kamloops, Penticton, Sicamous, Prince George, Kelowna and Campbell River are some of the other BC municipalities that have recently considered or passed regulations prohibiting drug use in public spaces.

¹ <https://tricitiedispatch.com/coroners-report-deaths-may-2023/#:~:text=Eighteen%20people%20have%20died%20in.province%20so%20far%20in%202023>

I have heard clearly from Port Moody residents that they are disappointed at the lack of planning and consideration given to municipalities and public safety before decriminalization was introduced by the Province. I share the concerns of many that we need to empower our bylaw officers now to prevent collateral damage.

According to a January 31, 2023 Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths in BC report from the Coroners Service, between 12 and 15% of drug overdose deaths between 2019 and 2022 occurred “Outside” – defined as in streets, sidewalks, parking lots, public parks, wooded areas and campgrounds. The proposed amendment would strengthen the ability of bylaw officers to address the visible use of drugs in our public parks and playgrounds but not possession itself. Repercussion options include bans from a public space and/or police enforcement and removal.

I understand that in the event of a toxic overdose, using in public spaces near other people ensures drug users can be helped more quickly. I also note that this past Spring, this Council approved a motion to provide frontline City staff with Nalaxone training. As of today, that proposal has still not been implemented and our staff remain untrained in assisting people suffering from overdose – I think it’s vital that our staff receive this training as soon as possible. We need to move faster.

While we cannot and should not completely shield our youths and most vulnerable residents from exposure to the reality and destruction wrought by the toxic drug crisis, it is still incumbent upon us as local government to provide safe, clean, and peaceable recreation spaces to our residents.

At this time, I am only proposing a ban on the use and display of controlled substances in our parks and playgrounds, though I ask my colleagues to consider adding recreation centres to this list if they deem it appropriate.

Council Strategic Priorities

1. *Resilient Natural Environment - Optimize park-user experiences*
2. *Resilient Natural Environment - Increase, expand, and enhance urban parks*
3. *Vibrant and Prosperous Community - Enhance places where people naturally gather*

Council Options

The following options are available for Council consideration:

1. Receive for information.
2. Refer to staff for a report back on the feasibility of the proposed motion considering budget, alignment with Council’s Strategic Priorities, and work plan implications, including but not limited to operational capacity, policy, legality, etc.
3. Other.