



City of Prince George Mayor & Council  
1100 Patricia Boulevard  
Prince George, BC V2L 3V9  
Lheidli T'enneh Ancestral Territories

August 26, 2021

**RE: Statement Imploring Prince George Mayor and Council to Defeat Proposed Safe Streets Bylaw**

Dear Mayor Lyn Hall and Prince George City Council:

We, the Board of Directors for the Omineca Artist Run Centre Society, are members of Prince George's community. We have watched and participated as Prince George Mayor and Council has discussed how to navigate community challenges in the downtown area, including at Town Hall events. Some of us have spoken directly to you about strategies that other communities have taken to ensure adequate supports for members of our community who are struggling with mental health, substance use, and/or homelessness. As members of the Prince George community, some who have experienced substance use and mental health challenges, worked in support sectors, and/or do research on these topics, we are deeply disappointed to see the second reading of the proposed 'Safe Streets' Bylaw. We are particularly dismayed at Prince George Mayor and Council's failure to undertake the readily available information that demonstrates the conditions proposed in the Safe Streets Bylaw (e.g., financial penalizations, criminalization) as ineffective at navigating the complex challenges that face our society, challenges that Prince George is not exempt from. In fact, the proposed outline in the bylaw runs counter to National Inquiries, including Calls to Justice # 5.5, 5.9, 7.1-7.4 (to name but a few) of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's and Girls Inquiry.

We are dismayed at the anti-poverty sentiment and increased criminalization of members of our communities who already experience barriers to safety. Over these last two years, international movements and repeated research has proven investing in policing and financial penalization does not decrease crime. Rather, these punitive actions increase incarceration and harm to those who (to repeat) already face barriers to accessing safety. Imposing financial penalization, let alone during a dual epidemic of opioid crises and COVID-19, is deplorable and, quite frankly, immoral. This will not lead to safe streets. These actions will lead to increased deaths due to unsafe supplies, further criminalize people who are already marginalized, and increase incarceration and recidivism rates. All topics that are easily researched, with proven evidence attesting to harmful outcomes.

We understand that Prince George Mayor and Council is attempting to uphold the demands of the business community and the very real challenges experienced by all people who depend on services downtown. However, the measures proposed in the Safe Streets Bylaw will not solve these problems. It will harm those who need support, and further invisibilize already stigmatized activities leading to increased criminalization.

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Housing insecurity and homelessness in BC is an emergency situation. Coupled with the cold winters in Prince George, the opioid crisis gripping the province, mental health crises and challenges accessing services across northern BC, and already disproportionate rates of policing along racialized lines, the Safe Streets Bylaw will cause harm and, quite frankly, cost lives. We encourage Mayor and Council to set an example that other mid-sized, urban, northern centres can look to as inspiration. We encourage Mayor and Council to further engage the talented, passionate, and grounded services across the city, many of which are necessarily Indigenous-led, to create tailored solutions.

Please. Vote down the Safe Streets Bylaw. There is an amazing opportunity here for the City of Prince George to show its leadership supporting all members of our community. We encourage you to take up this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Omineca Artist Run Centre Society Board of Directors

[Kate Ames, Rob Budde, Laurel Collins, Ben Knutson, Dean Marsters, Jennifer Pighin, Vanessa Sloan Morgan]