



TASC Survey Report 2009

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Temporary Autonomous Shelter Collective (TASC)

Introduction

The Temporary Autonomous Shelter Collective (TASC) is a group of homeless, unstably housed and housed individuals who are determined to take collective action on homelessness by ensuring that all residents on Coast Salish can live with dignity, autonomy and respect. TASC was formed to explore the possibility of creating user-run communities of temporary shelters, often called "tent cities".

Many members of TASC are organizers with the Committee to End Homelessness. We wanted to take collective action on Judge Ross' BC Superior Court "Tent City" ruling in October, 2009, on the constitutional right of homeless people to erect shelters in the absence of sufficient shelter beds. We began to research "tent cities" and found that user-designed and user-run communities of temporary shelters have proven to be successful short-term solutions to housing crises in many communities throughout the United States. Residents report that "tent cities" provide safety, comfort, dignity and support for people who can't access shelters or have different needs. We found that "tent cities" can be low cost, immediately applicable and safe measures that we can all take to provide temporary shelter.

While we were excited about the prospects of facilitating the process of creating a user-run "tent city" in Victoria, we had to begin by seeing if there was a need and a desire within our communities. Our first step was to get the opinions of those who matter most – those who would be interested in living in a community of tents or small shelters. We decided that the best and most inclusive way to hear what people had to say would be to informally interview members of the street community with a basic, simple and flexible survey as a guide. The survey was distributed to people who self-identify as homeless or living in an unstable housing situation in order to find out if they saw a need for a "tent city", and to see what shape such a community would take. We will use the results of the survey to help ensure that the project is guided by the visions, interests and needs of the communities it will serve.

A team of volunteers and practicum students attended briefing sessions and distributed the survey within the street community from February until April 2009. We also tried to reach people who are homeless or unstably housed but who don't access downtown services by creating an on-line version of the survey.

Our humble, grassroots survey collected the reflections and opinions of 116 street-involved individuals. This report summarizes the results of our survey.

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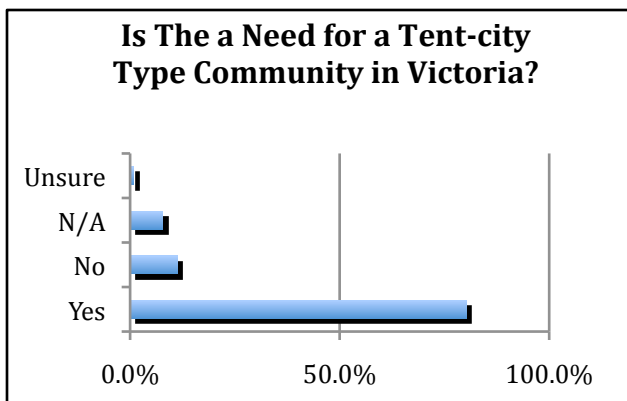
Acknowledgements

The Temporary Autonomous Shelter Collective (TASC) would like to acknowledge and thank the people who took the time to answer our survey. TASC would also like to acknowledge the hard work of all the collective members and volunteers who worked on bringing the survey to the streets. There are too many names to mention – you know who you are!

Key Findings

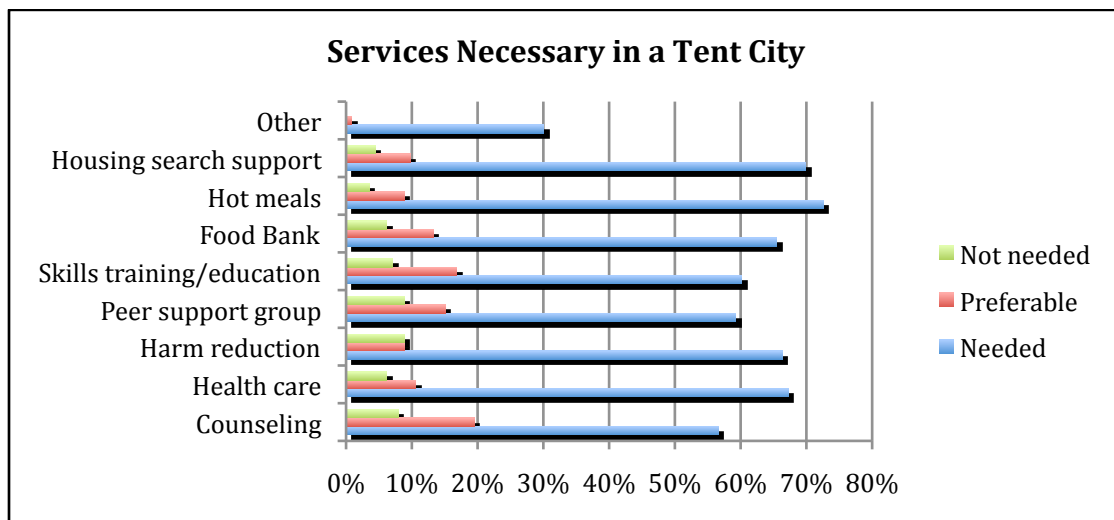
1. Need and Support for a Tent City

The TASC Survey 2009 collected the reflections and opinions of 116 street-involved individuals, of which 87 stated that they are homeless or unstably housed. Of those interviewed, 56 people considered themselves to be unemployed, 33 were working, 16 were students and 21 others chose not to answer or did not fit in the categories provided, including those who were on disability or retired.¹



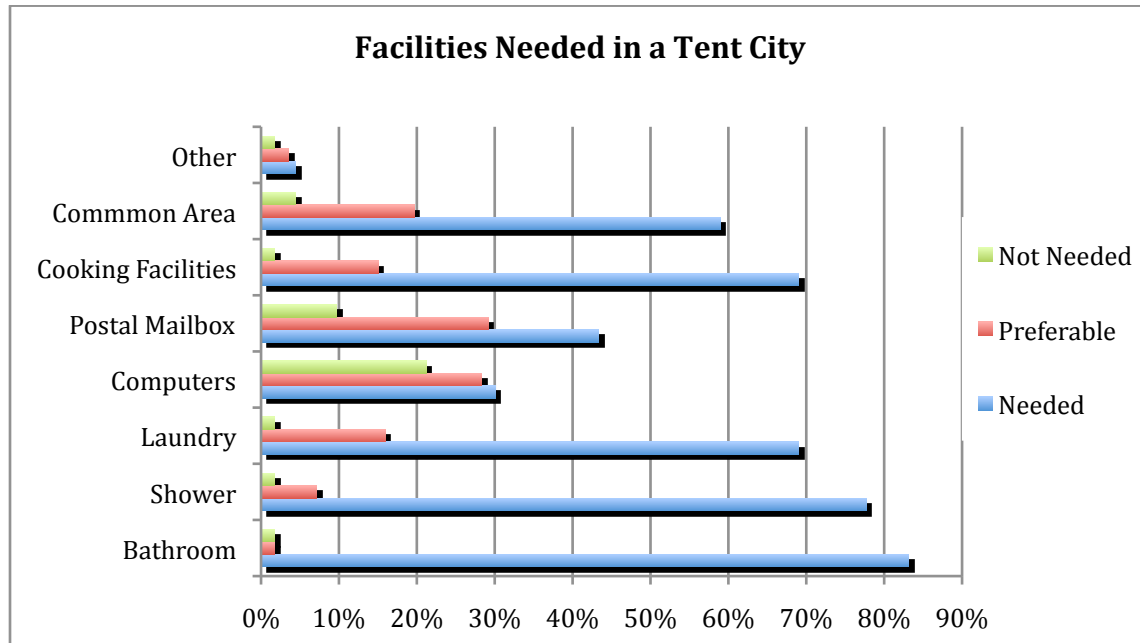
65% of respondents had heard of or experienced living in a tent city. The vast majority of people surveyed, around 80%, stated there is a need for a tent city in Victoria, 83% said that they would support a tent city in Victoria and 55% said they would take an active role in setting up and running the community.

2. Services and Facilities



¹ Please note that respondents had the option to choose more than one answer to this question.

The survey also asked folks what services and facilities would be “needed”, “preferable” or “not needed”. The majority of respondents reported that all of the services listed in the survey were necessary. The most important service was hot meals, which was followed by – in order of priority – housing search support, health care, harm reduction services, a food bank, skills training peer support groups and counseling.



There was more variation in the importance of different facilities than services.² The most important facility according to the large majority of those surveyed was bathrooms, followed by showers, cooking facilities, laundry and a common area.

3. Best Type of Shelter for a Tent-City

Given the choice between a tent or a portable shack, 45% of respondents said they would be willing to live in a tent, but only 24% said this was the best type of shelter for a tent-city. A larger number, 42%, said that the best type of shelter for a tent-city would be some kind of portable shack.

4. Important Qualities of a Tent-City

4.1 Privacy

Privacy and personal safety came up as the most significant qualities of a tent-city in Victoria, with most respondents saying that it was “important” or “very important”

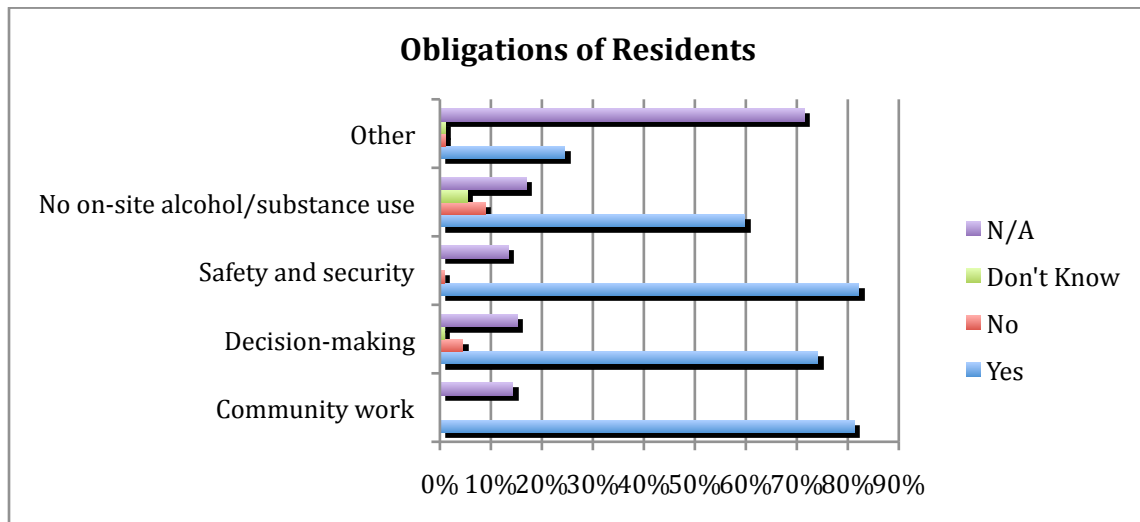
² To simplify this chart, the number of people who chose not the answer this question (“n/a”) is not shown.

to have private shelter (77%), a private shelter to share (75%) and a place where possessions can be securely locked (83%).

4.2 Pets

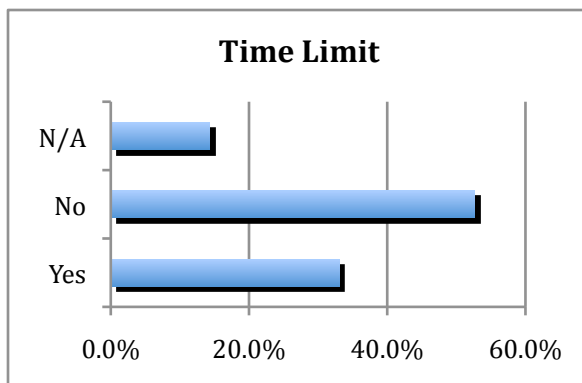
More than half of the people surveyed –around 66% - stated that pets should be allowed.

4.3 Obligations

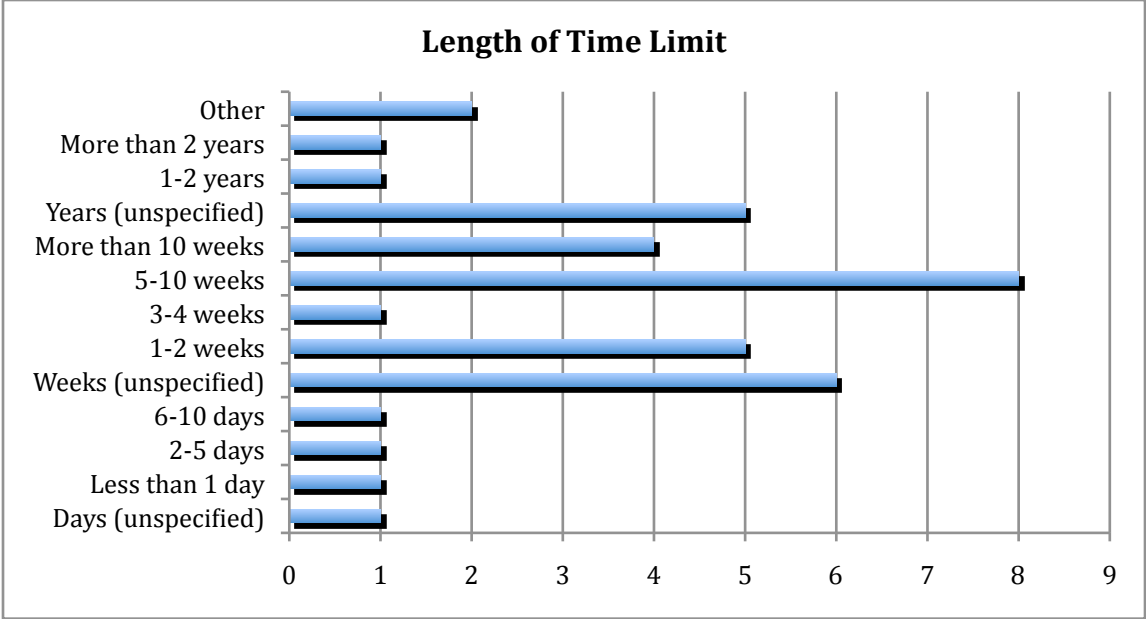


Generally folks reported that members of the tent-city community should have an obligation to contribute to safety and security, community work and decision-making within the community. Most also felt that residents should avoid alcohol and substance use while on-site.

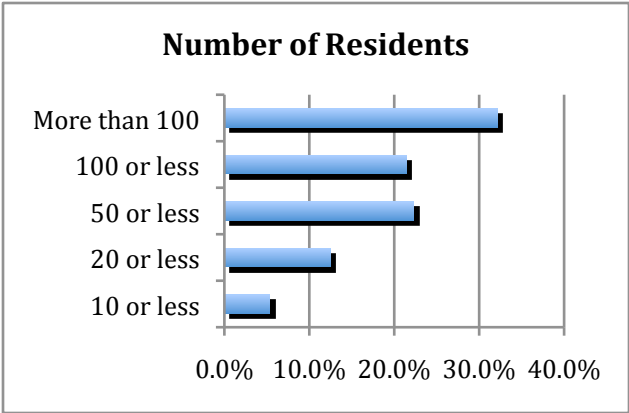
4.4 Time Limit



About half of the people surveyed (53%) said that there should not be a limit on the length of time people can stay in the community, 14% chose not to answer and 33% said there should be a time limit. The following chart shows the time limits proposed by respondents.



4.5 Number of Residents



When asked how many residents the community should allow, 32% answered 100 or more, 21% answered 100 or less, 22% answered 50 or less and 18% answered 20 or less.

4.6 Location

Generally the responses indicated that it would be preferable to have a tent city close to downtown, as most respondents (61) said they would be willing to live in a community that is within a half hour walk from downtown.³ A slightly lower number (51) would be willing to live in a community that is directly in the downtown area. While 42 people said they would be willing to live in a community that is within a half hour bus ride from downtown, 37 would be willing to live in a community within an hour walk from downtown and 22 would be willing to live within an hour bus ride from downtown.

³ Please note that respondents had the option to choose more than one answer to this question.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey indicates that there is broad support for the creation of a tent city-type community and provides information on how community members envision a tent city in Victoria. We hope that the information gathered in this survey will assist community organizers in the creation of collaborative, user designed and governed projects as immediate short-term solutions to housing crises in their communities.

Appendix: Temporary Autonomous Shelters Committee (TASC) Survey 2009