

From : jimleyden@netscape.net (Jim Leyden)
Subject : Support CRAB Squat
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The CRAB Park Squatters need your support.

On Tuesday the Vancouver City Council set the groundwork for the Vancouver Parks Board to apply for an injunction to have us removed from their site. If you agree with us that we have done nothing to deserve being removed from our homes we need you to let the Parks Board know. If you agree with the points at the end of this e-mail we ask that you either send a personal e-mail to as many of the parks board members as you can or simply forward this e-mail to them. Thanks for your support of our fight against homelessness and for Aboriginal cultural rights.

This is a copy of the text presented at the emergency city council meeting yesterday. Please forward this entire e-mail if you agree that our respectful conduct at the park supports our request to not be removed from the park and if you agree with the following Aboriginal demands.

I am forwarding this e-mail to you as an expression of our support for the conduct, needs and cultural demands of the CRAB Park Squatters. Please meet with them as soon as possible.

To the Council
Re. CRAB Squatters
By Jim Leyden

I found the efforts at communication and information gathering to be sadly lacking any effort at balanced reporting. There was no effort made to contact the squatters and no effort made to go to the park to engage in first hand interviewing of anyone at the park. Given that full and balanced information gathering is essential in any efforts at fair and remedial governance, we would hope that all decisions around how to deal with the squat at CRAB Park be delayed until all information is in and all Councillors and Parks Board members are available to receive and debate the new information. This would be the only ethical way to deal with a situation which has been subject to poor efforts at information gathering and even poorer and more one-sided media reporting.

Because of my history as the initiator of the Woodward's Squat and as a key organizer in that action, I was approached last week by members of Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society (the CRAB squatters) to represent them in their efforts to negotiate with the different levels of government around the goals of the CRAB squat. After serious consideration and discussion, I accepted their offer. A main reason for accepting their offer was because they showed themselves to be both honourable and respectful in their choice to move from Victory Square. They expressed their desire to respect the wishes of the veterans who have the greatest investment in Victory Park and its preservation. While we fully share the goals around housing and social assistance with our allies at the Victory Squat, we reside at CRAB Park in an effort to draw attention to several unique demands which tie into the fact that the Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society is an organization concerned with the social justice and cultural needs of the expatriate aboriginal community of the DTES.

Upon moving to CRAB Park the organizers met with the park custodian and arranged for late night access to the public washroom so that they could conduct themselves with dignity. They arranged for access to garbage bags and rakes to be able to clean up their area on a daily basis. They immediately got a work crew together and did a major clean up of the entire park area. At that time they found several old needles and condoms. They called the needle exchange van and arranged for needle disposal boxes. I found their efforts to be exemplary and civic minded. They have indicated that they will not tolerate hard drug use in the squat, and have been self-policing the site. I found implications that drug use and dirty needles in the park were the fault of the squatters to be flawed. It is a well known fact that there have always been homeless people sleeping in and around the park. On any given day I can take you on a tour of the area and show you the squats and stashed sleeping bags. At the same time I can show you where you can find used

needles and old condoms. On any given lunch break I can take you down there and let you smell the aroma of marijuana coming from the joints being consumed by the office workers relaxing in the park. I would suggest that the bigger issue here is not that they engage in these actions but rather that they dare to squat in clear site of those who have housing. Further concerns I would express on behalf of the CRAB Squatters is that neither the Raycam management nor the Council or Parks Board members tried to communicate with the Squat organizers prior to the efforts to use the courts to force our suppression. The organizers have already publicly stated their desire to make sure the park is safe and accessible to all citizens, especially children, because after all, accessibility is the issue they are fighting for. They were willing to work something out with the Raycam staff to secure the area for the safety of the kids program. They would have been willing to do a thorough sweep of the entire park for dangerous items and needles immediately prior to the start of the Raycam program. The efforts of the CRAB Squat organizers to date has been exemplary. Would only that the rest of the citizens using the park were as respectful. As an Aboriginal group, our focus relates to needs and rights of the urban aboriginal community. We recognize the validity of the Parks Board concerns that the Province and the Feds should be our principle targets, and we would welcome City support by asking them to host a meeting between the three levels of government and the CRAB Squat organizers to discuss our demands and to see what we could accomplish together.

Now that the Convention Centre is not going to be located on the parcel of land adjacent to the heliport we want to see it converted to additional waterfront park land. As nomadic aboriginal peoples who have traditionally used this waterfront for launching and docking of canoes and dugouts and have had villages and fishing sites running the length of the Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm we want to have that right reinstated through the granting of 24 hour access to the park and shoreline. As the original occupants of this property we expect the facilitation of our rights to pursue cultural enrichment through the building of a traditional longhouse and sweat lodge on the park property. This idea has been promoted in the past by many different aboriginal groups and bands. We intend to hold council with as many of these groups as possible and to work out a common vision which will be presented to the three levels of government with the endorsement of all aboriginal bands which have traditional title to this land. With the waterfront land being made available through the new location of the convention centre we believe this is the best time to get an agreement with the Port Authority, the Vancouver Parks Board, the Province and the local Bands for the entrenchment of cultural rights on this land. In closing we expect the Council and Parks Board to delay any transfer of responsibility and any action against the CRAB Squat until you have fully carried out your duties of governance through due diligence.

Jim Leyden
Crab Squat Negotiator.

e-mails can be sent to;

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