

GNA Directors Meeting – February 11, 2026 at St. Jean Baptiste Church

Attendees: Phil Hoen, Rosemary Sleigh (chair), Robin Jones, Matej Mate, Susanne Rautio

Regrets: Darryl Stein

Meeting called to order at 7:10 pm.

Motion to approve agenda by Phil; seconded by Susanne, approved.

1. Approval of previous meeting minutes:

Motion by Susanne to adopt January 14, 2026 minutes; seconded by Phil, approved.

2. Treasurer's report:

Robin reported there is \$2144.66 in the GNA bank account.

3. Blockwatch in Gonzales

Elaine et al are still gathering information so nothing to report at this time.

4. Community Map

Susanne reported that 5 copies of the community map have been distributed to every library branch in the greater Victoria area. Still to do: city staff, UofVic and teachers at Margaret Jenkins school.

5. My Great Neighbourhood grant application for notice boards at Gonzales beach and Pemberton Park

Rosemary continues to work on the grant and is soliciting bids from contractors on how much it will cost to build. Discussion ensued on how to incorporate Gonzales landmarks like the observatory into the design.

6. Op-ed piece on camping at Gonzales Beach

The board submitted an op ed piece into the Times Colonist. It was printed on February 10 and is recorded below for the record:

<https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/comment-its-time-to-ban-sheltering-at-gonzales-park-11851936>

Motion by Matej to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Robin, approved

Meeting adjourned 8:10 pm - Next board meeting March 11, 2026

It's Time to Close Gonzales Beach Park to Sheltering

In early 2020, in response to COVID-19 restrictions that suddenly required homeless shelters to reduce their capacity, the City of Victoria designated 12 city parks with washrooms, including Gonzales Park, for sheltering unhoused people outdoors. The problems that arise with tent encampments in parks, including Gonzales, are well known. The City's March 2025 report to council on sheltering in parks noted the following problems caused by those sheltering outdoors:

- threats of harm, erratic behaviour, yelling or screaming;
- overdose;

- physical assault, including intimate partner violence;
- threats of violence;
- unsafely discarded sharps;
- hazardous waste, including human waste and other bodily fluids;
- hazardous items, including drug paraphernalia;
- storage of containers of gas in the bushes in the summer
- open drug dealing and consumption; and
- antisocial behaviour, including inappropriate or foul language, fighting and nudity.

By 2023, as park users and local residents living near city parks complained about crime and disorder, the city began to remove some parks from the sheltering list. But three parks - Gonzales, Pemberton, and Oaklands - are now approaching their 6th consecutive year hosting unhoused people and have become de facto year-round permanent sites. When will residents living near these parks get some relief?

Gonzales Beach Park is a terrible site for sheltering, even from the perspective of unhoused people. It is exposed to extreme wind events that are not compatible with tenting. Most of the park is covered by a high tree canopy that drops large branches onto the lawn below. It is far from the support services required by the homeless community and, as one of the city's busiest and smallest parks, every potential camp spot is within a few metres of heavily used pathways, picnic tables, or the public washroom.

Many local residents have informed us that they are concerned for their physical safety at and near the park and that the situation is taking a toll on their mental health. However, no one is more affected than those people who live in homes bordering the park, and this problem is greater at Gonzales Park than other parks because of the lack of space between the park and neighbouring homes. For six years these residents have lived with people in tents (some with weapons) only a few metres from their back doors and windows, resulting in noise disturbances, people knocking on their doors at all hours, thefts, and threats. This situation may not be obvious to daytime park users but at night, as unhoused people return to the park, it becomes a different place.

The city's website states that sheltering in parks is only allowed in select parks on a "temporary" basis. However, in Gonzales Park some of the persons sheltering have been there for months or even years. One person has camped in the park for nearly 5 years, and two others have been there for at least 10 months. Our understanding is that these people have either never sought housing, or have declined housing offers because they prefer to be living where there are few or no rules.

Gonzales has had two successive city councillors (Matt Dell and Jeremy Caradonna) liaising with our neighbourhood, both of whom have agreed with our position that Gonzales Park is a poor choice for sheltering and should be closed. However, nothing has happened. Crucially, Mayor Alto has refused to meet with those most affected and we believe she remains out of touch regarding how this issue is impacting the neighbourhood.

The City's staff report referred to above describes municipal parks as vital to the city, "offering inclusive amenities and opportunities for recreation, socialization, and nature-based experiences that contribute to physical and mental wellbeing". Gonzales Park is hampered in providing such services to residents as long as the park continues to be used for sheltering.

The Park is also a regional tourist attraction and commonly appears in the "Top 10" lists of the best places to visit in the city. It attracts school groups, day care groups, seniors, dog walkers, tourists and paddlers from across the city and beyond. It is not suitable as a permanent encampment site for the

city. Those nearest the beach have endured more than their fair share from this situation. It's time for the city to add Gonzales Park to the list of parks in which sheltering is not permitted.

Gonzales Neighbourhood Association

Board of Directors