

April 12, 2024

Dear Mayor and Council members,

I would like to thank you for your attention to the concerns about air quality in the downtown and Millar Addition neighborhood in the recent council meeting on April 8th. Further to that meeting I would like to express some additional concerns and highlight my observations about the situation.

I have lived in the neighborhood for 23 years and have witnessed significant changes to the air quality directly related to actions, and inactions, taken by the City, the citizens, and industry. My qualified assessment of the average and point-in-time air quality is that it has never been worse in all the years I have lived here. The years after our industrial neighbours invested in cleaner technologies; after the civic push to replace uncertified wood burning appliances; and before the Lower Patricia encampment arrived was a period where our air was noticeably less smelly, easier to breathe, and overall healthier.

Presently, I have experienced frequent, toxic smoke emanating from the encampment on Lower Patricia Boulevard. Since the encampment has been allowed to grow, toxic smoke has impacted my family and friends' ability to enjoy our outdoor environment, invaded our yards, and permeated our homes. Personally, I have invested in clean burning or electric appliances and installed advanced air filtration in our home to try and ameliorate the situation. We have stopped having socials with outdoor fires, despite having clean seasoned firewood, because we cannot in good conscience add to the already dire air quality.

Notable during the council meeting was a suggestion to provide firewood to the encampment. We do not believe that providing firewood to the encampment residents is a viable strategy. My observation is that well-meaning individuals have already provided firewood on regular occasions, but it has not changed the burning habits of the encampment residents, just contributed to the volume and frequency of fires and smoke.

The other issue is safety with respect to the burning habits of the encampment residents. The number of tent and non-conforming structure fires on Lower Patricia Boulevard is alarming. I am concerned for my safety and that of all my neighbours. Given the drought conditions that we are experiencing and the expected wildfire season that is looming I believe action needs to be taken immediately to provide housing and oversight so that residents do not need to have open fires or non-conforming structures to sleep in.

It is my opinion that all burning in the encampment must cease. I support initiatives underway to properly house needy individuals, including the temporary measures, but only inasmuch as the unregulated encampment is systematically shut down and cleaned up. Cleaning up is critically important! The debris accumulations from rough living and past structure fires contributes to the fuel used by residents of the encampment for toxic personal fires that are harming the health of everyone in the Millar Addition and downtown. Encampment residents have not demonstrated an appropriate respect for fire safety. It is only a matter of time that a fire escape or structure fire from the encampment leads to a large fire that takes lives and property.

With Care and Concern,

***redacted**

Eric Long

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