



February 12, 2021

City of Prince George Mayor and Council
1100 Patricia Boulevard
Prince George, BC V2L 3V9
C/O cityclerk@princegeorge.ca.

RE: Harmony House Rezoning Zelkwas Avenue

Dear Mayor and Council,

On behalf of the BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH), I write in full support of the rezoning at 606 Zelkwas Avenue to facilitate the development of Supportive Housing for the Phoenix Transition Society's Harmony House program. Harmony House serves a critical need for mothers and pregnant women in Prince George. Harmony House has successfully been operating a six-bedroom house for four years and has served 94 women from across northern BC. To date, 89% of the women who participated in the Harmony House program have successfully gone through the program and are living independently with their children. This success rate is attributed to the highly effective and unique program that provides 24/7 staffing and focuses on strengthening the bond between mother and child and promoting the women's confidence by teaching life and parenting skills in a non-judgmental and caring environment.

Harmony House is committed to constructing a building that fits into the neighbourhood and is a maximum of 2-storeys. The new housing will help meet a growing need for safe shelter and housing for mothers and their children in Northern BC. The housing project is part of the Building BC: Women's Transition Housing Fund which is part of the province's 10-year plan to ensure affordable housing for all BC residents. The province's 30 Point Plan prioritizes women and children fleeing violence and abuse and their need for a safe, secure place to live with support so they can heal.

BCSTH is a member-based, provincial umbrella organization supporting Transition, Second and Third Stage Houses, Safe Homes and the PEACE and Violence is Preventable programs for women, children and youth experiencing or at risk of violence. We support anti-violence member programs across the province through training, resources, advocacy and research. BCSTH and Phoenix Transition Society work together to ensure BC women, children and youth receive trauma informed support services and safe shelter. From our provincial perspective, there is a critical need for mothers and pregnant women and children to access a continuum of safe shelter and affordable housing options along with comprehensive wrap around support services. In one year, more than 12,300 women and children accessed transition houses, second stage housing and safe homes to escape violence or abuse in BC (BC Housing, 2016). On any given day, 7,969 women and their children are sleeping in shelters across Canada because it is not safe at home (Statistic Canada, 2014).

Operating in Prince George since 1974, Phoenix Transition Society is well versed in the needs of the community and the prevalence of violence against women and families. The Phoenix Transition Society believes in the intrinsic worth and dignity of every human being and is committed to the values of acceptance, self-determination, ending violence against women and children, and to respecting each person's right to individuality. Working collaboratively with community partners, Phoenix Transition Society is a community social services agency providing a variety of



programs and services to Northern BC. Phoenix Transition Society has a skilled program staff and a visionary leadership team that is constantly adapting and innovating to deliver responsive relevant programs and services for women in northern BC as demonstrated by the successful Harmony House established 4 years ago. Concerns raised about safety, substance use and crime are unwarranted and will be non-issues, as the building will be staffed 24/7 with wrap-around supports and Harmony House has a demonstrated record of being a harmonious good-neighbour at their existing development.

BCSTH research shows that the lack of access to safe housing forces women to make the difficult choice to return to a violent situation or face homelessness – both of which put her safety and her children's safety at risk (Milaney, K. et al. 2017). Across BC, only 4 % of BC women are able to leave transition houses for an affordable home while 25% find housing beyond their means. 71% remain temporarily housed or sheltered or return to their abuser. (Getting Home Project, BCSTH, 2019) Women and pregnant women in particular living in remote communities face additional barriers. Transition Houses and Safe Homes that serve remote communities report a myriad of barriers to women even accessing their services, let alone finding affordable housing. Many of these communities report there is no or very limited social housing options in their community, leaving women to find housing in the private rental market where they face insecure housing solutions, discrimination from landlords or a lack of safety and confidentiality. The circumstances for women in remote communities in northern BC are especially dire with the overall lack of transportation. Domestic Violence is one of the main causes of homelessness for Canadian women and children. (WSC, Homelessness & VAW, 2017)

We urge you to support this rezoning application, as it serves a critical need in the Prince George community and region. The Phoenix Transition Society is acutely aware of and focused on meeting the significant community need to support vulnerable women and their children who have experienced or are currently experiencing violence. From a land use perspective, this development is in an ideal location as most of the mothers living in Harmony House will not have vehicles and therefore having services, schools, and parks within walking distance is important to their accessing the community with their children for their healing journey. The Phoenix Transition Society is aptly named for the phoenix bird who fell to the ground, burst into flames and was renewed from the ashes. At Harmony House, young mothers and their children are able to renew as they move from victim to survivor and build strong resilient families.

BCSTH wholeheartedly supports the Harmony House Project which will keep women and children safe and thriving in perpetuity in the Prince George region. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me by email **Redacted** or phone **Redacted** if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy S. Fitzgerald".

Amy S. FitzGerald, Executive Director

CC: Hillary Morgan **Redacted**
Maria Brouwer **Redacted**