

# Occupy Calgary takes some heat

## Mayor criticizes disruption of events

BY SEAN MYERS, CALGARY HERALD    OCTOBER 29, 2011

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The Occupy Calgary camp at the Olympic Plaza downtown on Wednesday October 26 2011 in Calgary.

**Photograph by:** Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

Frustration with the growing tab of the Occupy Calgary movement has led to tougher talk regarding the protest, but Mayor Naheed Nenshi would not say what next step is being contemplated to move encamped demonstrators from Olympic Plaza.

"The reason we've been very patient with them is because they were always clear that they weren't interested in interfering with the rights of other citizens to public space, including that park. It seems that they're backing down from that," Nenshi said. "They're making it difficult for event organizers to be able to do their events and, frankly, they're causing damage to the park.

"These are pretty significant issues and they indicate to me the demonstrators are not as concerned about the rights of other citizens as they had purported to be when this all started. They've made their point. It's time to move on."

The city says it will cost taxpayers \$40,000 to clean up the park and repair the damage done by protesters. The costs include re-sodding where grass has been destroyed, fixing broken heaters, countertops and clogged sinks in the public washrooms, and repainting several surfaces.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart wants the demonstrators out of the park now, even if it means an enforced order by police. "It's got to end. Immediately," she said.

"I'm very disappointed. We were told to not to say anything and let the lawyers and various other people do their job, and it's not resulting in anything. You basically have people who are breaking the law and who are damaging public and private property. They should be charged and they should be removed."

Colley-Urquhart has launched a survey on her website asking Calgarians to voice their opinions on the Occupy Calgary movement, which set up camp on Oct. 15.

Tom Sampson, deputy chief of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, has said the city is waiting for a legal opinion on possible challenges the protesters could make under Charter of Rights and Freedoms before a plan of action is formulated.

Colley-Urquhart said the city only needs to enforce the bylaws on the books, which don't allow for overnight camping in Olympic Plaza.

"Once we get all these lawyers involved and they all start interpreting the charter, we're in trouble," she said. "The precedent this is setting equally disturbs me because it's really going to change the nature of any future protests or rallies when people like this can hide behind the charter."

Ald. Shane Keating also wants the protesters out of Olympic Plaza, but said he will still be satisfied if they move to St. Patrick's Island, where another group of demonstrators, largely homeless people, are camping.

Ald. Gian-Carlo Carra said a forced eviction of the protesters would be a mistake. He argued that cold weather and an inability to connect their cause with the broader population will lead to them leave the area soon enough.

"There's a lot greater harm to our civil society in creating martyrs and cracking skulls than in paying for \$40,000 of re-sodding," Carra said.

The protesters have promised to move their tents from the plaza today to accommodate a Muslim Heritage Day festival that runs all day.

An event involving the food truck pilot program is back on for Olympic Plaza on Monday. It had looked like a secondary location was going to be used due to the protest, but it has been moved back to the plaza with Nenshi scheduled to give an update on the pilot project about noon.

"We absolutely need to continue to make sure that that park is for the use of all Calgarians," said Nenshi regarding the decision to go ahead at the plaza on Monday. "It's a shame, the Muslim community festival this weekend will be curtailed, the food truck event that was booked weeks in advance will be curtailed -- and that is directly due to the Occupy Calgary folks."

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